

## ***The Army***

It was the fall of 1941 and Arthur Brown could feel the winds of war getting stronger. There was a draft coming. Being bored with the depression and big company life on poverty wages, change sounded like a good thing to the twenty-three year old unmarried guy – so he signed up for the Army. To his unpleasant surprise his four years at Duke University and subsequent two years with the B.F. Goodrich Company in Akron, Ohio hadn't exactly prepared him for life in the Army where the normal mode of expression used four letter and single syllable words. The other thing that bothered him was the caste system separating officers and enlisted men. That changed when he arrived at Fort Devins, Massachusetts to wait for his assignment to a training post. His first cousin, Colonel Courtney Brown, Commander of a regiment with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division invited him to the officer's mess and they had a good long talk. Then he ran into one of his old fraternity buddies, 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant Ed Coon whom they called "Ty-coon". Coon had been an all-Southern Conference tackle and let him know it would all be different when he got through basic training and Officer Candidate School. Maybe so, thought Brown, but he was going to treat his enlisted guys better when he became an officer than he was treated as an enlisted guy.

Brown found himself at Fort Bragg, North Carolina for his thirteen weeks of basic training which didn't go too bad. First he was made a jawbone Sergeant which was a temporary non-commissioned officer. The next good thing was receiving his acceptance to Officer Candidate School. Brown didn't consider that a great achievement because after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the Army needed lots of officers and with a college degree he was an automatic candidate.

Following his training at Fort Bragg, Brown went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma to wait for his slot at OCS. His time was filled as a battery carpenter which meant he built bunks for the thousands and thousands of guys entering the Army. In the mornings he built bunks, in the afternoon he tested them by catching up on his sleep while the new trainees were out in the field. Not having people checkup on him was a good thing. OCS at Fort Sill was a mixed experience for Brown. The training schedule was very rigorous and left him bone tired every day. And while he really liked the mathematics associated with artillery fire direction he didn't have the mechanical aptitude needed for field stripping a howitzer.

His first duty post was Camp Forrest, Tennessee – a place where he'd learn important lessons about life and Army leadership. The first lesson occurred when his Commanding Officer directed him to the battery garage to get the trucks cleaned up. Brown dutifully went and ordered the Sergeant to have the guys clean the trucks and left. It wasn't until the Colonel called for him and asked whether the task had actually been done that he learned it hadn't; the Colonel had checked up on the young officer. That resulted in a lecture from the 'West Pointer' about the importance of inspections to make sure the guys had actually done what they were supposed to. Brown's second lesson occurred during an observed fire mission where he was to direct the battery. It turned out it was really difficult to figure out what he was looking at after sweeping miles and miles of barren terrain with field glasses and called in the fire on the wrong target. That resulted in a second lecture from the Colonel on the importance of proper target

identification. The lessons stuck and Brown ended up becoming a 'good shot', even demonstrating the battery's proficiency for Assistant Secretary of War Patterson.

Brown's first command came in 1942 when the Army decided to motorize the 80<sup>th</sup> Division with a Cavalry Squadron. There were no trained Cavalry officers around so they checked the roster of artillery officers, found his name, and assigned him command of a Light Tank Company. At 0600 the next day Brown found himself on the other side of the post with one hundred men lined up in front of him waiting for him to tell them what to do. Their first task was to cook lunch for the noon meal so Brown asked for volunteers and managed to get lunch out for his new men. To Brown Yankee ingenuity prevailed yet again.

His next task was to draw tanks from ordinance for his new Company. Thanks to some mechanically minded guys under his new command he was soon enjoying his first ride in a tank. Brown found it amazing that he was in command of this new unit when he didn't even have an idea on how to start one of the monsters. Brown quickly learned how to drive a tank and, wanting to show his newly acquired skills to his fellow artillery officers, he headed across the post in his dress uniform, called a 'Pink', and his new ride. In short order he and a bunch of them were off through the woods running over small trees having a grand time. Approaching a swampy pond Brown decided to hit the throttle and plow through it. The muddy water cascaded through the open turret and covered their nice clean dress uniforms with the muddy water. That was the last time anyone agreed to a joy ride in a tank with Brown. Six weeks later the Army decided to rescind the order to motorize the 80<sup>th</sup> Division, Brown's tanks were returned to ordinance, he went back to learning the art of an artilleryman, and was given command of Headquarters Battery, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

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In March 1943 Jon Gatens and a train load of draftees arrived at Fort Jackson, South Carolina to join the newly created 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Gatens was assigned to A Battery, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion and placed in a gun section under the command of Sergeant Johnnie B. Jordan. After three weeks of orientation on the chain of command, close order drill, making a GI bed, and physical fitness they received their four 105mm howitzers. Gatens section was made up of nine men under the command of the Sergeant. The next most important position was the Gunner. During training the officers paid attention to the guys and in short order selected ten men to take the test for Gunner. Only four of them made it, one for each gun in the Battery, and newly promoted Corporal Gatens was one of them. The four howitzer sections in Gatens battery were under the command of Lieutenant Graham Cassibry whose job was to train them to be efficient, accurate, and fast.



**Corporal John Gatens**

The guys loved Cassibry and would do anything for him. Cassibry came from a very wealthy family in Jackson Mississippi, and while he was a brilliant man, he was not really a military man. Being young and rich he was more of a playboy type and treated his men more like friends than subordinates. On his time off Cassibry would bring a bottle back to the barracks to share with the guys while playing cards and telling stories about life back home.

**[STILL WORKING ON JOHN'S STORY – STANDBY FOR MORE]**

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On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1943, about quarter to seven in the morning, John Schaffner kissed his mother goodbye, and with a small suitcase, walked three blocks with his father to the street-car line in Baltimore. They had a short conversation about John taking care of himself, a quick hug, and a brave "so-long." His father went off to work and he walked another three blocks to report to the local draft board. Schaffner and the new draftees were put on a bus, driven to downtown Baltimore and ushered into the Fifth Regiment Armory where they were stripped down to their socks while doctors probed, poked and squeezed all sorts of places. They were then asked all kinds of questions to find out if their head was on straight. "Do you like girls?" Of course he said, "Yes."



**John Schaffner**

The next decision he had to make was which branch of the service he wanted. Schaffner had older friends who'd joined the Navy, so that's what he told them, "Navy." Apparently that wasn't the right answer, "No, we have too many in the Navy," he was told. "How about the Air Corps?" asked Schaffner. Apparently that wasn't the right answer either, "No. You wear glasses. I have to put you in the Army." Well, if they already knew the answer they probably didn't have to ask the questions. The guy at the processing desk took his papers and stamped them "LIMITED SERVICE." Just what that meant he wasn't sure. The next stop was the swearing in where they were read the Articles of War. This was the first time he realized that the penalty for any and every infraction was "death or worse."

After boarding a bus for Fort Meade just outside Baltimore, Schaffner was placed in a group with a bunch of other new guys, assigned a barracks building, a bunk, issued uniforms and dog tags, and given shots for every disease known to man. They were then told how to stand, walk, sit, and most importantly, never refuse an order from somebody with a higher rank than what he had. Along the way he packed his old civilian clothes in the suitcase he'd brought with him and sent it back home courtesy of the Army. The "LIMITED SERVICE" stamp meant absolutely nothing.

Within a month he and a whole trainload of eighteen year old draftees found themselves at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. His new assignment was Instrument Section, A Battery, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion as a Scout, MOS 761. Based on the number of people with last names starting with the letter 'S' he figured it was the luck of the draw.

Schaffner's first morning at Fort Jackson with his new unit was anything but satisfactory. The sergeant came into the barracks making a lot of noise, telling them to get up, get going, and get dressed. It was still dark and cold. The wind was blowing sheets of rain against the barrack. His first thought was that with weather like that they'd have to stay inside for the day. Was he ever mistaken! The first order he heard was, "EVERYBODY OUT FOR ROLL CALL!" So, with steel helmets and raincoats, they lined up in the rain out on the battery street and sounded off as the Sergeant called their

names. Schaffner stood there with the rain beating on his helmet and running down the back of his neck. It sounded like an attic with a tin roof. From that point on it was clear that the weather, regardless of what he was doing, was never a deciding factor. He was in the Army.

The primary responsibility of Schaffner's Instruments Section was to support the battery commander in the field, conduct topographic surveys of targets and gun positions, and function as a forward observer. As a surveyor he was trained in a lot of calculus, algebra, and trigonometry. While all soldiers carried a carbine he had a slide rule and trigonometric tables to do his surveying. They spent a lot of time surveying when they were out on field exercises. Two man teams would walk a one hundred foot tape from point A to point B in one hundred foot sections. The lead guy would thread the tape through a steel pin with an eye and shove it into the ground as they moved forward. The guy in the rear would pull out the pins when he reached them and they'd do it all over again. At least that's the way it was supposed to work.

Being part of a Field Artillery Battery was something Schaffner found fascinating. The guys called themselves "Red Legs" which was a holdover from the artillerymen during the civil war who were identified by a red strip down the side of their pants. It was a moniker they were proud of. Batteries were a highly trained team organized around a set of four cannons, or howitzers called pieces. Each Battery was manned by a number of cannoneers that had posts and duties. At the top were the Executive and his assistant. Next in line was the "Chief of Section" whose duty was to control the service and operation of his piece. Even the location of the Chief was dictated; two yards from the end of the trail on the side opposite the Executive. The Ammunition Sergeant, or Corporal, was in charge of managing the ammunition dump and tracking every shell and charge in the battery. One his tasks was tracking lot numbers on the ammunition because different lots had different propellant and would fire longer or shorter ranges which created problems. The telephone operator took all the commands coming from the Fire Direction Center, or FDC, and relayed them to the Battery Executive. To support the operator there was a lineman who made sure the phones were operating and a recorder who took down every command and message and tracked every shell that went out as well as the gun settings.

Everything about the battery's operation was scripted and practiced. When they marched, they marched in specific positions around the gun. When they setup, or emplaced the gun, they executed specific duties in specific orders. One guy unlimbered a leg, another guy put in the bolt. One guy opened the breach; another guy used the ram rod to clean the barrel. When they completed their duties they indicated that by specific reports to the battery Executive like, "Communication established." The guys got really good at doing it and could setup their cannons in five minutes and start sending rounds down range.

It was like a ballet – a really dangerous and deadly ballet.

Not everything they did in training was as safe as surveying or firing a cannon. Among them was the infiltration course. That was the real deal. The guys got on their bellies and crawled forward in the mud and dirt while real charges exploded around them and live machine gun fire whizzed overhead. Compared to this Schaffner felt being an artilleryman was a relatively safe occupation.

While Schaffner was with a Field Artillery Battalion he, like the riflemen had a regular weapon, an M1 Carbine. The instructors taught the guys everything about their new weapon; how to take it apart and how to keep it clean, how to love it and, most importantly never be without it. Schaffner expected his rifle to have been made by some well-known company like Winchester, Remington, or Browning. Instead the manufacturer's name stamped on Schaffner's rifle was Rockola – the Juke Box Company. Some of the guys had rifles made by Wurlitzer and even Singer Sewing Machine. The guys joked about it because they looked nothing like a juke box, organ, or sewing machine. It was just that almost every manufacturing company in the entire country was involved in producing war material. When they finally went to the firing range and loaded them with live ammunition they were as excited as being on a first date with a real live girl. Targets were placed at 100, 200, and 300 yards. In the 100 degree heat the targets shimmered and wiggled like a belly dancer – nobody qualified – and the firing for record was postponed. When he got his chance Schaffner qualified as an Expert.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was known as motorized which didn't make sense to Schaffner because they walked everywhere. When they finally began to use the vehicles they were issued dust respirators and goggles because the dry dirt roads of the maneuvering area sent up clouds of dust that infiltrated everything and made it impossible to breathe or see. At the end of the day they were caked in mud from the dust and sweat.

There were very few interruptions to the training schedule. Whenever one came along the guys jumped at the chance to do something different. During his time at the Camp, Schaffner had the chance to be both an MP and a singer in a Soldier's Chorus with the operatic soprano Gladys Swarthout. The MP incident happened when the First Sergeant called him into the office and handed him an MP arm brassard, a loaded .45, white leggings, orders, and travel arrangements to go pick up one of the guys in the unit who'd overstayed his leave in Nashville. Schaffner was pretty apprehensive about the whole thing and never saw the guy again after releasing him to the Battery Commander.

Every so often the guys would get passes to leave the post. Busses would take them to Columbia, South Carolina. If they arrived after five PM the town was shut down and they had to either stay in town or use their thumb to get where they wanted. Often the guys travelled in pairs or small groups. On one particular pass Schaffner and a buddy decided to head to visit some folks that had a summer cottage. Their lift that night was a young fellow who was to report for induction when Monday morning rolled around and he was out celebrating his last weekend of freedom. The guy insisted he knew where Schaffner and his buddy were headed and if they stuck with him he'd get them there. While it wasn't a long drive they stopped at every honky-tonk they came to and rapidly had no idea where they were. Sunday morning with the sun coming up they made their destination, had a quick breakfast, grabbed a few hours of sleep and were fortunately driven back to Columbia to catch the bus back to Camp.

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The morning was clear and cold when John Schaffner and the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion loaded up to continue the move to Camp Atterbury. After hearing all the songs written about Indiana, he expected the weather to be balmy. Not so. When they arrived

the temperature was freezing and the wind was enough to blow his mustache off. The trip from Tennessee to Indiana had been difficult on the unimproved back road. They'd had to repeatedly unhitch their howitzers to make it around the narrow switch backs and they were tired.

The civilians in Indiana treated the G.I.'s with open arms whenever they were on pass. The hospitality was unlimited, even invitations to private homes for Sunday dinner, if they could get a pass into town. Invitations were posted in the service clubs for anyone wanting to take advantage of them. Schaffner and a buddy had girl friends in Indianapolis and frequently double-dated. The girls were next door neighbors and if he and his buddy were there on Sunday it was often for a mid-day dinner at the Stewart's house. They'd would take in a movie or go to the "Indiana Roof" for dancing. Schaffner was never a good dancer, but he liked to hold the girls while they did. He made it a point to catch the bus back to Camp early in the morning and to be one of the first to board so he could swing up into the overhead luggage rack and grab a nap on the way back. No problem for somebody six feet tall and one hundred forty five pounds.

Field maneuvers were a pretty constant training feature for Schaffner and weren't without their moments. There was one instance where he and another GI were running messages in the summer heat along the dirt road inside the camp when they passed a decrepit old farm house not more than forty feet from the road. Glancing over at the house as they drove by Schaffner noticed a woman standing in a galvanized washtub bathing under the bright sun in front of God and two GIs bombing down the road. The driver stood on the brakes and whipped the jeep around in a cloud of dust to head back for another peek only to find that apparently the woman was faster than their jeep and nowhere to be found. During another exercise Schaffner found himself and a radio operator out in an observation post under a peach orchard left intact when the camp was built. Not only did they eat their fill they loaded up the jeep and brought their haul back to the barracks and mess sergeant.

There were exercises, though, that left a big impression on Schaffner. Like how to handle solo bitter cold nights on guard duty. When they dropped him off it was made clear he was to stay there until they came back for him. He figured that meant the night and asked the driver to bring back his bedroll. Schaffner had no idea where he was, the battery was placed, no food, no map, no compass, no telephone, no radio, no nothing, except orders to stay put. That night he learned to gather pine needles and take it easy while bedding down in them. To his surprise he slept pretty well and when the driver showed up in the morning Schaffner had a special unprintable name for the guy.

There were also things about the Army Schaffner learned the hard way. Just prior to heading overseas at the end of summer Schaffner's Battery C.O. Captain Elliott Goldstein was promoted and transferred to Battalion HQ. His replacement was somebody none of the guys got along with. They found the situation so intolerable that they went over the chain of command and requested a transfer to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Trying to affect a transfer and going over the top in the Army is a very big "no-no" and it got Schaffner and several of his buddies transferred to other units and busted to buck private. Schaffner's new CO was Captain Arthur Brown - an officer and a gentleman "par excellence," and one he was going to be happy to go to Europe with.

## ***December 9<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>; On the Line***

The guys of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division's 15<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion hated to leave when John Schaffner and Battery B, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion took over the dugouts and gun emplacements they'd built over the previous two months. To Schaffner it looked just like up-town and he understood why they didn't want to go. They'd been prepared to pitch pup tents and live in the snow and rain like they'd been doing since arriving in France. Instead, he was going to share a dugout with a roof and a jerry-can stove near the village of Laudesfeld about a mile and half from Auw and besides, there were almost three thousand 422<sup>nd</sup> infantrymen between him and the Germans, and it sure beat having to dig gun sites in the frozen ground on their own. Things were definitely looking up.

The 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Kelly, moved into their positions on December 9<sup>th</sup> and done exactly what they were told, "replace the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division man-for-man and gun-for-gun". In fact, it was easier to simply swap some of the howitzers than trying to extricate the pieces already in place. There was so much snow the drivers were having big problems once they left the hard road. When it was all done Schaffner's B Battery was on the north side of the road to Auw. Batteries A and C took the south side of the road. Service Battery was a few miles to the rear, about four miles south of Schoenberg.

To artillery guys distances and locations were what it was all about. They had excellent maps and surveys of the terrain they covered and knew, for instance, that the enemy communications center in the village of Prum was twelve thousand yards from Battery B. They also knew that infantrymen of the 422<sup>nd</sup> they were attached to were on the top and front side of the wooded Schnee Eifel ridge three miles in front of them. By 1630 on the 9<sup>th</sup> Battery B had completed its registration and spent the rest of the night sending harassing fire on the Germans on the other side of the Siegfried Line.

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Sam Feinberg hadn't shaved since coming ashore in France over a week ago. It just wasn't possible with the nasty weather, constant driving, and the fact that all his gear was packed. The trip from Rouen had given him and the guys in the Headquarters Battery a lot of time to think and talk about being scared. Nobody actually talked about what they all knew in the pit in their stomach; they just nodded and gave quick verbal agreement that they were affected. They'd heard and read the stories about guys that couldn't control their bowels. Every one of them secretly hoped it wouldn't happen to them if that time ever came.

Feinberg and the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion arrived in the area outside St. Vith in the early afternoon, parked on a bleak looking road and had lunch. At each stop it was getting progressively colder, and the snow was getting deeper. Late in the afternoon they moved into a bivouac area near Wallerode to camp for the night. It was a heavily wooded area with tall pine trees and when it got dark it was pitch black.

Feinberg caught guard duty that first night and spent it walking along a deep forest trail that was a combination of slush, snow and half frozen water. Nobody had been issued the rubber winter overshoes they were supposed to have. Instead he was wearing combat boots treated with some kind of waterproofing compound. That night he found

out that the stuff didn't work and was beginning to learn all about frost bite. It was a long, bitter cold night made more ominous by hearing for the first time an occasional artillery shell somewhere off in the distance. The war was getting closer.

The morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> Feinberg got his first chance to shave which, given they were actually going forward to the front, was a good thing because, he'd been told, in the event he received a facial wound it would be easier to treat. With his gear still packed he had no Coleman burner to heat the water so he scrapped the whiskers off with ice cold water and was ready to get even closer to the war.

The Battalion's Command Post was set up in the kitchen of a substantial German house near the Auw-Bleialf road just outside Schonberg. Feinberg and the Fire Control section set up in a farmhouse some one hundred fifty yards in front of the Command Post. The mess hall was in a large barn type building about seventy-five yards behind the Command Post. Their new home was called the Communication Barracks because it housed the radio and wire as well as the fire control guys. They got a big twelve by fifteen foot room with eight double bunks with chicken wire mattresses. When they considered the tents and rain they'd had for the last week, Feinberg and the guys considered themselves pretty lucky.

Feinberg was close to the guys in his Battery and carried a picture of four of them taken in Boston before they left the states. They all had nick names. Feinberg's was "Fish". He'd picked up that moniker on his very first day of basic training at Fort Bragg, South Carolina when the Platoon Sergeant called out the roll. Whether by design or mistake instead of "Feinberg", the Sergeant called out "Fishberg," – and the name stuck.

There was Frank Aspinwall, Feinberg's closest friend from Rome, New York. The guys started out calling him "Luke", which seemed to match the way he wore his cap. It was sort of stuck on the right side of his head with a tilt toward the back. Eventually they felt that "The Asp" was a more apt description. They'd started out together in basic training and couldn't believe they both ended up together in the Instrument and Survey section of the 589<sup>th</sup> Headquarters Battery. Frank was twelve years older than Feinberg and taken taken the younger private under his wing. Feinberg was forever grateful for that. Aspinwall had graduated from Cornell University as a Civil Engineer under the ROTC program and should have been an officer. But the Army screwed up the paperwork and he never received his commission.

Ed Brown had also been in the same unit at Fort Bragg with Aspinwall and Feinberg. "Brownie" was an architect from Washington, DC, and by far the oldest guy in the Platoon at thirty-six. In addition to being an old man Brown had a bad leg which made it really difficult from him to keep up with the young guys and physical challenges during Basic Training at Bragg. The guys tried to help him through those days but Brown insisted on doing it himself and never complained once during the whole ordeal.

Their Sergeant, Raounas, from Scranton, Pennsylvania, was a dour, humorless guy. Feinberg always had the impression the Sergeant felt he was below the college boys. Overall he was fair and after a time they all got along. Mike Palfey, a Master Sergeant from Pittsburgh, had joined the Battery in May 1944 when the big drain took place. The guys were really happy when he came along and took some of the wind out of Rouna's style. Finally, there was Lieutenant Clausson, whom they all thought was a terrific officer.

On the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> Feinberg and his group of Fire Control guys got their orders to go up as artillery observers with the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment for the next week. The plan had teams swapping in and out on a one week cycle. The 422<sup>nd</sup> was occupying the first belt of dugouts and pillboxes on the Siegfried Line that had been breached earlier that fall. German civilians were all over the area, often herding a team of oxen pulling their wagons along the Auw-Bleialf road. Feinberg and the guys figured they were checking on their property which the guys were using for Command Posts and quarters. The civilians looked at the soldiers and they looked back the civilians. They may have wanted to talk with the Americans but Feinberg and guys did not want to talk with them. In fact they weren't permitted to do so. So the civilians went about their business and the guys went about theirs.

There were two events that occurred during the week that would always stick in Feinberg's mind. The first was when he was on guard duty in an unheated wooden unheated shack, some fifteen or twenty yards to the rear of their Command Post. His relief was George Hayslip who sauntered up carrying his 35mm camera. Feinberg was completely surprised because having a camera was against regulations so Feinberg questioned him and was told George simply wanted to take some shots of the guys - "don't worry, nobody will ever know about it."



**Sam Feinberg in the Guard Post Picture Nobody would ever know about.**

The other incident occurred later in the week, sometime in the morning while Hayslip and Feinberg were in their room in the Communication Barrack cleaning their carbines. Feinberg was sitting on the lower bunk while Hayslip was standing up; neither was paying any attention to what they were doing. Feinberg was close to finishing and dropped his head down to put the trigger mechanism together when he heard the click of

Hayslip's weapon. Except it wasn't a click. Instead he heard the whiz of a bullet zip over his head so close he felt the breeze before it buried itself in the wall behind him. Feinberg immediately jumped up and started screaming obscenities at Hayslip who by this time was a white as a sheet and tried to apologize. Feinberg was so scared he ran out of epithets, picked up his rifle, and was about to hit him with it when a couple of other guys ran into the room and sanity returned. Feinberg sat down and closed his eyes – that had been too close. There were all kinds of “ooohs and ahhs” as the guys reconstructed the scene and checked out the bullet lodged in the wall. As they measured it the bullet came within an inch of hitting Feinberg in the head. In short order they were laughing and the conversation switched to what a dumb way to get killed in war – by a good friend leaving a round in the chamber and cleaning his weapon.

Feinberg hoped that was as close to a round killing him as he'd ever get.

Pulling supplies was no piece of cake for the guys. It meant they had to take a drive along “Skyline Drive” that ran along the backbone of the Eifel. There was one particular spot they called “88 Corners” which was a stretch about three-quarters of a mile long that was completely open to viewing and shelling by the German 88's. The sign on the side of the road said to drive as fast as hell until you were under cover of the trees on the other side. The guys knew they were on German soil and literally every road and strong point had its coordinates marked on German Maps. The Germans had in fact managed to take out trucks in the past few weeks so the guys were extremely careful making the trip back to Service Battery for supplies. To Feinberg's great relief the 81<sup>st</sup> Combat Engineers took pity on their plight and, using good old American ingenuity, cut a corduroy road through the woods that started and ended on either end of 88 Corners which the guys they called, “Engineer's Cutoff.”

## ***Dec 16 Early Morning***

The gun crews of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion had been split into a day and a night shift under the command of Major Elliott Goldstein, Battalion Executive Officer. In Goldstein's view he was XO only because Major Arthur Parker, Battalion S-3 Operations Officer, a graduate engineer in his thirties, was better qualified to run the Fire Direction Center. Goldstein was familiar with the area and been given a tour by his old friend from Atlanta, Lieutenant DeJongh Franklin, an officer with the 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Group on the other side of Auw. Franklin told him the 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was stretched thin and if something did happen with the Germans the only thing he could do was run and report. Goldstein considered himself warned.



**Major Elliott Goldstein**

He'd been puzzled from the first day they arrived on the line about the order to replace the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in place. The explanation given was that Command didn't want the Germans to know there was a new division on the line. A lot of good that did – German radio from Berlin had broadcast a welcome to the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and identified all the units by name and number when they arrived - so much for operational security.

Intelligence should flow up from the Infantry Regiments and Field Artillery Battalions in contact with the enemy back up to Division and from there to Corp and Army. But no matter what information he provided it was considered worthless. Instead of getting questions about the Intelligence he provided, the Division Artillery S-2 told him, "This is the route that the Germans took through Belgium in 1870 and have taken in every war since. It's in their tactics manual, and it is a training exercise for all German officers. I've told them that, and they don't believe me. They are convinced that the attack is coming well to the north of us."

Things had been pretty calm the previous five days on Goldstein's night shifts. But something was different tonight. All his forward observers were reporting there was a traffic jam in the vicinity of Auw; convoys with headlights, flares overhead, german patrols. But they didn't want to hear about it.

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At 0604 John Gatens of A Battery, 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion was eating a plate of pancakes with strawberry jam. At 0605 shells started hitting the trees sending fragments and tree limbs all over the place. The official thing to do under the circumstance was to get back to the guns. It wasn't easy to avoid getting hit with anything that would wound or kill him. Little did he know that breakfast would be the last real meal he'd have for four and a half months.

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John Schaffner was on guard duty at his outpost where B Battery had a .50 caliber machine gun when the shells began to fall. Being in a dugout was probably better than being back with the rest of Battery, but that wasn't good enough for Schaffner. Shells were showering him with dirt and limbs. So he found the lowest point in the dugout and crawled into his helmet as best he could. But it wasn't low enough - the buttons on his clothing limited his ability to get even lower. Occasionally, instead of deafening explosions, he heard a deep thud when duds slammed into the ground. Those, he thought, were the good ones.

After thirty minutes the shelling ceased and Schaffner was summoned back to the battery position. To his relief even with all the shells that fell around the position no one had gotten hurt. One of the guys was busy inspecting the fragments and announced to the guys that the Germans were using 88's, 105's, and 155's. Why anyone would actually be concerned with that was a mystery to Schaffner. What was important was that neither he nor anyone else had the foggiest notion of what was going on except they were under attack and things were serious.

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On the bitterly cold night of the 15<sup>th</sup>, Sam Feinberg pulled guard duty until relieved at 0330 the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>. He was beat and couldn't wait to hit the sack - tomorrow he was going forward to replace the other fire direction team up near Auw.

Then, at 0530, the artillery fire started falling around the Battalion Command Post at Auw. No one seemed to know what was happening; Shells fell, and then they'd stop, then they'd start coming again. In between there were bridges of eerie silence. The talk in the barracks was that the Krauts were attacking and cut the phone lines between the Battalion Command Post and the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment Command Post at Schlausenbach. Nobody in the room thought for a moment it was a massive attack.

## ***Dec 16 Dawn***

As soon as he was relieved of his night shift command by his boss and 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Kelly, Goldstein took a crew out to do shell reports on the morning's barrage. The shell report was used to locate the enemy artillery by using an aiming circle pointed along the shell's line of flight, which was easily determined by inspecting the crater. The size of the crater told him the caliber of the gun. The shape of the crater told him the direction it came from and trajectory angle. By taking readings from a number of craters he could map the location of each enemy gun and get busy sending back a thank you note.

Goldstein was busy with the shell report when what sounded like fire crackers started popping in the distance. Looking up they spotted German infantry in their white over garments on a slope not more than one hundred yards away - they were firing at Goldstein and his crew. Nobody got hit. Being more indignant than frightened the crew fired back, the Germans left, and they went back to the Battalion Command Post.

By 0700 things were chaotic as the command staff tried to figure out what had happened. It was difficult given that they'd lost communication with both 106<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery Headquarters and the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regimental Headquarters they were attached to.

By 0915 reports of enemy patrols in Auw were coming in. That got an observer from C Battery dispatched to a position with a commanding view of the village who then directed fire on the village until he was pinned down by small arms fire. Given Auw was in enemy hands the Germans next stop was Laudesfeld and the batteries of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion so another patrol was sent up to the Schonberg-Auw road. By 1100 they were reporting enemy small arms fire.

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Sam Feinberg had one corner of the stretcher when they carried Captain Beans, Headquarters Battery Commander into the barracks about mid morning.

“You boys do a good job here,” said Beans.

Beans had been out on a mission to the 422<sup>nd</sup> Regimental HQ sometime around 0900 and gotten shot in the behind by German small arms fire on the way back to the Command Post. The guys thought it was ironic that he was going to be leaving with a million dollar wound in his butt and they were going to have to face whatever it was that was happening all around them.

But there wasn't much going on around the barracks so Feinberg made his way down the Auw-Bleialf road to the mess hall. It was strangely quiet when he got there. The mess Sergeant had coffee and food prepared but nobody was in the mood to eat with the sound of artillery again coming from the direction of the batteries. He hoped the guys were in their dugouts.

Feinberg knew some things were just basic Army functions no matter what the tactical situation when the officer walked in around 1000 and told him to go out back and dig another latrine. So Feinberg and his newest buddy Corporal Hossley headed out back and started digging. To Feinberg that was OK. Not only did it calm both of them down, but GI logic told him that if things were as bad as they sounded the officers wouldn't have them digging a latrine.

After digging to what they both knew was the proper depth they headed back into the mess hall hoping to catch up on any news. The few guys that were there told them the phone lines with the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment were still out and wire crews were busy trying to reestablish them. While nobody officially told Feinberg, it didn't look like he was going up to replace the fire direction crew on the line with the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment that day.

## ***Dec 16 Afternoon***

Thing had been busy all morning for Elliot Goldstein and it was clear he needed to coordinate a defense of the Battalion Command Post. The first thing he did was send out soldiers from Headquarters Battery with their carbines. He was also able to round up two bazooka teams which he sent to either side of the Auw-Schonberg road with orders to not fire on any tanks without his command.

....

Sam Feinberg had spent most of the morning at the mess hall either digging latrines or finding out what he could about the situation. With the noon hour approaching the Mess Sergeant asked him to take lunch back to the guys at the Communication

Barracks. Feinberg liked the Mess Sergeant and lifted the large heavy vat with handles onto the back of the truck – at least the guys could eat while things were still relatively quiet. With that he took off back up the road, hugging the tree line as much as possible.

Things had changed a lot at the Barracks since he'd left earlier that morning. The guys had setup machine gun and bazooka teams in front of the building. There was a story running around that one of the Sergeants from the Service Battery told to man one of the positions took off. The Major caught him in the act of leaving and pulled his .45 and told him if he didn't get back to his position or if he tried to leave again he'd shoot him.

After he dropped off the food Feinberg headed back to the Command Post down the Auw-Bleialf Road. He wasn't sure why he was going; maybe it was to see if there was any real information about what was happening. As he went past the building where they kept the vehicles a shell landed a short distance away. The concussion knocked him face down on the ground. Nothing was broken and he wasn't hurt, but he was scared out of his wits. It reminded him of a shooting gallery where you hit the duck and it plopped straight down. Feinberg jumped up and high tailed it straight to the Command Post. There were some guys around, but none of his buddies. The talk was that the Germans were infiltrating the entire area and everyone needed to keep their eyes peeled. Again, Feinberg headed back to the Barracks, maybe this time he'd find some friendly faces.

....

It was about 1400 when Feinberg arrived back at the Barracks where Captain Huxel, the assistant Battalion S-3, brought him up to an attic observation post setup earlier. The Captain had his binoculars and was scanning the terrain through a trap door on the roof. Feinberg, with a single piece spyglass, was next to the Captain looking out a window and had his glass glued to a hill where the Auw-Bleialf road crested from the direction of Auw.

It only took fifteen, maybe twenty minutes, before Feinberg spotted the turret of a German tank making its way over the crest. He called it out to the Captain who asked where it was. Feinberg told him again, "On the road at the crest." Again, the Captain asked where it was. By the time the Captain trained his binoculars on the crest there were three tanks. Feinberg was sure the tanks had spotted them. After all they were the highest point on the horizon.

Four hundred yards from the Battalion Command Post the first tank opened machine gun fire on one of the outposts and damaged three of its machine guns. The guys directed small arms fire back toward them but they just buttoned up and kept coming. When it came within range of the bazookas, they fired, and one hit and immobilized the lead tank. Unfortunately, the tank got a round of its own off and hit one of the two bazooka teams.

....

Down below Feinberg and the Captain in the attic Observation Post John Gatens and the guys of A Battery out in front of the Battalion Command Post were busy with an indirect fire mission. Unlike the other three pieces in the battery Gatens' gun was higher up on the hillside near the road allowing his Number 1 man to spot the tanks. The guy yelled the sighting to Gatens who yelled it back to Sergeant Shook the section chief,

“Enemy tank! We should fire at it.” Shook’s response was they should do it since Gatens had a direct line of sight on the pesky tanks.

In a direct fire mission with a 105mm Howitzer, Gatens, as the gunner, was in charge and needed to sight the piece in the same way he’d aim a rifle. The gunner’s sight, which had vertical and horizontal crosshairs like a rifle scope, was mounted on the carriage to the left of the tube, and moved with the tube. Fortunately, he’d been trained how to do this, and didn’t hesitate as he aimed at the lead tank; first setting the elevation based on his estimate of the distance, four hundred yards, and then traversing the tube until he had the howitzer nailed. Gatens was tracking its movement through the sight when four men raced down the hill toward the battery. That really screwed up the mission – they were right in his sight and he’d probably hit them if he fired at the tank. Besides getting a direct hit they’d probably be spotted and give away the battery position – neither was a good thing. Gatens and his #1 cannoneer ran out in front of the gun, waving their arms wildly to get down while yelling the same at the top of their lungs.

With a clear field of fire Gatens called the first shot. Sergeant Shook standing nearby watched the round miss through his binoculars, “It’s a little high.” Gatens lowered the elevation and commanded another fire. It was a direct hit and immobilized the lead tank in the middle of the road. Gatens called one more direct hit for good measure and scored the Battalion’s first direct fire mission.

The four GIs Gatens saw in his sight finished their run to the Battery position and jumped all over the guys with joy. One actually hugged him and thanked him for knocking out the tank – they were in one of the machine gun posts near the Battalion CP and that tank was coming straight for them.

....

To Goldstein his bazooka teams were the principal means of defense for his Battalion Command Post and he’d just lost one of them during the tank exchange. After all, artillery was for longer ranges. Goldstein got up his gumption and made the dash across the road and along the ridge line to the where the bazooka team that got hit had been. Closing on his destination he dodged small arms fire then dove to the ground and into a deep truck rut. Ahead of him he could see the bazooka clutched in the bloody arm of the guy who’d fired it just ten minutes earlier. It was all that was left of the guy. The sight shocked Goldstein. But what was far more disturbing was the round that hit just short of his cozy little rut. At first he thought it was a mortar round, then he thought more carefully and realized it was probably the second tank. That round was immediately followed by another just on the other side of the rut. Whatever it was, the German gunner now had a bracket on him and one of several things was about to happen. There might be one more adjusting round, or the gunner might decide the bracket was small enough, cut the elevation difference between the long and short rounds in half, fire for effect, and assume one would hit the American in the rut.

Goldstein accepted the fact that he was going to die and stared at the bloody arm in front of him. He realized there was nothing left to do but pray and wait for his fate. Sure enough three rounds impacted in rapid succession, all short. He waited for a moment until the firing ceased and backed down the rut to the Battalion Observation Post with the bazooka and one round.

....

Sam Feinberg was pretty shook up over the whole incident with the three tanks and decided it was time to head back to the Battalion Command Post as he headed down the steps out the back of the Barracks. This time he wasn't going near the road hoping he'd be less exposed making his way through the forest. The first thing he did when he left the building was look in the direction the Germans had been coming from to make sure the coast was clear. Two hundred yards out he saw movement in the snow. It was getting dark so it was hard to be sure, but it looked like a white clad German taking a step forward. He pulled his carbine up and looked again. It was now or never. Feinberg slung his rifle over his shoulder and made a mad dash out the door and headed toward the Command Post.

The snow was well above his knees and the going was tough. He'd fallen just shy of the Barracks on his way to the woods. He wasn't hurt, the snow had broken his fall but his rifle was jammed with snow and that was a much bigger concern to him. It felt like the whole damned German Army was looking at him when he got up and continued running, finally reaching the mess hall. To his surprise it was quiet with a few guys milling around outside. Clearly they didn't know there were Germans in the area.

Feinberg was determined to talk with the mess Sergeant and wandered inside to find several of them off in a side room. In the corner was a fellow from Service Battery lying on a pallet of straw with a severe wound to his mid-section. The medics were trying their best to make the guy comfortable as he fumbled to take his wedding ring off his finger, asking the guys to make sure it was sent back to his wife. Feinberg knew, everybody knew, the guy wasn't going to make it. He turned and left the building – he really couldn't handle watching the guy die. Outside in the cold air it hit him, he wasn't sure why it happened then, but for the first time a gnawing fear began creeping into his gut and he knew they were in real trouble.

The discussion outside among the guys was what to do. They kept their voices down because of the threat of infiltrating Krauts and decided to get into the foxholes in the woods behind the Command Post – at least they wouldn't be in the open. There were four or five of them in each hole when they climbed in. The only one Feinberg knew was his newest buddy, Corporal Hossley. Feinberg sat on the frozen ground with his back against the wall and his feet jammed against the other side. One top of his legs the other's crossed theirs making it mighty uncomfortable for him. First they went to sleep, then they went numb, and finally Feinberg had no feeling in his legs at all. But compared to the cold outside the hole at least they were a little warm.

....

The entire morning Captain Arthur Brown's Headquarters Battery fired salvo after salvo until the guns boiled. It was clear things were deteriorating when their Executive Officer, Ted Kiendl came back from surveying the situation. A German assault gun had the Headquarters Battery in its sights and was chopping up the wounded and dead with a continuous string of solid shots. The XO even got sprayed in the face and shoulders with pieces of log from a direct hit on their lookout post from a German 88 while bringing in a wounded soldier. "Nothing could live out there," he said, bleeding profusely all over the letters they had been censoring. Ted was a giant of a man who'd

played football for Yale. His last words to Major Goldstein when he was put on the stretcher for evacuation were, “Coach, I’m turning in my jockstrap. They’re playing too rough out there.”

Brown had managed to confiscate a German Burp gun earlier in the morning from his forward observer Lieutenant Cassibry and with it the two of them headed forward to reconnoiter the situation. Along the way Brown saw the body of one of his guys without the head – it was his first exposure to the stark reality of war and left him strangely detached from the moment. When they did get closer to the front it wasn’t good. German tanks followed by a column of infantry were headed down the road from Auw straight for their gun position. That meant the entire left flank of the 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment had been infiltrated.

....

2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Earl Scott with the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion HQ was an artilleryman first and a pilot second. His weapon was a Piper Cub airplane; a fragile machine when confronting hostile gunfire, foul weather, and unfriendly terrain. And it was definitely foul weather the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Scott had arrived for duty with the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina in October 1943. To him being a pilot with the Field Artillery was the best job in the Army. They gave him a plane and an additional fifty percent of base pay to fly it. His first encounter with Division Artillery’s Executive Officer, Colonel Craig put him on solid footing. That changed when he reported for the 589<sup>th</sup> Headquarters Battery Commander Captain Beans. Scott’s shiny new 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant bars didn’t take with Beans. He addressed him as Mr. Scott. Apparently he hated pilots, especially 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants, because one had stolen his girl in Texas. On his first night aboard he was assigned as duty officer and slept in the orderly room. From then on he routinely pulled duties like Mess and Supply Officer.

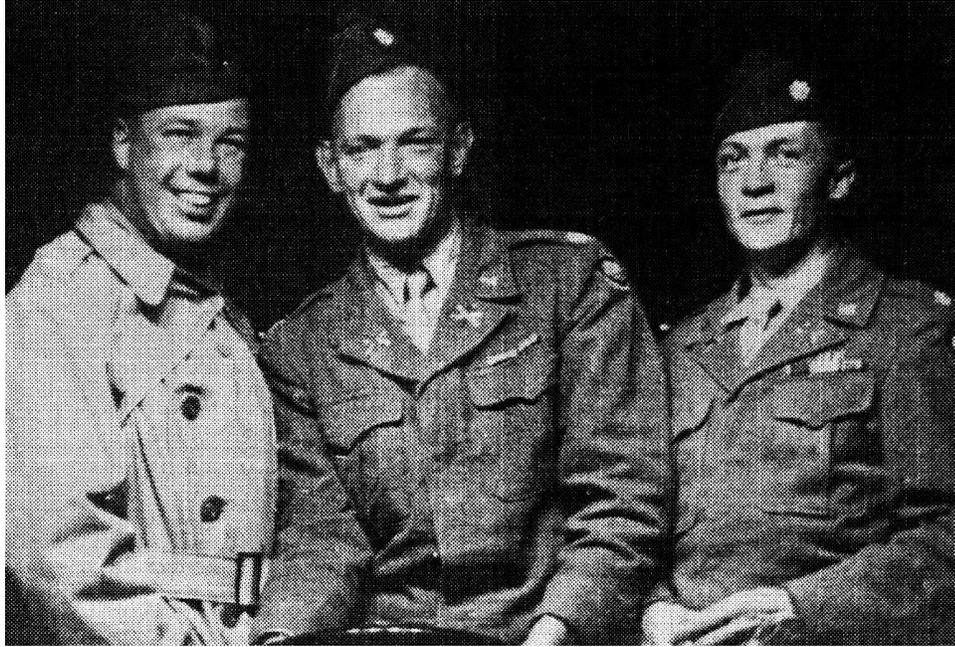
When they’d arrived in England the Division Artillery Air Section got their brand new Piper Cubs from their crates and assembled them. When the Division crossed the Channel on December 4<sup>th</sup> Scott flew his new baby to Cheltenham, England where he nearly tangled with a four engine RAF bomber he cut off when they both made the same landing approach. The bomber bounced along in the weeds while Scott’s Piper rolled smoothly down the concrete runway. He’d have been court martialed if the tower operator hadn’t been honest and admitted he gave Scott the wrong signals. The second leg of his trip across the Channel to Le Havre went a lot faster than the five days the guys of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion spent bobbing around in their LST. By the 14<sup>th</sup> he’d flown his plane to the air strip in St. Vith.

Things had been pretty crazy that morning when he and the second pilot attached to the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion headed to Battalion HQ near Auw. Along the way they were stopped by Lieutenant Cassibry with orders from the Air Officer to return to the strip and get the plane up. Things were hot around Auw and they needed the observation planes up.

In short order Scott and Cassibry functioning as his observer were at fifteen hundred feet altitude headed for Auw. It was clear there were Germans down there when the machine gun tracers and their zip, zip, zip sound appeared a few feet in front of the plane. At Fort Sill, Oklahoma they’d been taught to execute a diving turn and come out

over the trees and fields by hedge hopping. The pilots with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division had told him the maneuver was useless because the Germans were on to it, but they didn't tell him what to do in its place. So he did some tricky flying and headed back to the air strip. Neither of them had been hit but the rear fuselage of the plane was riddled with bullet holes.

It was a wonderful day to celebrate his twenty-sixth birthday.



**Left to Right: Lieutenant Earl Scott – Air Section, Captain George Huxel – Battalion Assistant S-3, Major Arthur Parker – Battalion S-3**

....

It was difficult for Vernon Brumfield, C Battery, to see the Germans against the snow in their white camouflage suits. It helped when they moved. He'd been there most of the afternoon behind a .50 caliber machine gun in a half dug fox hole watching them approach across the snow covered fields. Brumfield yelled back to Corporal Rhinebrick manning the machine gun that it looked like a Wild West picture show. Rhinebrick replied, "Brum, you'll change your tune after a while." He was right, Brumfield's view of the war did change quickly when one of the guys got hit in the back with a piece of shrapnel and spent the next several hours screaming in pain.

Even though the fighting was sporadic it was constant, and by dark they were running low on ammunition. Brumfield's buddy and protector, Malone, came over shortly thereafter with news that the two of them had just volunteered to fix that problem by going to St. Vith to bring back a load. Brumfield was surprised he'd just volunteered, but accepted the challenge, and when a replacement came up to take his position the two of them headed west to bring back more equipment and supplies.

Within an hour of moving through the snow and forest Brum and Malone ran into a Sergeant and about a dozen men from B Battery who proclaimed that the Battalion had been in a serious fire fight and were pulling back to St. Vith. The two lone men from C

Battery fell in and the entire party, lead by the Sergeant, headed for St. Vith across the open fields and forests of the Our Valley until they approached their first obstacle; an elevated region and the possibility of an ambush.

The Sergeant's plan was to lead a single column spaced fifteen to twenty yards apart across the open moonlit field. The guys were pretty apprehensive and watched the Sergeant move his first thirty yards. The next four or five guys refused to move out. Brumfield exclaimed, "If you're afraid, move aside so we can pass!" Malone agreed and they moved out. Brumfield was among the first to hear the noise on his left and immediately hit the snow. The German gunfire took out all but the Sergeant, Brumfield, Malone, and one other who spent the remainder of the night on the side of a hill under fire.

....

By evening Goldstein had received orders to withdraw to a new position about four kilometers south of Schonberg, southeast of their current position outside Auw. With a map of the location and a reconnaissance party he set out to survey the move scheduled for 0400 the next morning.

## **Dec 17**

Sam Feinberg's legs might have gone numb, but after six or seven miserable hours in the foxhole some things had to be taken care of. It felt like they'd been entombed when the five of them crawled out of a foxhole meant for two and headed for the latrine.

It was bitterly cold in the darkness of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the biting wind just added to his discomfort as he headed for the woods behind the Command Post. Standing on the steps was Major Goldstein, the guys were glad to see him and crowded around him.

"Feinberg", said Goldstein, "you'd better get your overcoat. Your teeth are chattering."

Feinberg was touched by Goldstein's concern. Goldstein then continued to tell them they were going to pull out of their present positions and they'd better get their stuff together. He asked the Major if it was OK to go back up to the Barracks to get his coat and was assured it was. He turned and headed back up the road alone in the blackness. He had the feeling he'd been up and down that stretch a dozen times that day. On reaching the darkened barracks he found nobody at the place ran upstairs to grab his overcoat and stuffed his gear into his duffle bag. It seemed like days since he'd spent the afternoon in the attic with Captain Huxel. On his way out the door he ran into his buddy Smithy just pulling up in a jeep. He was a welcome sight to Feinberg and asked him for a ride.

Feinberg threw his gear in the back of the jeep and they talked while waiting for Lieutenant Wood whom Smithy was supposed to be driving. They got a laugh out his story about the foxhole, overcoat, and teeth chattering. Feinberg blanked while Smithy told him about his day, and then they sat in the wind, waiting, still no Lieutenant. Around 0400 the six by sixes were gearing up to pull out from the Barracks. Feinberg decided to make a switch, grabbed his gear from the still waiting jeep, and turned to Smithy telling him they'd catch up at the next position.

....

The German assault on the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion from the direction of Auw made it impossible for John Gatens and the guys to stay in their positions. Major Goldstein had been out and surveyed their next position south of Schonberg and everybody was getting ready to pull out. Things didn't look good for C Battery though. The enemy was astride their only exit and the Battalion Commander Lieutenant Colonel Kelly had gone down to their position with the hope of getting some infantry to help them out. But the infantry had their own problems and as far as he could tell they weren't going to pull out with the rest of the Batteries.

Extricating B Batteries cannons was not going to be an easy task. They'd gotten them in there five days ago using the corduroy road of dirt and railroad ties left by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. The heavy trucks and melting snow churned the thing into an icy muck sinking the truck to their hubs. Artillery and small arms fire were breaking out all over the area while the guys pushed, pulled, and dug out the trucks and guns. The snow blew in their sweaty faces, carried on winds howling through the trees that could easily be hiding an infiltrating German patrol. When it was all done they were covered in mud, cold, and bushed.

....

John Schaffner and B Battery were well aware of the coming move and the approaching German infantry when he and Corporal Montinari grabbed a bazooka and six rounds. The Captain wanted the two of them to head down the road, dig in, and wait for the enemy attack from "that" direction. "That," in this case was on the road from Auw. Just out of sight over the crest of the hill they could hear the noise and rumble of the battle. To his relief the A Battery trucks managed to pull out their guns first, and passing his foxhole they motioned for him and Montinari to jump on board the outbound trucks. Little did he know his transfer from A Battery to B Battery because of the ruckus back at Atterbury over the Company Commander was his lucky break. By noon the Battery CO and many of those with him would either be dead or German prisoners.

....

Sam Feinberg tossed his gear in the back of the truck and checked in with the driver, a guy they called "The Chief." Chief was an Indian and like he always did he had on his sun glasses. Most of the guys thought having The Chief drive them around in the pitch black with no headlights was a bad idea, but Feinberg had seen him do it before, climbed in the back on top of the bags, and dozed off.

....

There was no time to tarry with the enemy building up in force and about to overrun Captain Arthur Brown and the Headquarters Battery outside Auw. They'd toiled all night in the snow and mud to get their guns out and into their new positions outside Schonberg. It if hadn't been for the tracked cats of the 592<sup>nd</sup> Field Artillery Battalion's 155mm howitzers they might have never gotten out. With his .45 pistol drawn it was his lot to lead the battalion to their next position outside Schoneberg. Progress was slow

with the dense fog and no headlights. They got as far as Engineers Cutoff before the white phosphorous shells started falling around them.

As daylight broke the gun Sergeants got busy placing the four B and three A Battery guns that had managed to get out of their first position into their new positions while Brown exercised his executive privilege and unloaded his gear into a small shack behind the guns. No sooner had he started to clean up and relax a little when the sound of machine guns could be heard coming from the direction they'd just left. That was the last he'd see of his footlocker or the good Zeiss field glasses his father had given him the year before. All that came away from that position with him was the clothing and gear on his back, standard issue GI field glasses, and his pistol.

....

It was still dark when Calvin Abbott, a wireman with A Battery walked into the new 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion Headquarters outside Schonberg. Major Goldstein was already at the table with his field telephone and map. His first order to Abbott was to guard the two women and old man in the back room. On entering one of the women tried to get him to lie on a couch, instead he took a chair with his carbine facing the old man who was busy trying to spit tobacco on Abbott.

Apparently these people didn't like him.

....

By 0700 John Gatens and A Battery had taken up positions in a field on the right side of the Bleialf-Schonberg road about a mile from Schonberg. Only three of their guns had arrived. The last truck with Lieutenant Woods was lagging behind because it had run into one the gun barrels and sprung a radiator leak. By 0715 calls were coming into Battalion Headquarters that Service Battery was under attack from enemy tanks and infantry and was surrounded. Within minutes the lines went out.

Service Battery wasn't going to be joining the rest of the Battalion.

....

With the approach of daylight Abbott got orders to go to the new A Battery Command Post and run the phones for Lieutenant Eric Wood, the new acting A Battery commander. Wood was busy placing his Howitzers when a weapons carrier and its crew came screaming down the road hollering they were being followed by a German tank and Abbott had better climb in. Abbott went back to the shack to grab Wood who's just come out and started down the road in the direction of the tank giving the order to fire. Abbott repeated to tell the Lieutenant the guns were pulling out, or at least trying to. Wood kept giving the order to fire while the guys in the jeep were hollering "Come on! We're the last jeep. Come on!" Abbott grabbed the Lieutenant's arm telling him the jeep was going to leave without them. Wood kept giving the order to fire. With that Abbott hopped in the jeep leaving Wood still calling out the order to fire.

....

Feinberg wasn't sure how long they'd been driving when the truck stopped. He was anxious to get off and grab a seat in the cab to get warm. It was barely dawn with a frosty mist. Between the time he jumped out of the back and stepped on the running

board to open the door one of the guys yelled, “Tanks!” Feinberg turned, and sure enough through the mist he could make out a few of them fifty or seventy-five yards away along the tree line. It was too dark and foggy to count, but they were definitely tanks, and he knew he’d better get in the back of the truck before Chief left without him.

Just as he figured, it was a good thing he dove into the back. The Chief hit the gas and they were off again. In the fading distance he could hear the sound of small arms and burp guns and just buried his head into the pack of duffle bags and prayed. They were driving like hell and barreled through the village of Schonberg. Out the back he could see they were picking up more six by sixes following them.

....

As far as John Schaffner could tell, sitting in his ¾ ton truck, everybody in the Battalion was moving out. German tanks and infantry were coming down the road and the fire was getting way too close. In fact it was so close they were going to abandon their cannons where they were. When the first small arms fire started hitting the truck he dove head first out the back sticking the barrel of his carbine in the snow. In training he’d been told the weapon would blow up in his face if there was anything stuck in the barrel. At this point it didn’t matter – there were Germans coming. So he held the gun at arm’s length, aimed toward the enemy, closed his eyes and squeezed. That cleared the barrel and didn’t damage anything except whatever it might have hit. Behind him the truck started moving out. Schaffner ran, scrambled into the back over the tailgate, and they got the hell out of there headed for Schoneberg and then St. Vith.

....

Lieutenant Wood started shouting at John Gatens, “March order, as fast as you can! I’ll meet you on the other side of Schonberg.” Given the enemy was so close it was clear he meant right now. Gatens looked about for Sergeant Shook and couldn’t find him. Gatens was second in command and without the Sergeant he gave the order to pack up and move. When the other two gun crews began to move out, with no Sergeant Shook around, Gatens jumped in the truck and gave the order to go. He was now in command of his gun crew. Fortunately for Gatens’s crew one of his guys had been on the forward party the night before and told Gatens about a quicker way to the road. After ninety minutes in their new positions they were going to move again - this time to St. Vith.

Behind him were the last trucks of A Battery with Lieutenant Wood.

....

It felt like it had taken Don Holtzmuler and A Battery all night to get to their new positions. His section was the only one of four that actually got busy and unhooked their gun from the truck to set it up when the guy started running through the position yelling “March Order! Get out of here, the Germans are coming!” It took a little work but they hooked the gun to the back of the truck and followed the other three sections down the road before they’d even gotten a chance to finish setting it up; hopefully, to the safety of St. Vith.

Just outside the village of Schonberg Holtzmuler’s truck spotted a German tank in the middle of the road and stopped at once. Their guys didn’t fire and neither did the German – he simply motored on down the hill and disappeared around a curve.

Lieutenant Wood pulled up behind them in his jeep, jumped out, and wanted to know why they'd stopped. Holtmuler and the guys told him about the German. "Can't be," said Wood, "It's probably an American tank." Wood climbed into the cab of the truck, sitting next to the driver Corporal Knoll, and Holtmuler's section leader Sergeant Scannapico, "Let's go," he said, and off they went.

It was only a matter of hundreds of yards to the stone bridge across the Our River, and into the small village of a few dozen old stone houses. Behind the first house Wood saw it. "See, it's an American tank," he said. On the second look he realized he was wrong, "No it isn't! It's German! Pour on the gas!"

Knoll hit the gas passing the tank quickly. The thunderous boom of a shot came – and missed. One of the guys in the back of the truck got off a bazooka round – and missed. They continued to roll forward, into a self propelled gun and a handful of Germans armed with automatic weapons. Knoll stopped the truck and the entire set of occupants instantly left for the ditch on the left side of the road when the gun fired, hitting the engine block and sent shrapnel everywhere. Lieutenant Wood went right and disappeared into the forest. It would be two years before any of them knew what he was going to be doing in that forest.

Holtmuler and the guys in his truck weren't the only ones in the ditch. It had already been occupied by guys from another truck hit by the Germans. Among them a Lieutenant Colonel and four black soldiers from another American 155mm Battalion. The guy discussed their situation. No cover to run to, and a few carbines against automatic weapons and self-propelled cannon – it would be automatic suicide to fight.

They raised their hands over their heads and walked out of the ditch. Holtmuler found the driver, Corporal Knoll lying in the road, shot through both ankles and wounded by the shrapnel from the engine. The Germans searched them, took anything of value, and pointed back up the road they'd just come down. Holtmuler did his best to tell them he wanted to stay with Knoll and to his surprise the Germans seemed OK with it. Not that he could do anything to help Knoll except keep him company, but maybe a German medic would come along – at least he could hope for that. Holtmuler watched the growing line of trucks of the 589<sup>th</sup> coming down the hill into Schonberg being forced to stop. The line of American POWs heading up the road was growing. Every so often German infantry would come by and call him back to be searched yet again. Knoll wasn't bleeding badly, but he was almost certainly in shock when the German officer came by, shoved a pistol in his face, and let him know he'd better be going up the road too.

It would take a few years, but Holtmuler would find out in a letter from Knoll's parents the Corporal didn't make it home.

Holtmuler started up the road and joined the line passing the body of his Section Chief Scannapico lying on the road. He figured the Sergeant had left the cab to fire at the Germans and was shot down during the fight. Artillery had now begun to fall on the road from Schonberg. This time from the direction of St. Vith – it was the Americans. Holtmuler had no desire to walk through that mess. Ahead he noticed a lane off to the left and with nobody to tell him where to go, he took it. Behind him twenty or so others took the left. He figured there was a German guard somewhere in the line, so he kept walking, finally stopping at a clearing in the woods. Holtmuler turned around to the gathering American soldiers, "Where's the guard?"

“We thought he was up front with you,” they said. And with that, they headed north to get as far away from Schonberg as they could.

....

The last vehicle out of B Battery’s second gun position waited for Captain Arthur Brown on the road while he checked to make sure that everybody was clear of the position. It was now obvious that the enemy was behind their 422<sup>nd</sup> and 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments on the Eifel in force and moving fast – now there wasn’t much to stop them. Brown didn’t know it at the time but the Germans were indeed making progress in two directions. The first around the north through Auw where they’d left in the morning darkness and the second around the south through the village of Bleialf which was the crew that chased them out of their second position. Whether or not they got their orders to withdraw from Division didn’t matter. If they’d stayed put they’d have been surrounded in short order.

To get to St. Vith the trucks of Batteries A and B and all the support units had to get through the village of Schonberg. He’d known 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment had been called out of Division Reserve to hold the town and had no reason to think otherwise when his truck came roaring down the hill in Schonberg. With shell fire falling on the bridge across the Our River in front of them Brown spotted a group of black artillerymen running and waving wildly at him. He figured they were just excited about the shelling which he assumed was friendly. Brown, with pistol in hand, fired a few rounds in the air to tell them to clear the road – Battery B was going to accelerate through the village and run the gauntlet. His truck rounded the corner, passing the first house on the road straight into a German tank camouflaged as a hay stack. Brown emptied the pistol at the gun ports of the tank now about thirty feet away, apparently startling the German gunner long enough for their truck to pass in front of the tank and see the blast from the gun belly in the canvas of his truck.

The scrape was close.

Continuing through town Brown raised his head, noticing the last truck of A Battery ahead of him being struck by a tank round. It was Lieutenant Wood’s truck. Brown ordered a full stop and within moments they’d dismounted and started to scatter. Some to a roadside ditch, others, like Brown up a hill to a house, small arms landing all over the place. Brown dove into a clump of bushes and waited for the noise to clear then began a slow creep up over the hill to the cover of the forest.

It was mid-morning when Brown found an abandoned American tent with some dry clothing. Apparently they’d left in a hurry too. Brown was drenched from wallowing in the snow and needed the extra long johns and gear for what he knew was going to be a long walk. Well, he thought, the place was crawling with Germans and northwest was probably a good place to find some friendly terrain. His path away from Schonberg led him to a wooded lane straight into a German soldier waving at yet another further down the lane. Fortunately, the man had his back to Brown. He contemplated taking a shot with his .45, but at fifty feet it was chancy at best. Besides, he didn’t really have the stomach to kill another human one on one and it probably would have meant his own demise. Brown took the path of least resistance and backed off.

Four hours later Brown had covered a lot of distance, yet the surroundings looked strangely familiar. He had, in fact, circled back to where he started and determined he

wasn't going to repeat that mistake, heading off yet again to the northwest. With the coming of night shells continued and seemed to fall near wherever he was. He didn't think that said much for their marksmanship. Especially given that there were no targets anywhere nearby. And he doubted he was their target. That night Brown found pile of brush to keep him off the ground and slept fitfully in his long coat.

....

Vernon Brumfield and his buddy Malone had spent the night on the side of a hill with the other two guys from XX Battery under fire. At least he thought he'd spent it with them. He'd managed to dig a foxhole and slept for an hour before the daylight broke. But to his utter surprise none of them could be found when he crawled out of his hole. He couldn't believe he was alone.

Gun in hand he moved across the hill to a farm house to find it occupied by twenty or thirty Americans. Approaching the house a Colonel appeared and shouted, "Anyone here from the 589<sup>th</sup> Battery C?" Brumfield and another soldier answered. "Your outfits either been destroyed or captured. Follow me."

....

On escaping from Schonberg Feinberg learned they were now headed for St. Vith. That news was frightening. St. Vith was where the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Headquarters was, way behind where the 589<sup>th</sup> had been positioned, and that meant they were making a sizeable retreat. There was other worse news that the Battalion Commander Colonel Kelly had stayed behind with C Battery and hadn't made it out the night before. That really bothered Feinberg and cut another notch of sadness into his heart.

Arriving in St. Vith Feinberg met up with some of the other guys from the Headquarters Battery and started asking around about his buddy Frank Aspinwall. Nobody had seen or heard anything about him. Some of the guys told him about the vehicles getting shot up on their run through Schonberg. Feinberg was busy hoping and praying he was OK.

They spent a good part of the day milling around outside St. Vith while all the surviving gun crews and batteries came straggling in. By late afternoon Feinberg found himself on direct fire roadblock north of St. Vith where they'd originally bivouacked coming up to the front seven days ago. Talk about going backwards, he thought. To his relief he hooked up with some of his Headquarters buddies later that night and headed out for their next position in their six by six. They swapped stories and tried to make some sense out of what had happened the past two days – the bottom line was they were being pushed back. To his great dismay he learned that his buddy Brownie had been captured at Schonberg – he hoped and prayed Brownie and his bad leg were OK. And his buddy Smithy who he'd last seen in the jeep waiting to leave the original Command Post was also either dead or captured in the confusion around Schonberg. Feinberg thanked God he'd been spared from whatever fate had befallen his two buddies. Feinberg did a lot of praying over those two days and even proposed a Faustian deal that he'd be a better Jew if he got him out of that mess alive.

....

In a matter of twelve hours Major Elliott Goldstein's 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion had gone from a full unit with twelve guns and almost a thousand men to three guns and just how many men he wasn't sure. They'd lost most of them along the way. What he did know was that they were no longer a Battalion, but more like a small task force made up from the remaining personnel of his A, B, and Headquarters Batteries along with the Service Battery from the 590<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. Twice they were ordered into successive positions around St. Vith, but the only enemies were members of a German patrol who torched a barn not a hundred yards from their bivouack outside St. Vith near the village of Poteau.

Goldstein thought a lot about what had happened that day. There were only two roads leaving the village of Auw. The north fork went to Andler and back around to Schonberg. The south fork, which they'd taken in the darkness, went through Ihrenbruck and then up to Schonberg where they'd taken their short lived second position. The more he thought about it the more he became convinced that the Germans had taken Schonberg from the north and the second bunch chased them out of their second position from the south. It was a classic double envelopment and had it worked they'd have been killed or forced to surrender.

They were lucky to get out with as many men as they did.

....

The owners of the house seemed friendly enough to Holtzmuler and his band of twenty escaped prisoners. Not only were they going to let them stay in the basement, they'd cooked some potatoes for the guys after their two or three mile walk to get out of Schonberg. As far as he and the guys knew the last two days had been a small battle and the Americans would be coming back through tomorrow.

But it wasn't to be, when, in the middle of the night they heard the stomping of feet upstairs and the voice from the top of the cellar stairs called down, "You are prisoners of the German Army!"

Somebody in that nice little village had turned them in.

## ***Dec 18***

John Schaffner and the guys who made it through the gauntlet at Schonberg had spent the afternoon and night of the 17<sup>th</sup> assembling and reorganizing what was left of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion. By Schaffner's count three of their twelve original guns had made it to St. Vith. When he ran into Brigadier General McMahon, Commander of what was left of the 106<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery, the General assured Schaffner he didn't know anything more about their situation than Schaffner did.

....

At 0730 Sam Feinberg and the remnants of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion started up again. By 0800 Feinberg and the column halted again, pulled off the road, and setup a defensive perimeter with their guns pointing down the road. The word was that the Germans had attacked 106<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery, Headquarters Battery which was on the same road they were on. They'd been told the Germans dropped a bunch of parachute troops behind St. Vith and that as causing a lot of confusion and made

everybody jumpy. In fact, besides asking for their usual passwords when they were on guard duty they had to ask questions about baseball, like, who won the American League pennant in 1942?

The next six hours Feinberg felt like he was a rat in a maze. By 1400 they'd pulled out and headed south for a while and halted again; apparently another German attack or roadblock. They'd turn the trucks around and do it all over again. It seemed they couldn't get out of this mess no matter which direction they went.

....

The roads were crowded with troops and vehicles moving into defensive positions when Major Elliott Goldstein's got his orders from Brigadier General McMachon to move his column to the village of Bovigny somewhere about fifteen miles west of St. Vith. That was probably better than running around in circles taking positions for no apparent reason. To reach Bovigny, they continued their circuitous route, proceeding south as far as Luxembourg, then turning north, and taking more positions along the way. This involved a lot of backing and filling, so that they were actually moving in circles.

....

Finally, Feinberg thought, they were headed someplace specific when he heard about their orders to Bovigny, which he assumed and hoped they could get to. Along the way he saw small groups of Belgian people gathered at the intersections as they passed through the little villages along the way. Their eyes told him everything he needed to know; they were retreating and leaving them at the mercy of the Germans. This hurt Feinberg and only added to the gloom he and the guys felt. A couple of times the guys shouted out, "retour" and pointed to themselves. Based on the blank stares of the people it wasn't a very convincing performance.

....

Goldstein and the column were getting close to their destination at Bovigny when a jeep coming the other way stopped them. The General had hand grenades hanging from either side of his cartridge belt when the jeep stopped. "Who the hell is in command of those guns?" said Lieutenant General Matthew Ridgeway, Commander, XVIII Airborne Corps.

Snapping his best salute, "I am sir!" replied Major Elliott Goldstein, now Commander of what was left of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion.

"Get those damned guns off the road!" ordered Ridgeway.

Goldstein gave his standard reply to higher ranking officers, especially those with three stars, "Yes Sir!" And off the road into the ditch they went.

Neither of them knew how important those three guns now in the ditch would be to the defense of his 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

....

After what seemed like a lot of driving, sending out a few shells, and driving some more the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion arrived at the village of Bovigny about ten miles to the west of St. Vith where it was attached to the 174<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Group. The

174<sup>th</sup> and its four Field Artillery Battalions served with the 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division until early December and then as Major General Troy Middleton's VIII Corp Artillery. By 1600 their new commander XXX had new orders for Goldstein and his men. John Schaffner, John Gatens, Major Parker, the cannons, and their crews were needed a mile south at the village of Cortil to chase the Germans out of the village of Charan some four miles further west.

The rest, including Sam Feinberg, without their cannons, headed north for five miles to the village of Joubieval. It was here that Feinberg and the guys first heard about the Massacre at Malmedy. That really pissed them off. The word was that all of them needed to keep one round from themselves in the event they were captured by the Germans. Feinberg was pretty sure the German's didn't really understand what this had done to stiffen the resolve of the average GI – and they were about to prove it.

By 2100 neither group had seen any signs of the Germans anywhere and dug in to wait for daylight.

....

Captain Arthur Brown with the 589<sup>th</sup> HQ Battery had slept fitfully somewhere along his northwest course away from Schonberg. That was a good thing because it was away from the direction where the fiercest sounds of battle were. By mid-morning he found his way to the village of Born where 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment had spent five days in reserve. The village wasn't in much better shape than Schonberg had been the day before. There were Germans on the roads. To his surprise he found several cooks still there camped behind a house. They had no idea what had been going on since their 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion buddies had left to defend Schonberg and it was up to Brown to tell them the bad news; their buddies were surrounded and unless they did something they were going to be surrounded too.

The guys grabbed their M1 Garand rifles and dodged the Germans on the road in front of the house as they headed for the west end of the village. Not knowing for sure where they were going they made a decision to enter a local house, hoping the residents were friendly with hopes of getting decent directions. Brown was lucky again. Not only did he get directions the residents sent them on their way with food and a bottle of wine.

Brown and his new group of cooks dodged a fair amount of fire as they made their way cross country in the direction of Stavelot-Trois Point. By noon they were nearing the village of Recht, about four miles south of Malmedy, where the Kampfgruppe Peiper's men were about to murder eighty unarmed American prisoners. To get through Recht they had to drive off a jeep load of Germans with rifle fire and then ford the ice cold river. The current was chest high and swift. The shorter soldiers had to be pulled across. Some of the guys were swearing at them to get them pissed so they wouldn't give up. Coming back up the other side of the river valley the enemy was back on Brown and his men with mortar fire which caused them to double time it up the slope. Looking back at the single file column strung out to prevent the enemy from being able to kill too many at once, it was evident they'd lost some of the guys. But they continued to walk.

The guys were soaked from head to foot, it was freezing, and getting dark. The prospect of freezing to death seemed at the time to be far worse than the possibility of being captured sitting by a fire in the dense woods. Brown chose the latter.

## **Dec 19**

As daylight came Lieutenant Earl Scott found himself walking to his plane parked in a field just outside Bastogne. The Colonel who'd found him a piece of floor to sleep on when he arrived at VIII Corps Headquarters at midnight had also woken him a few hours later and told him Corps Headquarter was moving out and the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne guys would take him out to his plane so he could get it out of there. Instead they'd simply left him alone in the darkness and given him a lot of time to think about the guys in the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion he hadn't seen since the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> and his failed observer mission to Auw.

Scott had arrived at the field in Bastogne after two harrowing days of flying and near fatal accidents. It started with him and his observer Cassibry being ordered out of St. Vith on the afternoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> to a rear area VIII Corps air strip. Then they'd been ordered out of wherever that was when the place came under German small arms and machine gun fire. There were a couple of other planes and Cassibry volunteered to fly one of them out to their next destination at Bastogne. Cassibry had never flown a Piper L-4 before but did have some flying training at an Army Training School until he cranked a plane with no one in it. It took off down the runway with no pilot and crashed. That was the end of his flying career.

There was almost zero visibility when the two of them left for Bastogne. Scott followed Cassibry into the air and quickly flew into a solid fog bank. He figured it might be better at a lower level but the fog was still thick there. The smart thing to do was to return to the airstrip so he gained some altitude and made the turn back. To his utter and complete surprise Cassibry went zooming across his flight path – the two barely missed each other. Scott figured Cassibry wasn't going to make it and he had a pretty slim chance of surviving himself. He looked at the parachute next to him, didn't want to make his first ever jump, and put his instrument and night flying course to work. Scott spiraled down hoping to come out of the fog. At one hundred feet indicated altitude he did and landed in an open field.

Scott taxied up to the road to the only soldier he found. The guy turned out to be a Chaplain, exactly what he needed at the time, who pointed him in the direction of Bastogne about four miles down the road and gave him a weather report – it was pretty clear at Bastogne. Scott took off again and followed the road. The Chaplain hadn't been totally correct. The fog was pretty thick and after searching for the airstrip he set the plane down in a field by an anti-aircraft unit who fed him and gave him a place to sleep. Around midnight of the 18<sup>th</sup> they woke him up and told him they were evacuating and would drop him off at the edge of Bastogne. There the MPs picked him up and took him to VIII Corps Headquarters which was how he ended back where he started in less than six hours.

In the darkness Scott sat at the wheel of his plane hoping that the fog would lift. A constant stream of traffic passed his plane while shells and machine guns kept up their chatter. The 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division was moving into Bastogne while civilians streamed to the west in whatever vehicles they could find. Scott prayed that God would get him out of the mess, and then, just a daylight broke he could see the end of the field and tree line, and was out.

Fourty-five minutes later he landed at the new VIII Corp Headquarters at Neuchateau. After lunch he headed to the Corps war room and learned that the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Bastogne was surrounded. Scott turned to walk out to the street and shook his head, running into Cassibry along the way who told him his strange story of surviving the near collision, landing in Bastogne, and spending a night in a Convent.

Both of them had managed to get out of Bastogne just in time.

....

Major Goldstein's guys had been through all kinds of villages since yesterday and finally fired a mission this morning when they registered one of the guns. It didn't go well. The officer from the 174<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Group in charge had ordered a smoke shell but couldn't see the burst. That was followed up with a round with the fuze set for a high burst. The telephone operator was the one who happened to notice that the first shell had landed immediately behind them – they'd been pointing the wrong direction all night. Well, thought Goldstein that explained the reports from Division rear echelon about being attacked by artillery all night. Thank God nobody had been hurt by it.

Now the orders from General McMahan, 106<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery were to move to Baraque-de-Fraiture to set up a roadblock and protect the Division supply routes from the south and west.

....

Around noon Feinberg and the guys stopped in a field full of all kinds of trucks and rag tag units including guys from the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Feinberg figured this was a good place to look around for guys he hadn't seen since the attack of the 16<sup>th</sup>. At the kitchen truck he found his mess Sergeant, Webb, and had a great reunion. But his best surprise was when Frank Aspinwall came walking up through the tangle of trucks. He couldn't believe his eyes. Feinberg jumped off the truck, tears in his eyes, and ran to greet him.

"Fish," said Aspinwall, "you see this," reaching into his pocket and pulling out a GI compass, "I'm going to put this on my mantel piece at home, because this is what got me through the German line." Aspinwall then spent what Feinberg would always remember as one of the happiest days of his life, telling him how the firing started in Schonberg and he'd jumped onto the hood of a jeep, made his way into the woods, and made his way west with the compass.

Aspinwall's story almost made Feinberg forget the pain in his feet. It was either Trenchfoot or frostbite, and maybe both. But every time he got in or out of the trucks, which was all the time he could see stars. It was like walking on a thousand hot needles even when he used his rifle as a crutch. The big toe on his right foot was an odd looking ashen color. Without his buddies he wouldn't have made it. They literally supported him by letting him put his arms around their shoulders and having him hobble between them.

After a few hours of reminiscing Aspinwall and Feinberg pulled out and drove for what seemed to be a very long time. Going through the villages they saw the grim faces of the Belgian people staring at them with a combination of resignation and disgust. The Americans were running away from the Nazis and they were going to have to live with them. How Feinberg wished he could say something to them.

Along the way they passed a line for artillery pieces placed wheel to wheel. It ran on for miles. Feinberg was impressed. They also heard the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne was being sent up to stop the attack. Those guys had an awesome reputation. Maybe they could finally turn this thing around.

It was dark when they stopped in front of a large French looking chateau. In the windows they could see flashing lights move eerily from window to window. Feinberg's first reaction was that the occupants were signaling German paratroopers that were apparently all over the place. This sent them into the ditches where they waited with their carbines ready to fire. To his relief the word came down that a bunch of their own guys had already gotten into the place and were wandering from room to room while they explored the place. The chateau, in the village of Phillipeville, was actually an orphanage with about one hundred Belgian kids inside. It was owned by a Belgian Count and his wife, who with the aid of a Belgian Army Chaplain took care of the kids.

Unfortunately for Feinberg and Aspinwall the guys who'd been welcomed inside and were wandering around got to clean up and sleep in the place. They got to spend another miserable night freezing the back of their trucks.

....

By 1500 John Schaffner and the remaining gun crews of the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, now attached to the 174<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Group, had gone from their bivouac at Bovigny back to Cortil, withdrawn to Salmchateau, and arrived at the crossroads of Baraque de Fraiture. Their mission, he was told, was to establish a blocking force and hold the German advance.

Schaffner was not at all sure any of this had been planned intelligently. In fact, he wasn't sure anybody knew anything. Of course he, the other ninety-nine men, and their three 105mm Howitzers would resist the German advance as long as they could and hope to get help or get out before they were blown away. The truth was he didn't even know who was in charge of their rag-tag group until he saw Major Goldstein. Goldstein was out in the open shouting at the enemy, wherever they were, at the top of his booming voice using every epithet he could think of to insult them. Schaffner, watching the display from the cover of one of the Battery truck's rear wheel wells thought the Major had lost his mind. If there were any Germans out there to hear him the good Major wouldn't be around too much longer.

Schaffner had no idea where he was when ordered to go out "there" dig in and watch for an attack from "that" direction. It was no different than the last five or ten days – nobody knew what was going on and nobody told him anything. To his relief the afternoon and night were completely quiet in his foxhole. Sometime during the night, he wasn't really sure when, the relief crew came up, and he headed for an old stone barn to get some sleep. The floor had a deep layer of muck which wasn't going to be a good place to sleep so, pushing a bunch of cows aside he headed up to the hay loft. The cows didn't seem to mind and kept pulling the hay out from under Schaffner eventually nibbling on him.

It didn't matter because in short order he was back in another hole in the ground

....

John Gatens placed his gun right on the crossroads of Baraque de Fraiture facing east toward the village of Regne. This was no firing battery position – they were there for a direct fire mission to defend the crossroads. The other two guns were setup to defend the approaches from the south. Gatens would never see the other two crews again.

When his gun was placed Gatens wandered across the street to an old farm house. To his surprise several GIs were busy talking with the elderly owner in French. XXX In the house Gatens found the cooks had already taken over the old man's kitchen and had a pot of coffee on the stove.

Gatens sat down, grabbed a cup, and warmed himself by the stove.

....

At first Captain Arthur Brown thought it was comical – one farmer angrily brandishing a pitchfork surrounded by six or seven soldiers armed with rifles. He figured the guy was fed up with all the battles raging back and forth across his ancestral farm so he holstered his weapon, stepped forward, and stuck out his hand in the universal symbol of friendship. Apparently they'd really upset the poor guy when he and his crew of cooks from 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment surrounded the place in the village of Trois Point to make sure it was safe to enter. With that, the farmer invited them in.

The family and their neighbors were actually friendly people. They cooked Brown and the guys a hot meal and spent their time outside scouting out the enemy, even reporting back on their locations. To Brown's unhappiness he figured he'd travelled twenty five miles and based on what he was being told he was still behind enemy lines. Their host's advised Brown that they should spend the night in the hayloft where they slept fitfully despite the Germans of Kampfgruppe Peiper they could hear milling around in the barnyard outside.

## ***Dec 20***

“Whoa,” yelled Major Arthur Parker to his driver, Charles Jacelon, when the two and a half ton truck came speeding up the road from Houffalize through their crossroads at Baraque-de-Fraiture. Jacelon jammed on the brakes – maybe they weren't going to Vielsalm for supplies just yet. Parker, with Major Goldstein close behind, got out and walked to the driver side of the truck, “Where are you going in such a hurry?” he asked the driver who explained that a string of German tanks were headed their way from Houffalize.



**Major Arthur Parker**

Goldstein looked at Parker, “You know, we came over here to fight a war and this looks like a good place to start.” The two of them were sick of running. They’d been chased out of their first two positions and spent the next two days wandering from one defenseless position to another. This time they had a chance to setup their own defensive position and Goldstein wanted to do it right there.

Parker shook his head, “I was thinking the same thing, Major, set up for the defense of this crossroad.”

“I’m going to ask my big friend here,” pointing to a tracked bulldozer, “to dig me some gun pits,” said Goldstein.

Jacelon followed Parker into their makeshift Command Post, the Auberge-de-Carrefour, literally, “Inn at the Crossroads” owned and operated by M. and Mdme Lehaire. Parker pulled out a flashlight and immediately got busy with his planning and maps. One of the guys handed the Major a beer they’d found in the basement. Parker drank half and handed it to Jacelon, “Here, driver, I want you to have some of this.” While Jacelon drank the remainder as ordered in rushed the young daughter of the Inn’s owners, grabbing something from one of the cabinets. Parker looked at the obviously upset woman, “You don’t have to leave, we’ll protect you,” he said in an attempt to calm her down.

“Boche come,” she said, referring to the derogatory WWI French term for ‘the cabbage head Germans’, “I go,” and she was gone.

**OWNERS DAUGHTER. COMES BACK LATER. FATHER TAKEN PRISONER TO BE SHOT BY GERMANS AS COLABORATOR. MANAGES TO TALK HIS WAY OUT OF IT BECAUSE OF SAVING MESSERSCHMIT PILOT.**

....

It was early in the morning when Captain Arthur Brown’s Belgian host came to the barn to get his American guests and lead them to the American lines. Brown was extremely grateful to the man and his family and before leaving gave him his field

glasses as a gift. They set out in single file and hit their first obstacle when they ran into a group of German soldiers washing up at a nearby pond. Brown and the guys hit the dirt and got ready to fire. Apparently the Germans sensed their predicament and quickly ran off. Brown wanted to get back to the American lines more than he wanted to argue with the Germans and simply left them alone without firing a shot.

After walking a mile or so the farmer pulled out a white flag and walked the last few hundred yards across the field to the American lines by himself to announce their arrival. Their thinking, and it was smart thinking, was that if a bunch of soldiers simply marched toward the American lines from what was clearly enemy territory they'd get shot.

Brown's first order of business now that he and the six cooks of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment were back behind friendly lines was to get back to the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division Headquarters. He had been out of touch with what was going on with the Headquarters for almost three days and found himself in the rear Headquarter at Vielsalm in short order. The place was swarming with activity and yet he managed to locate the remnants of his 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion which had refitted somewhat. Major Parker, in Vielsalm to pick up supplies and ammunition, was happy to see that at least one of the Battery Commanders had survived and suggested Brown get some sleep before moving out to Baraque de Fraiture to take command of the guns at the crossroad. By this time Brown was pretty angry about the German assault and itching to get back into the fight. Figuring he had a few chips stacked on his side he declined the Major's offer and left immediately.

Besides, he wanted to be back with his men.

....

Over the next few hours their rag tag combat team continued to grow from units and men that wandered through their crossroads. They managed to pick up four vehicles from the 203<sup>rd</sup> Armored Anti-Aircraft Battalion, 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division who'd been driven out of their position to the south. Three of them were armed with four 50-caliber machine guns and one was a self-propelled 37-millimeter gun. Even a Platoon of the 87<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron, 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division pitched in when they wandered through the crossroads. By mid afternoon they'd put together quite a bunch.

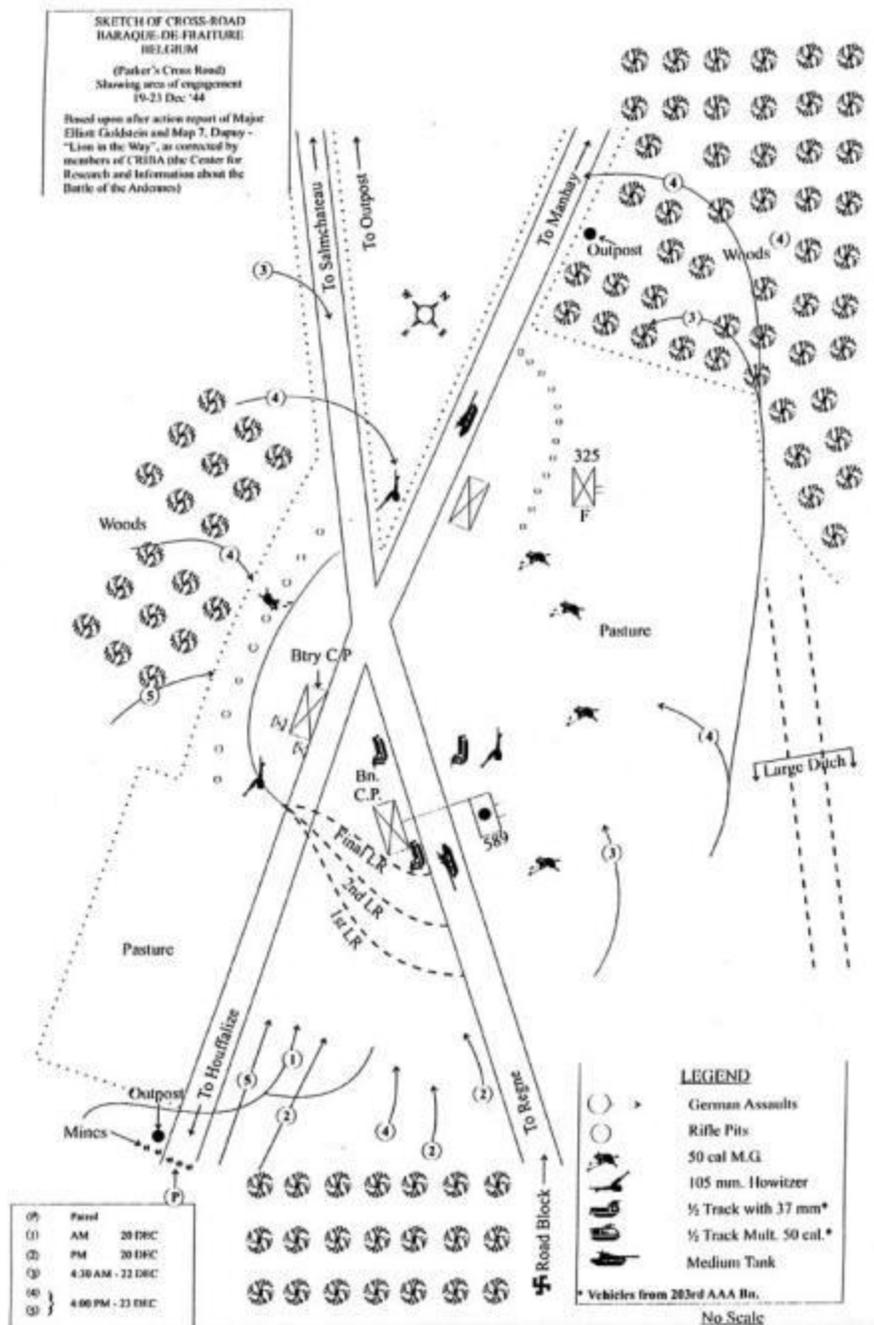
At Parker's direction, Goldstein laid out plans for coordination of fire for all the different weapons and staked them on the ground. He placed outposts five hundred yards out to the west, south, and east and had telephone lines strung to each of them. He had a daisy chain of mines laid across the road from the south. When he thought about it the weather was pretty bad and the Germans would have to stick to the roads – and that's exactly where he wanted them.

When Parker returned from Vielsalm with Captain Brown and whatever supplies and ammunition he could scrounge up he took both command and S-3, as the operations officer who would coordinate fire. Goldstein's task was to coordinate the defense of the position. And with finding Brown, they now had an officer to command the three Howitzers.

....

Baraque-de-Fraiture was Flemish for “barracks in uncultivated countryside” which was exactly his first impression of the place when he got there – the place was bleak. The only good thing was a small ski slope on the road to Manhay which, in Brown’s view was too bad because he didn’t bring his skis.

Three of the four roads coming into the place had a single cannon trained down them. The unguarded road led to the village of Manhay in what was still their friendly rear. Eventually this road got to the city of Liege some forty miles away. The road from the south went through Houffalize and Bastogne, about twenty-five miles away. The road heading east to Regne and Vielsalm, about eight miles away, was manned by Corporal Gatens. The road to the south-west led to Samree and LaRoche.



.....

If the enemy was around he was keeping it a secret from John Schaffner in his foxhole. The weather was miserable. It was cold, wet, and foggy with a little more snow added for good measure. With all of that the day went very slowly. It was the kind of day he spent digging his hole a little deeper because he never really knew how deep was going to be deep enough. Lots of guys piled the dirt in front of the hole. Schaffner put the pile behind his. In his view having a pile up front meant he had to stick his head out

further and it would make a nice target silhouetted against the gray sky. Every once in a while somebody would pop off a few rounds at something. Most of it was probably imagined, but it definitely kept everyone on edge.

When the 203<sup>rd</sup> AAA guys arrived with their M16 half tracks and quad .50 caliber machine guns Schaffner was impressed. He'd hate being in front of that thing when it went off. Little did he know he would be in front of them a short time later and they would save his life.

....

John Gatens really hated the sound of tank treads coming toward him - especially at night. But it was daylight and he was pretty happy when he saw that it was one of theirs from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division. The guy pulled around the corner and parked it right in front of the farmhouse near his gun position.

"Hello," said one of the guys as he jumped down and waved then continued to walk around the corner and check out Gatens's gun and the road he was covering. One minute later he fell to the ground which immediately had Gatens and the guys headed over to find out what happened. The guy had a bullet right between his eyes - and only a sniper could have done that.

Captain Brown had witnessed the entire thing and bolted to Gatens's position ordering three rounds into the trees down the road to Regne. Gatens fired off the rounds and what was probably a German sniper ceased to be a problem. The fact that a sniper had gotten that close and never fired at him would stay with him forever. The only thing he could figure was that the poor guy had on one of those soft tanker hats instead of his helmet like Gatens or the sniper had just arrived. Either way, nobody went wandering around after that.

Gatens felt a little better when Major Parker would come by and visit his position. The Major had come by a least three times, always in good spirits. "Don't worry," he would say, "we'll be leaving here pretty soon." This time though, Parker had a fire mission for him. The 87<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron had radioed a report of a large German armored and mechanized infantry position near Samree along the Salamchateau road. Parker told him to turn his gun from the east to the west and find good clearing to fire through. Parker was busy with a map computing the firing data for Gatens and told him to set his elevation just above the peak of a house some distance away. Gatens set it with the gunners sight then peeked through the gun tube to make sure he got it right. Parker set the fuze. The crew loaded the shell and closed the breech and pulled the lanyard. Round one was away. The observer with the 87<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Squadron watched the shell hit and reported back; range correct, deflection correct, burst height correct. Two more volleys were sent down range and the report came back of the radio - "Mission accomplished."

....

Schaffner had been in a new foxhole since the late evening with another new buddy, Ken Sewell. This time a few hundred yards down the southern road to Houffalize. The only thing he liked about the position was the chain of land mines out in front of him. The fog was thick with a silence to match. Now and then a pine tree would

drop some snow or make a creaking noise. He eyes and ears were set on wide open – waiting.

It was near midnight when he heard the first hints of something approaching. The noise was definitely strange. It wasn't a motorized vehicle. And it didn't sound like the stomping of boots. And then he saw them – about a dozen Germans and their square helmets on bicycles about ten yards in front of his foxhole. They'd apparently spotted the landmines and gotten off their bikes to figure out what to do. Schaffner and Sewell could hear them talking. Schaffner took off his rifle safety and turned to Sewell who whispered he had no intention of firing. Being this close to the enemy was a first for them – and they were in big trouble – it was twelve to two and their carbines would just irritate the Germans. Schaffner picked up the phone and whispered their situation back to Captain Brown.

Brown gave him a clear plan; “Keep your head down and when you hear me fire my .45 the first time we'll sweep the road with the AAA quad .50s. When that stops, i'll fire my .45 again and hold fire while you to come out of your hole and return to the Command Post. Make it quick!” Brown passed the word to all the guys on the crossroad which sent everybody into positions with their carbines in hand. When Brown fired his .45 everyone let loose with all the rifles and machine guns they had. Gatens was lying next to one of the quad.50's. The roar was deafening.

Schaffner knew the German patrol had no idea what hit them when the shooting started. On hearing the .45 the second time, he and Sewell left their hole and ran back toward the perimeter. Schaffner was running so hard the helmet bounced off his head and went rolling out into the darkness. "To hell with it," thought Schaffner, and kept on running. “COLEMAN,” he shouted passing the perimeter defense, hoping the password wouldn't get him shot. But somebody did take a shot at him and thankfully missed. Schaffner let loose with a string of good old American obscenities – and that was enough to let them through.

When all the shooting stopped and his buddy Schaffner was safely back at the Command Post Gatens found the silence deafening. But for the rest of the the night crying and moaning of the twelve downed Germans drifted toward Gatens and his cannon. Even though he knew they were the enemy he couldn't help but feel sorry for them.

## ***Dec 21***

Major Elliott Goldstein could sense a strange euphoria around the guys in having repulsed the first attack on John Schaffner and Ken Sewell's observation post the night before. But he knew that those twelve were simply a patrol and others would soon follow. If he had any doubts the sounds of tracked vehicles moving about outside the village of Baraque-de-Fraiture the remainder of the night removed them.

At 0530 the second attack began.

Goldstein alternated between the two houses being used as the headquarters and his defensive positions around the village even enaging in the fire fight on the road to Houffalize. Two hours later the fight was over and the Germans withdrew. The fighting had gotten at least six dead Germans and fourteen prisoners. Goldstein setup the

interrogation and learned that eighty Volksgrenadier led by a Lieutenant from a Panzer Division were probing the defenses of the crossroads in preparation for a big assault.

....

John Schaffner was the first to be sent forward to look around the foxhole he'd escaped from the night before. He was not at all happy with having to make the three hundred yard trek out to the fox hole and dreaded the thought of finding live Germans along the way. To his relief he made it out to his old hole and found the bicycle riding Germans dead.

The rest of the morning was spent digging more foxholes and improving their outposts and defensive positions. Every so often he and the guys in the holes would get some time back at the Command Post. They called it 'warming time'. Mid morning, during one of those short respites, Schaffner was detailed to guard two of the German prisoners captured in the early morning fire fight. One of them was an officer who spoke English very well. The guy spent the entire time telling Schaffner that the German Army was coming through, going to kill anyone in their way, and push the rest into the English Channel so Schaffner and the guys at the crossroads should save everybody a lot of trouble and surrender to him right then and there.

While Schaffner listened in disbelief his only thought was an indignant, 'Sure'.

....

It was around noon when a messenger arrived at the crossroads Command Post with orders from General McMahan, 106<sup>th</sup> Division Artillery to withdraw from the crossroads to Bra about six miles north when sufficient reinforcements arrived. Parker and Goldstein debated what to do. The 87<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop had orders to hold the crossroad. The guys from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division who'd joined them didn't have orders from the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division or their own Division Headquarters, and Goldstein and Parker had no orders from them. The problem, as Goldstein and Parker saw it, was that if they pulled out before sufficient reinforcements arrived the crossroads would not hold.

So they stayed.

....

John Schaffner spent most of the day in his hole. There were some American stragglers in and out during the day. A few stayed, some left. He really didn't know what was going on, or who they were. Apparently, there was one road still open to their forces to the west. At one point a Sherman tank came along and set up in front of the Command Post that fired a few rounds across the field and into the forest at some distant. That sent German soldiers running from tree to tree for cover.

....

By 1530 it was too late for Majors' Goldstein and Parker to withdraw to Bra – the Germans began their third assault on the crossroads. It was a surprise to them. The Germans made their way in the heavy fog to within three hundred yards of their position when the observation posts reported the approach from the south and east. Their combat team had just opened up on the Germans when two platoons of medium tanks and A

Battery, 54<sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division came rolling in – it was Task Force Jones.

Goldstein and Lieutenant Pratt from the 54<sup>th</sup> headed up stairs to an observation post in one of the houses. It wasn't much good given it was a direct fight of cannons on German tanks and infantry at close range. Pratt had more experience with this kind of fighting than Goldstein and suggested they get rid of everything in the room and put the mattress and pillows up against the walls for more protection. Furniture flew out the windows. To Goldstein it seemed a poor way to treat their Belgian hosts. By 1700 the Germans had withdrawn again.

....

Schaffner found himself in his foxhole waiting for the Germans to come yet again when evening came. The area was lit by flames from burning fuel drums that reflected eerily off the snow covered ground. The only sounds were the fire and the cries for help from the wounded Germans lying just outside his view. Their German buddies must have abandoned them.

It was then that he realized he was involved in a really risky business. A lot of things went through his mind now that he realized it might be his time to die. He was in a cold hole in the ground that could easily become his grave at any moment. He hadn't even experienced being in love yet and definitely didn't want to die in that strange place. He spent the rest of the night praying to God, Jesus, and every other deity he could think of. In later years he'd hear the expression that, "there are no atheists in foxholes." That was absolutely true. He'd also continue to feel responsible for the fate of the dead Germans in front of him since he was the one who'd called fire on them. Responsible yes; sorry no. It was him or them.

....

Back in the Command Post Goldstein continued to develop a plan of fires with his new assistant, Lieutenant Pratt. They had two more 105mm assault guns brought in by Task Force Jones. To Goldstein their position seemed like more of a way station than a defensive post. Reinforcements seemed to come and go on a continual basis. He had no idea how long Task Force Jones was going to stay or whether and when somebody else would arrive. The best thing to do, they decided, was to pull in their perimeter and dig two-man emplacements at five-yard intervals along the south and eastern fronts and let the anti-aircraft guns of the 203<sup>rd</sup> AAA and machine gun mounted vehicles of the 87<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop cover the rest.

The churn continued into the evening when a squad from the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division holding the line to the north of the crossroads near Manhay showed up and Task Force Jones moved out. Goldstein was impressed by the squad commander, Sergeant Wehner and his men – paratroopers were cool, confident, and professional. Goldstein sent them on two assignments. They were more like requests than orders because they didn't actually report to Goldstein. First they were to send out a few men on the northern road to Manhay to meet up with a company of reinforcements from the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division around 0300 and bring them into the crossroads. Their second task was to send patrols into the woods on the south and east to determine the German positions and strength. They never made it to

the south but came back telling them that there were lots of Germans to the east and they were digging in.

For the remainder of the early morning darkness a heavy snow fell on the crossroads of Baraque-de-Fraiture.

....

While the cannons and crews of the 589<sup>th</sup> were busy at the crossroads of Baraque-de-Fraiture Sam Feinberg and the rest of the Battalion had managed their way back to Vielsalm to refit and reorganize. Vielsalm was the new Headquarters of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division after it evacuated from St. Vith. Feinberg could hear the sounds of battle off in the distance as they went about their routine equipment maintenance – it was all business.

Feinberg's feet were in pretty bad shape and getting worse. His buddies finally convinced him to have the medics check them out. The medic took one look and wrote a note for him to give to his commanding officer that was going to send him back to a field hospital for treatment. Feinberg hobbled out of the building not sure what to do. There were all kinds of stories about hospitals in the rear being overrun by Germans. He couldn't imagine being without his rifle and being captured by the Nazis. Besides, his outfit was his home and his buddies were his family. They'd gotten him through some miserable times. So he decided to stay with his family and got rid of the note.

Back with the guys they spent the rest of the day trading. Vielsalm had all kinds of outfits coming and going to the front. The square in the center of the town had become a place where all kinds of things were swapped and traded. They traded stories with guys from the 7<sup>th</sup> Armored Division who'd pulled into the square. The Armored guys wanted the infantrymen's carbines and they wanted the armored guys M1s. A Sherman tank was cramped place and the tankers got tired of lugging around their eight pound M1s. Feinberg's carbine weighed only three pounds and was a lot shorter which was good inside a Sherman.

They swapped everything and that was OK with Feinberg and his fellow artillerymen who were pretty sure they were going to be infantrymen and wanted the power of an M1. The tankers got their carbines and ammunition. Feinberg and the guys got the tanker's M1s and bandoliers. They even threw in grenades, a bunch of machine guns and ammunition, and even a BAR. They felt pretty good about it when they packed it onto the half-ton weapons carrier along with a bazooka or two. They hadn't felt this well prepared for a fight since they'd left France.

But then news from the crossroads started to drift in. First there were the German prisoners who didn't look all that unhappy. Then came the vehicles full of holes followed by stories of the fighting and Kraut tanks approaching the place.

The fighting was getting closer.

## **Dec 22**

Reports of from the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry patrols had Goldstein convinced the Germans were going to follow their standard operating procedure and attack around 0530. After six days of fighting them it had been like clockwork. Majors' Parker and Goldstein held a quick conference and made their decision – they weren't going to wait

for what they knew was coming and instead make a preemptive strike by simulating a counterattack by American forces and forcing the Germans hand.

At 0530 Parker's men opened up. Between the indirect fire from the armored field artillery, the direct fire from their three howitzers, and every .50 caliber machine gun they had it sounded like a real battle. The 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry and their guides from the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry were still on their way into the crossroads from Manhay when the commotion at the crossroad broke out and headed for the fields about a mile north of their destination.

....

**(DATE NOT CLEAR – BASED ON LETTER – NEEDS COLES ACCOUNT)**

Major General James Gavin, Commander, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division was in a hell of a fight with the 1<sup>st</sup> SS Panzerdivision along his front from Trois-Point to Vielsalm. The **Crawling thru the woods, backing off, uncovering 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer moves, gave him 24 hours.**

....

The German mortar rounds and small arms fire around John Schaffner's fox hole was ferocious. At one point rounds were landing incredibly close to his foxhole. He could hear the fragments and bullets slam into the ground around him and seriously wished he'd stopped to pick up the helmet he'd lost a few nights earlier. Mortar fire was bad all over their positions but it was hell behind him near the buildings and guns.

Not everyone was doing well in their new holes spaced just five yards apart. In the hole next to his Schaffner called out to the GI next door for fire. The guy just looked at him. Schaffner knew there were guys who had a tough time with it but he couldn't understand why they weren't willing to at least help themselves – and the rest of the guys live.

....

Around 0800 the two platoons of tanks and assault guns of Task Force Jones from 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division pulled out as directed the night before. By 1200 one company of the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry finally made it to the crossroads and was sent up to relieve the guys from the 589<sup>th</sup> who'd been in their holes for the past five days. The relief did not go well. They never made it to the perimeter and took fifteen casualties before returning back to the Command Post.

Goldstein and Parker started thinking about how they would pull out if that opportunity ever came. An artillery Battery on the road was a pretty vulnerable target. They were slow, easy to hit, and particularly defenseless. To withdraw the crews needed protection while they pushed and pulled to get the guns out of their dug in positions and hitched to the trucks. That was how they'd lost nine of them already. Once the guns and crews were safely on the road and moving out the infantry who'd provided cover could follow them out. Their problem was the Germans were getting close and their infantry, as shown by the failed relief attempts of the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry, needed to be reorganized before any withdrawal we possible.

They were going to have to wait until after dark.

Goldstein continued to work the defense of the perimeter. The falling snow, while it was miserable for his guys, kept the Germans on the roads and with his guns and rifles trained on the roads things were working out and the toll on the enemy was high. Even their friends from the withdrawn 54<sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion threw in their support with volleys of indirect fire missions. They continued to hold despite continuous mortar fire from the woods.

Goldstein had no idea why they chose to gather all the supporting commanders inside the perimeter on the road in full view of the Germans. But they did. Major Parker was laying out the field orders that would get the 325<sup>th</sup> Glider Infantry up front and relieve the 589<sup>th</sup> guys in their foxholes for a few hours of rest when the mortar round landed in the middle of the assembled. Goldstein was knocked back and got a peppering of shrapnel. Fortunately he had on a lot of clothing and wasn't seriously wounded. Parker was not as fortunate and had serious wounds. The medics worked on him in preparation for an evacuation. But Parker wouldn't go until he passed out from his wounds and had no say in the matter.

Goldstein was now in command.

....

Schaffner could hear the sounds of the approaching tanks. Thankfully they were American when they rolled into the open field and fired their guns into the German positions. No problems now, he thought to himself, they're here to help save the day. The fire from the tanks brought a quiet over the area. No doubt the Germans were regrouping. As happy as he was when they arrived, he was equally unhappy when they left, which in his view meant the defenders at the crossroads were being hung out to dry. It was too bad they couldn't stay for dinner.

At dark Scaffner found himself digging another hole at a new perimeter closer to the Command Post. He hadn't had much to eat over the past three days except one hard chocolate D-bar and was grateful when one of the guys made a run from hole to hole tossing boxes of wet-or-dry cereal. Schaffner ate it dry.

They'd dug the hole pretty deep and fortified it with some fence rails they'd found. Schaffner was certain they'd be attacked that night as he counted his ammunition – thirty rounds and a knife which he placed on the ground where he could reach it. He prayed that wouldn't be necessary. The night was excessively long. They took turns on watch, one hour on, one hour of sleep. The quiet time was both a good and a bad thing. It was bad in that time passed very slowly and that gave him far too much time to think. It was a good thing in that he could crawl out the back of the hole and take care of business as quickly as possible when everything was dark – hopefully where the enemy would step in it. When there was a fire fight or it was possible he'd get shot crawling out he'd simply go in the hole and then throw it out – of course in the direction of the enemy.

....

As Goldstein's day drew to a close the fighting fell into a pattern. They'd repel an attack then get a quiet period. Everyone knew the next cycle was coming. The only question was when. Everytime the cycle started he could hear somebody pee in the snow when the fight or flight syndrome hit. They had no choice but to fight.

News from the rear was hard to come by. The radios hadn't worked in several days, and his driver, Jacelon, whom he'd sent to Manhay to return one of their borrowed forward observers back to his unit returned with bad news. Manhay to their north was deserted. On their way back they ran into German tanks just outside the crossroads. To make matters worse, the Germans had infiltrated the woods to the north and setup a line running along the road to Vielsalm.

The weight of command finally hit him when he went to get one of his soldiers who'd been severely wounded manning a .50 cal machine gun.

"Major, I stayed here and kept firing like you said."

## ***Dec 23***

Major Elliott Goldstein noted the insignia on the captured German officer's lapel. It was the mark of an SS Lieutenant and according to his interrogation the rag-tag group defending the crossroads was facing advance units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzerdivision.

While they might have repulsed the 0430 attack the noose was tightening. The two platoons of towed tank destroyers from the 643<sup>rd</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion that had showed up in the dark had set up outside the perimeter. Those guys had been surrounded by 0900 and the Germans were using those guns on the crossroads. He'd lost a couple of mortar crews too. The Germans had also managed to capture a bunch of radios and were listening in on the Artillery frequencies and creating a lot of interference.

The good news was that his friends from the 54<sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion who'd left earlier had put some serious fire on the German mortar crews that kept creeping forward across the open fields just outside the village and sent them running back into the woods for cover. Now they couldn't be sure whether the fire missions were hitting their mark. Then at 1000 a company from the 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division came down from the north and recaptured the Tank Destroyers and brought them back inside the perimeter.

By noon the situation was critical. Neither Captains' Brown nor Huxel could call the gun positions to direct fire and spent their time running from gun to gun in full view of the Germans. That had gotten Huxel hit by shrapnel from a mortar round. From the interrogations he'd found out that the Germans planned to finish the job that night – and that meant he needed reinforcements to withdraw.

....

To John Schaffner it seemed that every time they pulled in the perimeter the Germans had gotten closer and were getting ready to end it. He spent the entire morning and into the afternoon running in and out of foxholes with an occasional visit to one of the stone houses to thaw out. The fog rolled in and out all day. While it limited his ability to see much it no doubt limited the German's ability to see what stood in their way too. Whenever they came out of the fog Schaffner and the guys would drive them back into it. He was down to one clip and there was no more. The word coming down the line was that when their ammunition ran out and the Germans came it was every man for himself, escape if they could, otherwise surrender was prudent.

....

Talking with one of the armored officers at the crossroads, Goldstein learned that Lieutenant Colonel Walter Richardson, Task Force Y, 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Division was in charge of defense in their area. If Goldstein wanted reinforcements he was the man to see. Goldstein grabbed the two SS prisoners and headed for Manhay to see the Colonel. Richardson saw him immediately and already knew more than Goldstein could tell him – the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzerdivision was coming up the road from Houffalize and the crossroads needed to be held. Richardson ordered Major Olin Brewster, XXX, to return to the crossroads immediately with a platoon of armored infantry, another of tanks, and company from the 509<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Battalion. (TIMELINE NOT QUITE CORRECT)

....

It was the saddest day in Goldstein's life when he and Brewster were stopped on the road from Manhay to Baraque-de-Fraiture and told they couldn't proceed any further by road. The two of them parked the jeeps and continued forward on foot paralleling the road. Tank rounds coming out of the crossroads were literally flying straight down the center of the road about six foot high – a perfectly flat trajectory. The closer they got to the wood the worse the artillery fire got. He wasn't going to be able to get back to the crossroads with the reinforcements.

....

Captain Brown made his last visit to the farmhouse aid station to talk with Huxel – they had to get out. The only road open was the road to Manhay and that would take them back to friendly lines so that was where he was going to direct everybody.

As soon as he stepped out of the place the Germans cut loose with mortars and 88's that shook the ground around him. Brown took shelter first under a truck and then crawled to a ditch. At short distance away one of the light tanks that had come to help was on fire. "Hope it doesn't blow up and take me with it," he thought. After things seemed to calm down a bit Brown headed for the cover of a tree line – straight into a German position.

One wild-eyed German soldier, a boy, immediately began clubbing Brown with his rifle butt; first creasing his helmet, then hammering his knee. It was only the intervention of a German noncom that prevented the enraged soldier from finishing the job.

He was now a prisoner of war.

....

John Gatens had spent the past four days firing his guns at everything coming down the road from Regne. Just before 1600 Captain Brown came around to all the positions and told them to get ready. First there would be an artillery attack and when that stopped the German infantry and tanks would follow. Gatens made a run back to the stone house where half his crew was getting warm. He was standing in the doorway when the shell hit. The concussion picked him up and sent him flying across the room into the wall. Gatens sat there in a daze feeling for his arms and legs for what to him felt like a few minutes. The place was on fire when the farmhouse with the wounded started getting hit – they had to help the wounded. That worry ended when a German tank rolled

up with its barrel trained on the door. “Are you coming out or do I tell this guy to fire?” came the voice of a German officer.

Outside numbers of Gatens fellow soldiers were being rounded up. Some were already standing in rows on the road. Gatens ended up giving them his overcoat, girlfriend’s high school ring, and everything but his helmet and field jacket.

No one can be a hero when a tank is staring down their throat.

....

Schaffner was sitting on the floor of a stone house with his back to the wall at 1600 when the final German assault came. Harold Kuizema was there with him. Kuizema had gotten a nasty thumb wound when shrapnel almost took it off. It was jagged and bleeding badly but was nothing compared to the injured in the aid station that’d lost their faces and others that were pulling their own teeth out.

It started with mortars and small arms then grew when the tanks started firing. There was a guy in the corner by a wood cook stove trying to heat something when something really big that the wall and exploded right over Schaffner and Huizema’s head. It had to have been high thought Schaffner or it would have killed both of them. Debris and dust filled the room – that was all the motivation they needed to go. The thought of waiting for another one never crossed his mind.

Schaffner and Kuizema headed for the door. Others headed for the cellar which Schaffner didn’t think was wise. The Germans were coming and he was going. It was that simple. The guys crawled to the road where some cattle were milling about amid a dense cloud of smoke, ran across to the ditch on the other side, and dropped again. The field in front of them was open and had its own dangers but it was away from the attack so that’s the direction they headed. Not far into the field Kuizema was hit in the left leg by shrapnel from a nearby shell. He wasn’t going any further without help. Schaffner made his way to Kuizema and along with two unknown GIs headed for the the woods and into a patrol from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Schaffner turned and looked back at the Crossroads. The entire sky was lit by the flames of burning buildings and vehicles. Kuizema was badly injured and evacuated with other wounded from the crossroads. In a few days he was in England. Schaffner received permission to tag along with the guys from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and on Christmas Eve would find the guys and trucks from the 589<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion that withdrew from Vielsalm a few days earlier. In one of the trucks was his duffle bag with a set of clean underwear and dry socks.

As far as he was concerned it was a miracle.

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