

WHAT DID YOU DO DURING THE WAR,

GRANDDADDY?

MY MEMOIRS OF
WORLD WAR TWO

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INTRODUCTION

When General George Patton addressed the soldiers of the 9th Army at Camp Polk, Louisiana he said, “Nobody helps win a war by dying for his country. You make the other poor guy die for his country. I’ll be proud to lead you men into battle and we are going to make thousands of Germans die for their country. And when your grandchildren ask you ‘What did you do during the war, Granddaddy?’ you won’t have to tell them I shoveled horse manure in Louisiana.”

At the age of eighty, I have decided to write about some memories that I have of my small part in World War II. At this age, my brain has played some tricks on me. It seems that my brain has blocked out all of the more gruesome parts of my combat experience. I hope that these other war stories, which my brain has not blocked out, will be of some appeal to the readers.

This booklet is dedicated to my grandchildren. They should be thankful that I was lucky enough not to be killed during the war. If I had been killed, none of them would be here to read something that I never could have written. That would have been terrible because I love them very much. The reason I am attempting to write this booklet is that some day they might really want to know what Granddaddy did during the war and I might not be here to tell them.

Perhaps they will find some interest in the recollections of an old soldier’s stories of a war that was fought a very long time ago. Like the children’s stories that I used to read to them, I’ll start this booklet by saying – ONCE UPON A TIME...

PROLOGUE

The year was 1941, my junior year at the University of Florida. The European Continent was almost completely under the control of the Axis Powers. England and Russia stood alone against Germany and Italy. Although everyone hoped we could stay out of the war, no one really thought we would be able to do so. I had enjoyed being in the Reserve Officer Training Corp my first two years in college. Since my grades were good, I applied for and was accepted into advanced ROTC. I figured that if we did go to war, I might as well be a commissioned officer. Also, the army paid us a little money to participate in the program. During my senior year, I was elected to Scabbard and Blade, a national honorary military organization. I held the rank of 1st Lieutenant in the ROTC Infantry Regiment.

In 1941 the University of Florida was not coeducational. Florida State College for Women in Tallahassee was the state school for young ladies. Therefore, almost every weekend students at the University of Florida went somewhere. I usually went to Jacksonville for the weekends, because I knew and liked several young ladies there. On Sunday December 7, 1941, I was trying to hitch hike a ride back to Gainesville. I was pleased when a long black Buick stopped to pick me up. I sat up front with a young man who was driving the car. An older woman and a very attractive young woman were in the back seat. The older woman asked me if I had heard over the radio the unbelievable news that the Japanese had bombed our naval base at Pearl Harbor. She also said that the radio account of the bombing indicated that almost the entire Pacific Fleet was damaged. My first reaction to this news, was the thought that it was unbelievable that Japan could do such a stupid thing. I perceived Japan as a tiny island nation, whose military strength could not begin to equal that of the United States. My only concern was that this war with Japan would not last long enough for me take part in it. How wrong I was. The conversation in the car changed to other subjects. I found out that the older woman in the car was the madam of a house of prostitution in Jacksonville. The attractive young woman was one of her prostitutes. They were going to the University of Florida to distribute her business cards at the dorms and fraternity houses. What a day! Japan bombs Pearl Harbor and I find out about this from prostitutes!

On December 8th, President Roosevelt asked for and received from Congress a declaration of war. On December 11th, Germany and Italy declared that their nations were at war with the United States.

For the balance of my junior year and for my senior year, college was frustrating. Grades were not important. Graduation was not important. I was floundering with no sense of purpose. Every week someone you knew either left college to join the service or someone was drafted into the service. Rumors were passed daily from dorm to dorm and from frat house to frat house. One such rumor was that all ROTC students were going to be called for active duty. Because of this rumor, all ROTC students quit studying and skipped classes for a week. Decent grades were hard to accomplish under these conditions.

For some reason, which I could never understand, I received a notice to appear before the Duval County Draft Board. The chairman of this board asked me if there was any reason I could give them for not drafting me into the service. I told him I was already in the service as a ROTC cadet at the University of Florida. His response to my statement was to the effect that all college students thought they could avoid the war. He went on to say that he was personally going to see to it that I was drafted into the service. Although I knew he could not follow through on his threat, it was discouraging to be treated in that manner. I was upset and again my grades suffered.

In May of 1943, approximately eighteen months after Pearl Harbor, I was graduated from the University of Florida with a BSBA degree with a major in accounting. I also received orders to report to Camp Blanding, Florida to be inducted into the army and to be subsequently sent to the Officer Training School at Ft. Benning, Georgia.

THE ARMY

The following words are from a World War I popular song:

This is the army, Mr. Jones
No private rooms or telephones
You had your breakfast in bed before
But you won't have it there any more

The words to that song would also apply to the army in World War II.

I received orders from the army to report to Camp Blanding, Florida on August 2, 1943. Camp Blanding was an induction center for the army that processed several hundred individuals each day. My group consisted of ROTC graduates from the University of Florida. Our processing at Camp Blanding lasted five days. During that time we had several physical examinations. I think we were given vaccine shots for every type of disease in the world. My college roommate had failed a physical test while we were in college because of albumin in his urine. He arranged to repeat the test at a time when I was also taking a physical examination. During this test I provided urine for both of us. I performed the same service for him whenever we had a physical examination. Therefore, you could say I wee-weed him into the army. We spent a lot of time taking classification tests and going to lectures and movies concerning various military matters. We were given an individual army serial number plus identification tags, called dog tags by the army.

During this time I learned that the army had one system for all procedures, the hurry up and wait system. Each morning we got up at 5:30 AM and were rushed to the mess hall for breakfast. When we arrived at the mess hall we would stand in line for more than an hour before we could eat. Afterwards, we would be rushed to a building for some procedure and again we would wait for hours before being processed.

On my fourth day of being in the army I was rudely awakened at 3:30 AM. I heard someone say in a loud voice, "You've got it". "Got what?", I responded. "K.P.", the individual said. K.P. in the army meant kitchen police. I worked in the kitchen all day serving milk, scrubbing and mopping floors, and peeling potatoes.

We had been inducted into the army as privates. However, in order to attend Officer Candidate School at the Infantry School at Ft. Benning, we were promoted to corporals on August 7th. That same day with two duffel bags full of army clothing, our only worldly possessions, we boarded a train for Ft. Benning.

A young Lieutenant met us at the train station at Ft. Benning. He kept impressing us with the fact that we were now at The Infantry School. He also emphasized that this was the best infantry training school in the world. We were impressed by the size of Ft. Benning, the really nice new barracks and the great food. We were informed that for the next ten days we would be taking a variety of mental, physical and aptitude tests. The results of these tests, plus an evaluation by our instructors, would determine who would be admitted into Officer Candidate School. Needless to say, we spent a very nervous ten days. At the end of the ten days, we were given a list of names of individuals who would be going to Officer

Candidate School. My name and all of the other University of Florida ROTC graduates were on that list. We were also told that our group, which now only numbered 175 candidates, would be the first all college ROTC class to attend the Officer Candidate School. Of course, I was very excited about making the list. After four years of ROTC training at the University of Florida, plus a tense ten days of testing at Ft. Benning, I was finally an officer candidate!

The Officer Candidate School was outstanding. I loved every day I was there. The School stressed staying on the ball and being aggressive. All of our instructors had been in combat against the Germans in North Africa. We were involved either in class or field exercises six days a week from 7:00 AM until 6:00 PM. We often had nighttime activities in map reading, scouting and patrolling. We became efficient and knowledgeable with all infantry weapons. My favorite was the 81-millimeter mortar.

The combat courses and field firing problems were developed to expose you to actual battlefield situations, which you might encounter. There was a school solution for each battlefield assignment. You were expected to act quickly and aggressively while successfully completing your assignment. If you did this, you would receive a good grade, even though you might not have followed the school solution.

The instructors always emphasized that our army was a citizen army. Every person from the commanding general to the non-commissioned officer should understand our objectives and our plans to accomplish these objectives. If an officer was killed, another person should be able to take command and lead the unit to accomplish its mission. We were told that the German army was a professional army. It was very well trained; however, there was no leadership without a fairly high ranking officer. They did not allow their junior or non-commissioned officers to take the initiative, make quick decisions and act in accordance with those decisions.

Each of our units had a tactical officer who evaluated our performance each day. He was also responsible for advising candidates if they were not doing well and encourage them to try harder. Our Tactical Officer was Lieutenant Tanner and he loved to play Ping-Pong. I was a very good ping-pong player and had won the candidates' championship. Lieutenant Tanner and I had some great ping-pong matches and I always made sure he won. I may have been dumb but I wasn't stupid enough to beat Lieutenant Tanner. We became very good friends and that was a big plus for me. If a candidate failed a test or performed poorly during a combat field exercise, he might be called before the Review Board. Often, when that happened, you never again saw that candidate. He was usually sent to some active army unit.

On a combat course involving village fighting, I was tagged twice as having been killed by enemy hand grenades. It was strange that this happened to me during training and also almost happened to me in actual combat. To teach us the importance of literally hugging the ground during combat, we had to crawl on our stomachs for several hundred feet while a machine gun fired live ammunition over our heads. To teach us the importance of digging a good deep foxhole, they had us get into the foxhole we had dug as a heavy tank ran over the hole.

For ninety days they put us through make believe combat situations. When I received my 2nd Lieutenant gold bars, after successfully completing the course, I knew I had earned it. They told us that our ROTC class had set records, had higher test scores and had

performed better than any class completing the Officer Candidate School. We did not know if we would see combat in the South Pacific or in Europe but we were ready for action. When I received my orders, I was told to report to the 86th Division at Alexandria, Louisiana.

When I reported to the 86th Division, I was assigned to an infantry heavy weapons company as an 81-millimeter mortar platoon section leader. I was very pleased with this assignment. I enjoyed working with the 81 millimeter mortars. As the junior officer, I was also assigned to be the company mess officer, the company supply officer and the company physical training officer. This was not exactly the action I was hoping for. However, I performed my new duties seriously like any new 2nd Lieutenant would do.

Almost all of the soldiers in my company were older than I, many were married, some had families and everyone was in very poor physical condition. I decided, that if we were going to win this war, it was my personal responsibility as the company physical training officer to get these soldiers in excellent physical condition. The very first day that I was in charge of the physical training, I led them through the same exercises I had performed at Officer Candidate School. Needless to say, the soldiers were exhausted after doing these exercises. Afterwards, the company's 1st Sergeant asked me if I was planning to kill these men before the German army could. He informed me that these men stayed out late every night and had quite a few beers. Therefore, if I wanted to get them into good physical shape, I had better do it gradually. At the Officer Candidate School, they told us that if a 1st Sergeant gave us some advice, we should always follow that advice. That's exactly what I did and although it took a while, I finally got the company in excellent physical shape.

In the winter of 1944, the 86th Division participated in the Louisiana maneuvers. These maneuvers were very tough both mentally and physically. Since we were in good physical condition, our company performed in a very acceptable manner. We made some judgmental mistakes but we learned a lot as the result of these mistakes. I thought that it was better to have made these mistakes on maneuvers than to make them in actual combat. Once during maneuvers, an umpire tagged me as a casualty. The umpire then asked my sergeant if he knew our objective and our plan to accomplish this objective. He responded that he was both knowledgeable of our objective and ready to proceed with our plan. I felt that because of all the hours of training and the lessons learned on maneuvers, our company was now prepared for combat.

After the Louisiana maneuvers, the 86th Division was ordered to the West Coast to participate in special training for fighting in the South Pacific. Because of the anticipated invasion of Europe, many officers of the 86th Division were ordered to a disembarkation seaport near New York. These officers were to be sent to England as replacements for officers killed or wounded in the European invasion. I was one of the officers chosen as a replacement. On May 12, 1944, we shipped out at night from some seaport on an ocean liner, which had been converted into a troop transportation vessel. The next morning we discovered that we were part of a huge convoy of ships. During the crossing two ships had to fall out of the convoy because of engine problems. We later learned that both of these ships were sunk by German submarines.

My stay in England was very brief and very boring. Since we were not in command of any troops, we had no responsibilities. To kill time, we were sent to a few training schools that were very boring. We did a little sightseeing but there wasn't much to see. Mainly, we just waited for the invasion of Europe. One morning we awoke to the sound of hundreds of

aircraft flying overhead. We ran outside and stared in wonder as squadron after squadron of planes passed overhead. We yelled and shouted to each other because we knew the invasion was actually happening. Finally, it was to be our turn next!

THE WAR

NORMANDY – THE ASSIGNMENT

Top priority for replacements was assigned to Divisions that had participated in the invasion. This task was not accomplished quickly. For example, the 83rd Infantry Division left England on D-day plus 10 (June 16, 1944) to relieve the 101st Airborne Division. This Division did not complete replacing the 101st until June 26th. We thought that our individual officers replacement groups were never going to receive the necessary priority to join the battle for France. Once again, I was concerned that the war might be over before I would have a chance to participate. Once again, I was as wrong as I could be.

Finally, I am not sure of the exact date, we were loaded onto transport ships and rushed out of England and across the channel to France. We landed at Omaha Beach and moved very carefully along mine-free trails, marked with bright orange tape, towards General Bradley's 1st Army Command Post. Along the way we passed huge stockpiles of equipment, which had been collected from the dead and wounded. We noticed many officers' helmets with bullet holes in the painted vertical stripe that identified the wearer as an officer. We asked about this and were told that enemy snipers had learned that only officers had vertical strips on their helmets. Therefore, vertical striped helmets were the favorite targets of snipers. We quickly found some olive drab paint and covered up the vertical strips on our helmets. Also, as an extra precaution, we pinned our 2nd Lieutenant's bars underneath our shirt collars. We also resolved that should anyone salute us we would salute back and in a very loud voice respond, "Yes Sir, General."

At 1st Army headquarters, I was ordered to report to the 83rd Infantry Division. Upon reporting to this Division's headquarters, I was subsequently ordered to report to Company L, a rifle company, of the 3rd Battalion. The captain of Company L ordered me to take command of the 3rd rifle platoon. I was really disappointed with this assignment because almost all of my combat training was with the 81 mm mortars of a heavy weapons company. Another really important reason for my disappointment was that the death rate of junior officers was by far the greatest for rifle platoon leaders.

During my assignment, as I was led from one command post to another, I got my first taste and smell of war; this included my first taste of artillery and mortar shelling and my first smell of dead animals and dead Germans. I have never forgotten the first dead German soldier I saw. He was lying in a ditch with a bullet hole in his chest. He looked to be about my age. It was not a pleasant sight. It made me realize that I was going to have to recall and put into practice all that I had learned during combat training. Not only my life but also the lives of my platoon members would depend upon my performance. It was an awesome feeling.

NORMANDY – HEDGEROW COMBAT

The first person to greet me when I reached the 3rd platoon was my platoon Sergeant. He told me he had never been so happy to see an officer and he was anxious for me to take command of the platoon. I told him that he had several weeks of combat experience and that I had none. I told him to continue as platoon leader for a few more days and then I would take over. He was agreeable to this plan but unfortunately he was seriously wounded the very next day and I had to take over as platoon leader. During my first few days as a platoon leader I learned a lot about myself, about combat and about the men of my platoon. I also learned that in spite of my excellent training, some things can only be learned by experience. For example, from the Generals down to the junior officers, no one was aware of the fact that we would have to fight through a maze of hedgerows in order to break out of the area of France known as Normandy. Instead of marking farming and cattle areas of ownership with wire fences like we do in the USA, for over a hundred years the Normandy farmers used mounds of earth with hedges planted in them. These hedges consisted of roots and vines that were as tough and as strong as metal. There was usually only one entry into these fields enclosed by hedgerows. We were supposed to have tank support but I did not see a single tank during hedgerow combat. The entire 1st Army was bogged down in the hedgerows. Front line troops, such as my platoon, did well to advance one or two hedgerows a day! This type of terrain was perfect for the defending Germans. It seemed like any movement we made drew artillery, mortar or machinegun fire. We dug our foxholes as close to the hedgerows as possible to avoid enemy fire. One of the bravest actions I took during the entire war occurred during hedgerow combat. We were dug in behind the hedges surrounding a field that the Germans were pounding with mortar shells. I knew I had to get my platoon out of this field before we were all killed! I tried my best to convince the men to move but they were too scared to get out of their foxholes. Finally, I thought of a somewhat stupid plan that just might work. I told my platoon Sergeant that I was going into the middle of the field and urinate. That was not hard to do, as I was about to wet my pants anyway, since I was as scared as my men. When this happened my platoon Sergeant was to yell to the men, "Look at the lieutenant urinating in the middle of the field. He's not scared! Come on, get out of your foxholes and let's get the hell out of this field." Believe it or not, the plan worked. It started with just a few men getting out of their foxholes and finally the entire platoon moved out of that field. I never understood why I did not receive a medal for this action. I guess it was because no one wanted to write a citation that would have to include this language:

**Over and above the call of duty and with complete disregard
for the personal safety of an important part of his anatomy,
Lieutenant Hury while under heavy mortar fire, urinated in an
open field in order to save the lives of the men in his platoon.**

One of the first things I did in combat was to get rid of the carbine I was issued and I acquired a M-1 Garand rifle. The M-1 rifle was recognized as the best all-purpose rifle in the world. You could drag this rifle through mud or through water and it would still function. Although the carbine was lighter and had a faster rate of fire, the slightest bit of dirt would jam the firing mechanism. Other individuals might not have felt that way about the carbine but I did. I continued to use and carry the 45-caliber pistol that I was issued. Everyone carried and used lots of hand grenades during the hedgerow fighting. Although the American hand grenade was more powerful than the German hand grenade, their hand

grenade was lighter. This lightness plus the handle on their hand grenade made it easier to throw farther. Because of its shape, we called the German hand grenade a potato masher.

One morning my platoon was behind one hedgerow firing and throwing hand grenades at the Germans. At the same time, the Germans were behind another hedgerow firing and throwing hand grenades at us. One of the potato mashers, which the Germans were throwing, landed right beside me. Should this happen to anyone, we had been trained to quickly pick up the potato masher and throw it back at the Germans. However, my feet worked faster than my brain. Therefore, I turned and tried to run away from this potato masher. I have never been particularly quick and when this potato masher exploded, a ragged fragment struck my back. The first words that come into your thoughts when you are wounded are, I'm hit. The first words you actually utter are to call for a medic. Our medic patched me up and sent me back toward our field aid station. The doctor at the aid station did not remove the grenade fragment. Instead, he sewed up the wound and I returned to my platoon within two hours of being hit. I did not have this grenade fragment removed from my back until I was 32 years old. The doctor who removed the fragment wanted to know if I wanted it as a souvenir. I told him, "No thanks."

Men who were wounded in combat were unfortunate. Every man took his chances and it was a certainty that some would get hit. The Purple Heart Medal was awarded to these men with one of the following classifications:

KIA - Killed In Action
SWA – Seriously Wounded In Action
LWA – Lightly Wounded In Action
DOW – Died of Wounds

For being wounded, I received the Purple Heart Medal with the classification of LWA. Thank goodness no citation accompanied this medal. If so, mine would have read something like this:

Lieutenant Hury, while running away from the enemy, was lightly wounded in the back by a fragment from a German hand grenade.

One evening I received orders to report to the battalion command post. This was somewhat unusual and I hoped that it might mean that I was going to be transferred from my infantry company to the heavy weapon company. When I reported to the battalion commanding officer, he was studying a recent aerial photograph. His first words to me were, "Lieutenant, I want you to lead a night patrol and secure some information for me about the German positions in front of us." He then showed me the aerial photograph that indicated a maze of hedgerows and a dense forest in front of our position. He said, "I need to know if those hedgerows are defended by the Germans. Additionally, I want to know if the Germans defending those woods are equipped with machine guns and mortars. If possible, try and capture a German soldier. We could learn some valuable information from him about his outfit. Any questions?" I thought to myself, why me? Don't you realize that I was raised in a city? When I went somewhere at night there were streetlights and street signs. Do you know that my poorest grades at the Officers Training School were made in courses involving nighttime patrols? However, I replied, "No questions, sir." Then I saluted the battalion commander and returned to my platoon. I selected two squad leaders, who had lived on farms in Ohio, to accompany me on this nighttime patrol. We blackened our faces, taped our dog tags and removed any objects from our clothing that

might rattle. I chose to carry only my 45-caliber pistol and my squad leaders chose to carry carbines. I briefed my squad leaders about our assignment and explained my simple plan to accomplish our mission. My plan was simple because I could not think of any clever or tricky plan. We would move horizontally along each hedgerow until we found an opening to the field it enclosed. We would move slowly through the opening, then cross the open field to the next hedgerow and repeat the procedure. If we found any hedgerows defended by Germans, we would attempt to capture one and return with him to our platoon. Fortunately, the night was very dark. We passed through the openings of the first two hedgerows without any problems. However, as we approached the third hedgerow opening we could hear heavy breathing from the other side. I thought that this would be a German sentry who had fallen asleep. Perfect, I was certain that we could capture a sleeping German! We moved through the opening very slowly and finally made out the silhouette from which we were hearing the heavy breathing. We sprang forward and captured a cow! Shrapnel had apparently wounded the poor cow. I was so relieved that I felt like giving the cow a hug. We moved on without finding any Germans and were now approaching the dense and dark wooded area. Once again we moved very, very slowly. I was in the lead and was about to enter the woods when a German sentry yelled something. I assumed he yelled in German, "Halt, who goes there?" I realized that the Germans had discovered us! I followed my first reaction which was to fire my pistol in the direction of the sentry. I must have hit him, for he let out a yell. I turned around immediately and said to my squad leaders, "Let's get out of here fast." We had run away from the woods for only a short distance before we heard the pop-pop sound of flares being shot overhead. We fell to the ground as a burst of light lit up the field as bright as a nighttime football stadium. During combat training, we had been told that the Germans did not fire at a target while the flare lit up an area. Instead, they would try to locate their target during this time and commence firing after the flare went out. Using this technique, they hoped they would hit the target when it was up and running. This is exactly what these Germans did. Therefore, by only running after the Germans ceased firing and the extinction of a new flare, we were able to reach the safety of a hedgerow. After firing their machineguns, the Germans fired several rounds of mortar shells in our general direction. These mortar shells landed close enough to scare us but not close enough to inflict any damage. Now that we were out of harm's way, I hurriedly led us through the maze of hedgerows back toward our own troop. After several minutes, my squad leaders informed me that I was leading us right back towards the woods occupied by the Germans. After a very brief conference, I told my squad leaders to take the lead and I would follow them. I may have been lost and confused but I was not stupid. I knew those farm boys could find the way back better than this city bred Lieutenant. We turned around and they led us in the exact opposite direction. Soon after this complete change in directions, we reached the safety of our own troops. I finally realized that the only smart thing about my simple plan was to pick two men to accompany me who were familiar with nighttime activity in open farmland. Without their sense of direction, I am certain that I would have led us back to the woods occupied by the German and we would have been captured. I was able to report to the battalion commander that the hedgerows between our position and the woods were not defended by German troops. I also informed him that the Germans, who were defending the woods, were well armed with both automatic weapons and mortars. I explained that we failed to capture any Germans because a sentry challenged us and I had to shoot him. He seemed to be very satisfied with my report. As I left the battalion command post, I heard the commanding officer tell another officer, "Looks like we have found a good man to take charge of our nighttime patrol activities." I thought to myself, if he is serious, this outfit is in real trouble. Thank goodness, as it turned out, this city bred Lieutenant never had to lead another nighttime patrol.

NORMANDY – THE BREAKTHROUGH

A junior officer and the men he led were never aware of the Division's overall strategy or the long-range plans. Our immediate objective was to advance two or three hedgerows a day. We did not know how many more miles of hedgerows we had to capture in order to breakthrough this type of terrain. It seemed as if this hedgerow fighting would go on forever. The morale of the front-line combat units was very low. What could be done to avoid the heavy loss of life and the snail like advancement of hedgerow combat?

One evening we received orders to mark our current positions by placing very large and very bright panels on the ground. Additionally, we were ordered to move approximately two hundred yards to the rear and set-up a MLR (Main Line of Resistance). We were told that the Allied Air Force was planning a massive bombing of the German positions. This was great news to us because we had practically no air support during our hedgerow combat. The next morning we heard the planes before we saw them. What a beautiful sight. I will never forget it. There were thousands upon thousands of planes. Just to write about it and to remember it brings goose bumps to my skin. First came the heavy bombers, then the medium bombers, and then the dive-bombers and finally fighter planes. It was like some giant shadow was blocking out the sun. They bombed so close to our positions that the ground beneath my feet actually shook. I learned later that some bombs that fell short of their intended target killed one of our Generals, who had visited the front line positions to witness the bombing. This was the kind of air support we had so urgently needed. All along the MLR you could hear the infantry soldiers cheering.

We had orders to quickly advance as soon as the bombing ceased. At first we advanced slowly over the hedgerows that had been blown apart. As we moved across terrain that the Germans had defended so fearlessly, we met no resistance at all! Soon we charged out in full pursuit and the only Germans we found were either dead or walking around in a daze. For two more days we advanced as rapidly as possible through hedgerow country while meeting little or no resistance. Suddenly, we burst out of the hedgerow country! Those damned hedgerows were behind us! We could see ahead for thousands of yards. Miles away we could see small villages. We were moving even faster now; passing through village after village that had been deserted. The Germans were disorganized and in full retreat. Often contact with the retreating Germans was lost completely. Instead of having to attack the Germans, we were in pursuit of the Germans. During these days, we saw roads strewn with bombed out German tanks, trucks and cars. We also noted that the Germans had to use hand-pushed carts and horse-pulled wagons during their retreat. The German soldiers that we captured seemed happy to surrender. I realized that the Germans were not able to re-supply or replace their troops. It was obvious, that after years of combat, the German soldiers were tired of fighting. We were winning the war of attrition by wearing away the strength of the German army. For the first time, I felt we would win the war and defeat the Germans. It was now only a matter of time.

The 83rd Division had now seized all of our assigned objectives in Normandy. Although we had no radios or newspapers, the word spread among the units of the Division that General George Patton and his 3rd Army were going to pass through us. Soon we heard and then saw tanks of General Patton's 3rd Army. Fresh Divisions passed through our positions and we cheered them.

The miracle of the breakthrough was now over. God bless the Allied Air Force which made it all possible! Armored Divisions were fanning out in all directions into Northern France. We had our first rest period of the war!!!!

BRITTANY - REORGANIZATION AND REPLACEMENTS

During our brief rest period, we were not idle. Replacements had to be assigned so that units could be brought up to full combat strength. Also, the Division headquarters had a chance to determine if any changes should be made in the assignment of officers. During this time, I received the best possible news. I was being reassigned from the position of a rifle platoon leader to a mortar section leader in the Heavy Weapons Company. I truly believe that had this transfer not occurred, I would not have survived the war.

I was so happy with my new position. I loved being involved with the mortars. I would still be in the front lines with the rifle companies; however, I would only be responsible for my radio operator and myself. If enemy fire should pin down the unit I was assigned to, the commanding officer would call for me. He would not call for me by saying, "Would someone please ask the mortar observer to step over here." Instead he would yell, "Where in the hell is that mortar observer? Tell him to get his ass over here now." As a mortar section leader, I had two squads. A squad consisted of a squad leader, a gunner, an assistant gunner, four ammunition handlers and a jeep driver. Each squad had an 81mm mortar. These squads were located well behind the Rifle Company I was assigned to, hopefully out of harm's way. A good mortar observer (I must admit I was one of the best) could drop a mortar shell down the chimney of a house. All you needed to do was have a shell explode in back of the target and another one in front of the target. By adjusting your range, you could then have a shell explode on the target. Mortar shells were called "whispering death" because they did not have a high pitched whine like artillery shells. A good mortar team could fire six shells on a traverse and search pattern before the first shell hit the ground.

BRITTANY - BREST PENINSULA CAMPAIGN

The Allies needed another deep-water port to bring supplies and reinforcements into France. Our Battalion was detached from the Division and joined with General Patton's 6th Armored Division to form Task Force A. Task Force A's mission was to eliminate the pockets of German resistance that remained in scattered towns of the peninsula and capture the important port city of Brest. The Germans knew they could not stop us from capturing Brest. However, they hoped to delay our advance down the peninsula long enough for their engineers to destroy the port's facilities. This was a delightful new kind of combat for us. We were motorized and moving as fast as possible against token resistance. If combat among the hedgerows was hell, then combat along the peninsula was heaven. It was seldom that we had to fight for a town. The Germans would offer a little resistance and then retreat. They used a simple delaying military tactic.

In almost all wars, the sight of foreign troops brought fear and terror to the local people. It meant looting, destruction and often senseless killing of local citizens. However, the sight of the American GI always brought smiles and joy to the local French people. They knew we were there to liberate, not to conquer; to help, not to terrorize. The streets of the French

towns we liberated were lined with people waving little American flags. Where they got these flags was always a mystery to me. I guess they had been hiding them from the Germans for years. They showered us with wonderful bread and cheese, fine wine and cognac and fresh flowers. We actually had to issue orders to the men to stop drinking or else we would have had a drunken Task Force. Of course, the Mademoiselles provided beaucoup kisses at every halt. I personally will never forget the reception the French people gave us at a town called Morlaix. These people were so happy and so grateful to us for their freedom from the Germans that they actually acted almost insane. One very pretty Mademoiselle in a nurse's outfit actually jumped into my jeep and in perfect English kept saying "I love you, I love you." I found out her name and the name of the hospital where she worked. I'll tell you more about her later.

The closer we got to Brest, the harder the Germans fought. At the town of Trier, the Germans were determined to stop us and had stopped us. The Germans were successfully holding a defensive position in a walled cemetery on the outskirts of the town. Their anti-tank guns dominated the approaches to the town, Their machine gun and mortar fire was devastating. Our tanks and tank destroyers could not get into positions to effectively overcome the Germans. Our rifle troops had sustained severe casualties attempting to capture the cemetery by frontal assaults. Apparently, our Task Force Commander did not want to bypass and leave these German troops in our rear. I received orders to immediately report to the Task Force Commander. When I reached his command post, he pointed out to me a church with a high steeple, which was located fairly close to the German held cemetery. He told me that if I could make it to the top of that church steeple I would be able to direct a barrage of mortar fire, which would effectively destroy the Germans' position. He also stated that he did not know if the Germans were occupying the church and its steeple. Additionally, he stated that I would have to advance well beyond our front line positions and that I could be constantly exposed to sniper and small arms fire. I'm sure he did not realize how this information scared me. I only hoped he would not notice how I was literally shaking in my boots. He did provide me with some good information. We had a Frenchman who had lived in the village. According to this Frenchman, he could lead us through some back roads and streets to the church and its steeple. I made a quick estimate of the situation and placed all six mortars from our entire platoon in position to fire on the cemetery. If I made it to the steeple and estimated the range correctly, we could fire thirty-six mortar shells on a traverse and search pattern that would land on the unsuspecting Germans almost simultaneously. I then got together with my French guide and said, "Lets go to church!" Unfortunately, he did not think this was very funny. I found out that he did not understand English and of course I could not speak French. That was not a very comforting thought. I did find out that, like most Frenchmen, he was extremely excitable and of course I was very apprehensive. He wanted to dash through the back roads and I made sure we moved very cautiously. I was completely turned around and lost. I was also about to lose faith in the ability of my guide to lead us to the church. Suddenly he pointed towards the end of a street and there was the church with the high steeple. He wanted to make a mad dash for the church but I shook my head indicating no. I observed the church for some time through my binoculars without detecting any movement. Then we advanced very slowly towards the church. I was anticipating being shot by a sniper with each step forward. Finally, we entered the church. It was unoccupied! We proceeded up the stairs to the top of the steeple. It was also unoccupied! What a view I had of the German positions. Even without the aid of my binoculars, I could see the German soldiers moving about and I could determine their anti-tank gun positions. The Germans had made a major blunder by leaving this church and its steeple unoccupied! From my observation position in the steeple, it was easy to determine the distance and direction needed to deliver a barrage of mortar

shells on the cemetery. The mortar fire caught the Germans completely by surprise, thanks to good old “whispering death”! The mortar shelling was so effective that when the smoke from the shelling cleared, the Germans were waving the white flag of surrender. Afterwards, the Task Force Commander asked me if I wanted to see the terrible damage the mortar barrage had inflicted on the Germans. I told him I had no desire to do this. I just did not want to see what I had done. He congratulated me on being instrumental in defeating the Germans so that the Task Force could continue its advance towards the port city of Brest. For this action, I was later awarded the Silver Star Medal. I have always thought that my French guide also should have received a medal. However, I never saw him again. I guess that being instrumental in driving the Germans from his city was reward enough!

After the battle for the town of Trier, our Task Force pushed on to the outskirts of the port city of Brest. Our heavy weapons company’s mission was to deliver long range harassment fire on the city. Plenty of ammunition was expended but it was like target practice with live targets. During this time, I requested and received a two-day pass to revisit the French City of Morlaix. I secured a jeep and drove to the hospital in Morlaix. It took me a while but I finally located the pretty nurse who had jumped into my jeep when we passed through the town. Her name was Alouette. She arranged to go off duty from the hospital and took me to her home. Her entire family, which consisted of herself, a younger sister and her mother and father, spoke English. It was my first exposure to the French family life style. We again celebrated the liberation of their town from the Germans. Many of their friends came to their house to meet the American officer. I really appreciated and enjoyed their hospitality and my first home cooked meal in a long time. It was like a Thanksgiving dinner at home. The next morning Alouette and I played tennis and she showed me around the town. I was introduced to more of her friends. I had never been treated like a hero. It was very nice and I loved every minute of the attention and respect I received. I gave Alouette the name and address of a girl friend of mine in Jacksonville, Florida. They corresponded with each other for many years and finally got to meet each other when my friend visited France. Unfortunately, I never saw or heard from Alouette again.

The Task Force was activated on the third of August and although Hitler had instructed his Commanding General to fight until the last man, the Germans surrendered on the twentieth of September. The German engineers had successfully destroyed all of the port facilities. However, the American engineers soon restored these facilities and the port of Brest was operational. Three days later we were again on the move. During this six hundred plus miles move to rejoin our Division, we had a rendezvous with our first American Clubmobile. How great it was to have fresh doughnuts. They were delicious. It was also wonderful to talk and look at American girls once again. We hated to leave and everyone felt homesick. It also made us realize what a sacrifice we made when we left the good old USA!

During this trip, we bivouacked one night in a forest area. After we had eaten, two of my squad leaders discovered that there was a small French village nearby. They heard the sounds of music and singing coming from this village. Apparently, these people were celebrating the withdrawal of the Germans from their village. They asked me for permission to visit the village. I not only gave them permission to do this but I told them that I was going with them. It was dark by the time we reached the center of the village. When the people of this village saw three armed soldiers approaching, the celebration abruptly stopped. When they realized that we were American, they surrounded us and the celebration started again. We were the very first Americans soldiers they had seen. The

presence of three American soldiers made the celebration even more festive. We were toasted with wine and champagne. We were hugged and kissed by women old and young. We danced and tried to sing songs with them. We were heroes! I must admit that I was really enjoying this hero stuff even though I did not believe I was one. Later I noticed several women, who had apparently had their hair shaved off, standing in the background and not participating in the celebration. I asked about these women and I was told that they had fraternized with the Germans. After the Germans left, the villagers had shaved these women's' heads to shame them for fraternizing with the Germans. When we returned to our area in the wee hours of the morning, we discovered that our unit had already left. In fact there was nobody left in our area except for my jeep driver. If my jeep driver had not waited for us, I guess we would have been AWOL (Absent Without Leave).

When our Battalion rejoined the 83rd Division, we learned that the Division had been very instrumental in helping to drive the Germans almost completely out of France. The Division was now mainly guarding an area of northern France. Since this was primarily a patrolling mission, we were able to devote a great deal of time to training. It was a relatively quiet time for us. However, I did get to see one of the most unusual sights of the war. A German general and his twenty thousand soldiers surrendered to our 83rd Division. These captured Germans were marched past our unit. It was an amazing sight. Twenty thousand German soldiers, still fully armed, marching down a road under the surveillance of only a few American soldiers. It took several days for the entire group to march past our positions. For those German the fighting was over. They were really lucky because they probably spent the rest of the war in prison camps in the USA.

LUXEMBOURG – LIBERATION

Now that France was completely liberated, our new assignment was to relieve the 28th Division and finish the job of driving the Germans completely out of Luxembourg. We would then occupy the west banks of the Moselle and Sauer Rivers, which separated Luxembourg and Germany, preventing the Germans from recrossing these rivers.

In order to accomplish this mission, we had to travel 300 miles to a tiny country, which we knew nothing about. We knew nothing about the people, the culture or the towns. For two days and nights we rode towards Luxembourg. When the Civil War General Sherman said that war was hell, he must have been referring to a two day and night convoy operation. We slept and ate while moving. We would switch vehicle drivers after several hours. Every few hours they would stop the convoy so that we could get out of our vehicles and stretch. Often it rained on us. Finally, we arrived in Luxembourg. We were tired, dirty and cold. I thought we would quickly drive the remaining Germans from this country and in a few days we would be fighting on German soil. Once again I was wrong. We spent two months in the Luxembourg area.

We encountered considerable resistance from the Germans. They would establish roadblocks and we would have to fight through heavy machine gun and mortar fire to breach the roadblocks. At every town it was the same story: few German troops but plenty of mortar and machine gunfire. After many more days of this type of action, the Germans finally retreated across the Moselle and Sauer Rivers and all of Luxembourg was liberated. We received orders to hold our positions along the Moselle and Sauer Rivers and establish patrols into Germany to determine the strength of the German defenses.

During this period, our mortar sections were rotated weekly between the front lines and a rest and training area. There was very little action on the front lines. Actually, the mortar sections on the front lines got more rest than the sections in the rest area because of all the training. My mortar section seldom complained about any decisions; however, training during a rest period was the exception. These were experienced combat soldiers and they resented having to train like new replacements. I could not argue with them. In fact, I agreed with them. In order to make the training more acceptable, I arranged competition between the other mortar sections in our company. I also told my section that the training was making me a better forward observer. Nothing really worked, for they continued to complain about training being emphasized so much. In May, 2000, I read Stephen Ambrose's book "D-Day". In this book, General Eisenhower is quoted as saying, "From now on I am going to make it a fixed rule that no unit, from the time it reaches this theater until the war is won, will ever stop training." I wish my mortar section had known that their training was a direct order from General Eisenhower, our Supreme Commander. If so, I do not think they would have complained.

A mortar section had about one-third the number of men that were in a rifle platoon. Therefore, the officer in command of a mortar section had a much closer relationship with the men in his section than an officer in command of a rifle platoon. One reason you

learned a lot of personal information about the men under your command, was due to the rigid censorship regulations. I had to read and censor all of the V mail that my men sent home. V mail was a single sheet form that could be folded to also provide the envelope. Any references to our location, combat activities, casualties or anticipated troop movements had to be deleted by the censor. It was not necessary to delete many items in the V mail because the individual soldier didn't care about revealing that type of information. The individual soldier wanted to know if his wife or girl friend was being faithful to him. He wanted to know why she did not write more often or did she miss him as much as he missed her. He wanted to know if she had seen his folks, were they all right and did she remember the last night they were together. The letters were intimate and often disclosed private relationships. In my opinion, the saddest V mail was from fathers whose children were born after they went overseas. They longed to see and hold their children and they were afraid they might not live to do this. Oh yes, I had a very close relationship with the men under my command. I knew all about their personal lives and their longings and fears. I felt I was a better and more compassionate officer because of this knowledge.

When we were in the rest area, the officers' quarters were separated from the quarters of the men. However, when we were on the front lines we lived together, often in an abandoned house. There was very little action on either side of the rivers. Our forces and the German forces would often send out patrols at night and during the daylight hours there would be artillery and mortar shelling. We would occasionally get requests to fire our mortars at specific targets. However, we were mainly involved in harassment shelling. This provided me with an excellent period to get to know the men under my command even better. I shared in preparing our meals, cleaning up our house and hunting for stray pigs or chickens to supplement our rations. Because of the German nighttime patrol activities, we set up booby traps around our house. No Germans were killed by our booby traps but they did provide for a good supply of chickens. We had time to talk to one another about our childhoods and our goals that we hoped to accomplish after the war. Sometimes these discussions were on a one to one basis and often it was on a group basis. My jeep driver was a little guy from the city of New York and he loved to tell stories about growing up in Brooklyn. He was an Italian and he often received "do it yourself" food packages from home. When he fixed a spaghetti meal from these food packages, it was a great treat. I was always invited to these occasions.

Since we were always together during combat, I felt a closer relationship with my radio operator than anyone else. He was just a little older than I was and had completed two years of college before being drafted. He was very popular with the men in my section and provided me with a lot of insight into their individual strong points and weaknesses. His father had not been a very healthy individual. During World War One, his father had been under constant German artillery shelling which resulted in his being shell-shocked. His father never completely recovered from this condition. My radio operator often expressed his fear that the same thing would happen to him in this war.

I got into a little trouble during this time. One of my Corporals brought me a wrapped package addressed to his mother. He assured me that the package contained linen tablecloths that he had purchased in the town of Remich. I accepted his word and stamped the package as being censored, without opening the package to check on its contents. A few days later, I received orders to report to Battalion headquarters. I learned that this package, because of its weight, was opened for inspection at Battalion headquarters. It was discovered that in addition to the tablecloths, the package contained all the parts to a German machine pistol. We called these German weapons "burp guns". Sending guns of

any type back home was strictly forbidden. I was reprimanded for having stamped a package as having been censored, when I had not even opened the package. When I returned to my Company this Corporal quickly became a “buck-private”.

During this period, I received a pass to visit the town of Remich. While there I had a chance to talk to the man who operated the post office. I asked him if there were any families by the name of Hury living in the town. He said that there had been a family by that name that had once lived in the town but they had moved away several years ago. However, he stated that there was a Hury buried in the local cemetery. I found the local cemetery and located the grave. It had a nice marker with the name Hury in large letters. I suppose that the person buried there was some distant cousin of mine, since my great, great grandfather had entered the United States from Belgium, a nearby country.

We had read about the new German V-2 rocket in the Stars and Stripes, the army newspaper. It was in Luxembourg that we saw and heard our first German V-2 rocket. Its popular name was the “buzz bomb”. They were used by the Germans to bomb London. When the motor of this rocket stopped buzzing, the rocket would spiral downward and explode upon contact. Because of unreliable motors, many buzz bombs exploded prematurely. I have since learned that many historians believe this occurred because of acts of sabotage by the slave laborers, used by the Germans to construct these rockets. As they passed overhead, we would listen to the buzzing sound. As long as it continued to buzz, while passing overhead, we knew it would not fall on us. However, it was sad to realize that as long as it was buzzing, it would be falling on London and probably killed many civilians.

Another memory of Luxembourg was that of a German reconnaissance plane that would fly over our positions every night just about the time we were ready to go to sleep. Fortunately, this plane never dropped any bombs or did any strafing. We nicknamed this plane “bed check Charlie.” It was strange but we actually started looking forward to his nightly visits. Then one night he did not fly over our position and we never heard him again. We missed “bed check Charlie” and we often wondered what happened to him.

We spent our first war time Thanksgiving in Luxembourg. We had turkey and all of the trimmings. Although the Luxembourg population did not understand why we celebrated Thanksgiving, they did everything possible to make us feel good that day. They realized that we were missing our families and friends more than ever on this special day. They were not as demonstrative as the French people. However, I thought they were truly very appreciative toward us for having released them from four years of German occupation.

Our Division was now at full combat strength, rested and ready to participate in the big offensive push into Germany. I learned about our leaving Luxembourg from my mortar section. They liked to listen to the radio, especially Axis Sally’s programs. She was an American girl who had visited France and had become a Parisian fashion model. While working in Paris she met and married a German and they moved to Berlin, Germany. When American troops were sent to England, the Germans convinced her to become a disk jockey. Her programs were very popular with the American troops because she played the latest American hit records. Of course, she also included in her commentary German propaganda and sometimes very accurate information about our troop movements. This information was probably provided by German intelligence. My mortar section told me that Axis Sally had said “hello” to the guys of the 83rd Division. She said that she hoped we had enjoyed our stay in Luxembourg, because the German troops were ready to welcome us to the Hurtgen Forest. She also said that it was too bad we were going there because it was a

forest of death. The very next day after her broadcast, we received orders that the 83rd Division was going to move. We would be relieving the 4th Division that had been fighting the Germans in the Hurtgen Forest. Axis Sally had been right again!

HURTGEN FOREST – GERMANY

The Allies offensive drive into Germany started while we were still guarding Luxembourg. This offensive drive was slow and costly because the Germans were bitterly contesting our advance into their country. Approximately in the center of this area was a huge woodland called the Hurtgen Forest. This terrain was naturally advantageous to the defense and the German army exploited this advantage to the utmost. They could easily conceal themselves and their weapons in this thickly wooded forest. Our troops were facing machine guns, mortars and camouflaged entrenched veteran German soldiers armed with rifles and burp guns. Our troops had been fighting hard but the Germans were fighting back just as hard. This vicious fighting was taking its toll on both sides in the numbers killed and wounded. This type of warfare was very similar to the hedgerow fighting in Normandy. The German advantage was superior defensive positions and the Allied advantage was being able to reinforce and resupply its troops.

We had heard about the vicious warfare being fought in the Hurtgen Forest. Our mission was to relieve the battered 4th Division, complete the drive through the Hurtgen Forest and occupy the West Bank of the Roer River. I was extremely apprehensive about our first encounter with the Germans in Germany. This would be our first engagement with veteran troops in their own homeland. I figured the Germans would fight fiercely to defend their own soil.

It is strange that after 56 years, I can still remember that when we left Luxembourg it was very cold and raining. In spite of my apprehension, I was excited about the possibility of seeing snow for the first time in my life. After spending the night in the mud of an assembly area, we started the long hike up a very heavily traveled road to the front lines. We were subject to occasional long-range artillery shelling, even before we reached the front lines. We had never paid much attention to planes flying overhead because they were always our planes. You can imagine my surprise, when several planes came into view that had German swastikas on their fuselage. These planes strafed our column with their machine guns. Fortunately, my mortar section was not at the head of our column. We could see the planes and we could see our troops peeling off the road hitting the ditches for cover. I remember that I found myself in the ditch without knowing how I got there. It was as if I had flown into the ditch. It was a scary experience. No one in our area was hurt; however, several men at the head of the column were killed or wounded. Thank goodness, this was the only time we were ever strafed by enemy planes. It was almost dark when we moved into our new front line positions that were about in the middle of the Hurtgen Forest. This forest must have been a beautiful place before the war. It was very different now because the once beautiful tall pine trees had been destroyed. Most of the trees that were left were nothing but topless tree stumps. This was due to the ever-deadly tree burst artillery shells that were fired. The Germans had timed their shells to explode on the tops of the trees, sending shell fragments flying in all directions. The ground was littered with pine limbs of all shapes and sizes. We used this wood to build roofs over our foxholes. Inside these reinforced foxholes, we were fairly safe from artillery shell fragments.

It was during this time, that I was informed by our platoon Sergeant that my radio operator was AWOL (Absent Without Leave). Taking advantage of our movement toward the front lines, he deserted by joining some units of the 4th Division, as they were being relieved. Several weeks later, I learned that he had been arrested by the military police. When he was on trial for desertion, I was called on to testify as to his previous performance. During this trial, I was able to explain about his fear of becoming shell-shocked in this war, like his father was in World War One. As a result of my testimony, he was not charged with desertion. Instead, he was sent to a military center for psychiatric treatment. Much later, when the war was about over, he was pronounced mentally ready to return to active duty. He requested that he be reassigned to his old outfit. Since he had missed all of the furious fighting we had encountered during his treatment and because the radio operator who had taken his place was killed in action, I refused his request.

Other American units had begun the assault to drive the Germans out of the Hurtgen Forest and reach the Roer River. It was now up to us, to permit no loss of this momentum in our assault. During the first three days of combat, our Third Battalion was held in reserve, while other units attacked strong points in the German defensive positions. Our entire mortar platoon supported these attacks by firing entirely by battery, instead of individual sections being assigned to individual rifle companies. This was the first time we had used this technique since I used it on the cemetery, during the drive to capture the port city of Brest, France. We fired on the average of 600 to 800 rounds per day. I was excited about the firepower we achieved by firing entirely by battery. I anticipated that we would employ this technique often, during future engagements. The strong points in the German defensive positions were captured. Supported by artillery and our mortar fire, repeated German counterattacks were turned back. Now that both our right and left flanks were secure, our Third Battalion received orders for the main attack. It was to be a frontal assault against the Germans' defensive positions, with the capture of the town of Strass as our objective. Headquarters for the entire German defense of the Hurtgen Forest was known to be located in Strass. That afternoon it started snowing and for the first time in my life, I had a chance to play in the snow. My excitement was cut short when I received orders to report to our company commander. He reviewed the battle plans with the other officers and myself. Two rifle companies would lead the frontal assault. The machine gun platoons and the third mortar section would be attached to and accompany the rifle companies. The first and second mortar sections would remain in their present positions, firing supporting barrages. Guess who was the commanding officer of the third mortar section. Me! The attack was to begin at 5:30 AM (0530 military time). Needless to say, I was concerned! In fact, I was petrified! Never had I ever thought that I would be involved in a frontal assault against a strong German defensive position. That was World War One tactics and I thought it would result in a great many casualties. Another concern of mine was that in this frontal attack, tanks would support us. I knew that any tank movements would surely result in heavy mortar and artillery fire. Oh well, I figured that I might as well enjoy the snow, which was getting much heavier. It was impossible to sleep when you were so apprehensive about the feasibility of a frontal assault.

As it turned out, our General knew a lot more about tactics than I did. The attack began at 0530 in the midst of a swirling snowstorm. It was dark and it was awfully cold. My mortar section had to hand-carry our mortars and our ammunition. You could only see a few yards ahead. It was so quiet. The snowfall even muffled the noise of the tanks. We caught the Germans completely by surprise! Who would be crazy enough to attack before daylight in a snowstorm? If the Germans had learned something about American history, they

would have remembered that General George Washington had crossed the Delaware River under the same conditions, during the American Revolution. The rifle companies punched a huge hole in the Germans' defensive positions and at 0700 hours we entered our objective, the town of Strass. We met only token resistance in the town. We captured the German Commanding General while he was eating breakfast in his pajamas. He was so mortified, I believe he would have committed suicide, if he could have reached his revolver. A perfect plan, perfectly executed, no problems? Not exactly! The Germans were smart enough to rush reinforcements into the gap we had made in their defensive positions. Shortly thereafter, their defensive positions had been reestablished. The First and Second Battalions that were to follow us through the gap we had made in the German defensive positions, could not do so. Our entire Battalion was cut off from the rest of the Regiment. We were isolated in the town of Strass, with no hope of reinforcements, additional ammunition or medical supplies. The remainder of the day was spent in preparing a defense of the town for the German counterattacks, which were sure to come. The machine gunners and my mortar section fired into the rear area of the German defensive positions. This harassment fire was limited because our ammunition supply was low. Our main concern, was the anticipated nighttime activity of the Germans. We were certain they would come. All of the officers got together and decided that our best nighttime defense would be to spread throughout the town into small units and hide inside the basements of the houses. The German General, plus the few other Germans we had captured, would also be hidden in the basement of a house and guarded. We would make the Germans spend a lot of time hunting for them and us. I got my section into the basement of the most insignificant house I could find. Fortunately, one of my Corporals was of German descent and spoke the German language fluently. If the Germans started to search our house, our plan was to have him tell the Germans that we were citizens of the town hiding from the Americans. That night we were as quiet as a group of men could be. We heard German infantrymen and tanks moving around the town but no attempt was made to search our house. The next morning, the Germans were gone and so were a machine gun section and several squads from the rifle companies. The Germans captured them during the night. The second day the Germans made several counterattacks but the rifle companies, with support from my mortars, succeeded in repelling these counter attacks. That night the Germans came again and we were not lucky this time. We heard a tank rumble up to our house and we could hear German infantrymen starting to make a search of the house. We realized that if our plan for fooling the Germans did not work, we would have no recourse except to surrender. To do otherwise, would result in the tank destroying the house, the basement and us. My Corporal, who did not leave the basement, had a shouting discussion with the Germans, who had entered the house. I could not understand what was said but the Germans left without searching the basement. The plan had worked! A few carefully worded German sentences had saved my section and myself from spending the rest of the war in a POW (Prisoner Of War) camp. The next morning we learned that another machine gun section plus more infantrymen had been captured. The Germans did not attempt any counterattacks on the third day. However, enemy artillery fire was continually falling on the town. I thought that Hitler himself must have ordered that the town of Strass be destroyed. We were again lucky, in that no artillery shells hit our little insignificant house. We were all thankful for the deep basements in the houses. Our supplies were now almost exhausted, our wounded could not be evacuated and our dwindling food supply consisted of food bars that had been dropped to us by an observation plane. Our situation really looked desperate. We were all battle-weary, the rifle companies had suffered at least fifty percent casualties and we had lost an entire machine gun platoon. To say we felt abandoned was an understatement! We wondered why reinforcements had not broken through the Germans' defensive positions. Later I learned that numerous patrols were sent

out from other Battalions with supplies for us but they were unable to break through the German defensive positions. On the fourth day, a small patrol finally succeeded in reaching us with medical supplies. During that evening, a 50-man patrol was able to reinforce our position. By the fifth day, the 2nd Battalion moved through our position in pursuit of the retreating Germans. Our wounded, the German General and the other Germans we had captured were then evacuated. What was left of our 3rd Battalion was moved out of what was left of the town of Strass, to a bivouac area. I had mixed feelings about the success of our mission. I was proud of the fact that we had accomplished our objective by capturing the town of Strass and the Commanding General. I was elated that we had repulsed every counterattack that the Germans had thrown at us. However, I was saddened by the knowledge that our comrades in the machine gun platoon would spend the rest of the war in a POW camp. The fact that during this period, our Battalion lost almost 300 men killed, wounded or captured was tough to take. I did not have a single casualty in my mortar section; however, that was more due to luck than leadership.

The 83rd Division received six unit citations for outstanding performance of duty during World War II. I feel very proud that our Battalion earned one of these citations for our performance in the Hurtgen Forest. The last sentence of this citation states, “The aggressiveness and superb devotion to duty displayed by the Third Battalion against overwhelming odds and under extremely difficult conditions merits much praise and is in keeping with the finest traditions of the armed forces of the United States.” I would like to add to this statement, “and God bless the brave men who fought and died in their devotion to duty.” A unit citation is represented by a fourragere (a braided cord) which is worn looped around the left shoulder. The fourragere is awarded to a military unit and can be worn by all present members of that unit.

We remained in this bivouac area just long enough to secure replacements and to get reorganized. During this time, other units of the 83rd Division were driving the Germans out of the Hurtgen Forest. These units had opened a way through the forest for the passage of tanks of the 5th Armored Division. Only one small town needed to be captured, so that the 5th Armored Division could pass through. It was unknown if German troops were still in this town. One rifle company was assigned to occupy this town and my mortar section was assigned to this company. This mission was probably the most insignificant mission of the entire war. However, for me it was the most frightening experience of the entire war. My radio operator and I advanced with the rifle company to the outskirts of this town, while my mortar section remained in support several hundred yards behind. As we entered the town, the two dozen or so German infantrymen, who were occupying the town, quickly surrendered. As was the procedure for front line troops, these Germans were disarmed and told to march down the road leading towards our Division, with their hands on the top of their heads. Our headquarters was notified by radio that the town was secured and everyone started searching the houses for food, such as pickled eggs and other type of preserved food. Unbeknown to us, the advance elements of the 5th Armored Division had not been notified that we had secured this town. Their tanks approached the town buttoned up. That meant the tanks’ turrets (the revolving armored tower of a tank) were closed. The tanker visibility was limited to looking through small slits, as the tanks moved over the rough road. Therefore, they could not determine that the Germans we had sent down this road were prisoners. Unfortunately, the tanks opened fire on these Germans and killed every one of them. As the tanks proceeded closer to the town, still buttoned up, they saw our troops moving around in the town and assumed that we were more German infantrymen. The tanks immediately spread out and commenced firing their machine guns and cannons at the town. Believe me, artillery and mortar shellfire is nothing compared to

the awesome direct firepower of a bunch of tanks! The explosions from the 75mm cannons literally demolished the houses. The machine gun fire ripped across streets tearing down shrubbery and fences. My radio operator and I had just entered a nice looking house, when the tanks began to fire. Suddenly, explosions struck this house. The walls started to cave in, the roof was blown off, and furniture began to disintegrate. I had never experienced an earthquake but it must be a similar type of disaster. We were knocked down on the floor and started crawling aimlessly around, as all sorts of debris fell on us. We could not figure what in the world was happening. My first thought was that the Germans had booby-trapped the house. Then I realized that no booby trap known to mankind could ever do this much damage. We were really not a bit scared. We were just terrified! My only thought was that nothing could survive this onslaught. Somehow, among all this debris, we stumbled upon a cellar door and practically fell into the cellar. After finding that cellar door, I have always believed in miracles and guardian angels. If we had not found that cellar, we would not have survived. Even in the cellar, we did not feel safe, because of the explosions we could hear overhead. As suddenly as the shelling started, it ended. Fortunately, for all of us, one of the men in my mortar section realized what was happening. He rushed over to the tanks and was able to communicate to the tankers, by using a hand mike located on the rear of a tank, that the troops in the town were Americans. When we emerged from the cellar, we saw that our house as well as many other houses, had been completely destroyed. We suffered many casualties from this attack by our own American tanks. When I thought about what had happened, I got real mad. To have survived all the German attempts to kill me and then almost being killed by our own tanks! It's no wonder that this was my most terrifying experience of the war!

As the 5th Armored Division roared out of the Hurtgen Forest (and I was not the only one to be glad to see them leave) in pursuit of the retreating Germans, we took up defensive positions along the West Bank of the Roer River. It was here that we spent our first Christmas out of the States. It was a very sorrowful time. Everyone missed being with their families and their loved ones. It was a white Christmas as it was still snowing. By now, I was sick of seeing snow. It was also very cold. We tried to keep warm but it wasn't possible. We had read in the Stars and Stripes, that President Roosevelt had told the American people that our boys would have turkey and all the trimmings for Christmas. What he said was technically correct because our Division did receive these goodies. However, since we were in the front lines, these goodies were saved for a future date. We ate cold K-rations for our Christmas meal. The K ration came in a small sealed box. It contained a can of processed meat, a packet of soup mix, a small amount of Velveeta-like cheese and a few crackers. Since these K rations were usually issued to front line troops, they could not use a fire to heat up the soup mix. Instead, they would sprinkle the soup mix over the canned meat, to give it a better favor. Somehow they almost always managed to get hot coffee to the front line troops. As long as the men got their hot coffee, they did not complain too much about the food. Unfortunately, I did not like coffee; therefore, I did complain about the food! No one can imagine, without having been there, how sad it was being away from home for the first time on Christmas day. Many songs were written about the way people felt during the war. These songs dealt with such subjects as walking alone because you were lonely, missing the Saturday night dance because it would not be fun and telling a soldier to remember that all the while you're gone you belong to me. However, in my opinion the saddest of all the war songs, is the one about Christmas. I know I'm just an old softie now because as I write this I get tearful. Forgive me for boring you with the words to this song that I have never forgotten:

**I'll be home for Christmas
You can count on me
There'll be snow and mistletoe
And presents around the tree**

**Christmas Eve will find me
Where the love light gleams
Yes, I'll be home for Christmas
But only in my dreams**

Several days after Christmas, the 104 Division relieved us. This was an inexperienced Division fresh from the States. We wished them luck but unfortunately they were not lucky.

Since the German defense positions had not been able to stop the Allied advances, it seemed to me that the war would soon be over. The Germans were apparently unable to replace their casualties and the loss of equipment and ammunition. I did not feel that there was any way they could mount an offensive drive. This same situation also existed on the eastern front, as they had not been able to stop the Russian advance into Germany. Once again, as usual, I was as wrong as I could be. Perhaps I should change the title of my memoir from, "What Did You Do During The War, Granddaddy" to, "Why Were You So Wrong During The War, Granddaddy."

ARDENNES – BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Having been relieved by the 104th Division, we left the Hurtgen Forest and moved into a reserve position. We needed time to receive replacements and to reorganize. I learned that I had been promoted to a 1st Lieutenant. Silver bars replaced the gold bars.

During this period, we ate our Christmas dinners. We had turkey and all of the trimmings. It was several days late but everyone appreciated it. The next day, I joined my mortar section for Christmas dinner leftovers and got in trouble again. When I returned to our Company headquarters, I was told to report to the Battalion Commander ASAP. When you receive orders to report to a Battalion Commander as soon as possible, believe me you do so! The Colonel informed me that a General from 3rd Army Headquarters had just completed an inspection of our Battalion. During this inspection, the General noticed that I was having lunch with my mortar section. He told the Colonel to reprimand me for eating at the enlisted men's mess hall instead of the officer's mess hall. Additionally, he informed the Colonel that if I preferred to eat with the enlisted men, I could be reduced in rank to that of an enlisted man. Can you believe that? It actually happened. I was upset and just plain mad about the General's remarks. When a General reprimands a 1st Lieutenant, he usually accepts the reprimand and states that this action will not happen again. However, I was so upset that I said "If the General wants to reduce me in rank to that of an enlisted man for eating with my men, that's all right with me. This General (I wanted to say 'Armchair General' but I was not that stupid) apparently has no idea of the close relationship in combat between an officer and his enlisted men. Did the General not realize that in combat, you ate and fought together as a unit. Also, for morale purposes, you spend as much time as possible with your men in a non-combat situation." The Colonel looked straight at me and said very slowly, "I was told to reprimand you and I have done so." Then he smiled and in a normal voice told me that I was absolutely correct and to forget about being reprimanded. Then he winked at me (I was probably the only officer that the Colonel ever winked at and I have never forgotten it) and told me to see if I could get him an invitation to the next spaghetti dinner my jeep driver fixed. How he knew about those spaghetti dinners, I don't know. When I returned to my Company, I told my jeep driver that his spaghetti dinners were famous. I also suggested that he should send some spaghetti to the Colonel the next time he made some.

It was during this period that we learned about the German great counter offensive drive. The Germans' best Panzer and SS Divisions had driven a wedge through the allied positions that had reached a depth of some eighty-five miles and a width of about sixty miles. I could not believe that the Germans could conduct such an ambitious plan of attack. According to the information we received, paratroopers, hundreds of tanks and their elite SS troops spearheaded the German offensive drive. They had the advantages of the element of surprise and the concentration of their forces in a small area. This area that was in the Ardennes Forest, Belgium was the same route that the Germans had used before to conquer France during both World Wars. The newspapers referred to this area as The Bulge. This winter offensive completely surprised both the British Corps and the American Armies. In many cases, the rapid advance of the German forces crushed entire regiments and divisions. For example, the inexperienced 104th Division that had relieved us in the Hurtgen Forest, was hit so hard by the Germans that they could no longer be considered a functioning unit. However, as often happens in a football game, the Germans marched down the field but failed to cross the goal line. The Allied forces bent but did not break!

Because of the amazing mobility of the allied forces, reinforcements were rushed to various defensive strong points that had held out against the Germans. The most famous of these strong points was the 101st First Airborne Division's defense of the town of Bastogne. The Germans used tanks, artillery shelling and frontal assaults by infantry to capture this town which was almost in the center of their bulge. When the German General asked the American General if he would like to surrender, the answer he received was "NUTS"! General Patton's Third Army disengaged the battle they were fighting. They moved several hundred miles, in snow and freezing weather, to relieve the besieged troops at Bastogne. Such heroic action stopped the Germans' winter offensive. Now the full strength of the American forces counter attacked from about six different directions to destroy the Germans before they could withdraw from their self-made death trap. It would take weeks of desperate fighting to accomplish this mission. At the end of the movie The Battle of the Bulge, it shows a defeated and demoralized German army retreating back to Germany. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Germans fought fiercely to retain every inch of ground that they had captured during their winter offensive. Our forces never fought harder or ever faced stronger opposition than that which was encountered during the counter attacks against the bulge. I know that for a fact, because I was involved in this counter attack.

Soon after Christmas, our Division was ordered to attack the center of the northern edge of the Bulge. Without any more rest or replacements we moved as fast as possible towards the Bulge. Speed was of the essence as we prepared to launch a counter attack aimed at forcing the Germans to retreat from the Bulge. During this move, the weather was freezing cold. At night I would sleep in a bedroll beside my jeep. I had never had a drink of whisky in my life. However, I had a bottle of Scotch whisky in my jeep. When I got into my bedroll, I held my nose and took a huge gulp of that Scotch whisky. For the next few hours, I slept as warm as toast. On the 3rd of January, our Battalion, which was attached to the 3rd Armored Division, was given the mission of attacking south into the Bulge. We would then link up with General Patton's army, attacking north into the Bulge, and cut the all-important Houffalize-St. Vith highway. We moved out early in the morning in a column of companies with tanks and our mortar platoon in close support. This was the only time during the war that the mortars were ahead of the machine gunners. I actually rode on the top of a tank while we advanced forward.

Since the Germans had been on the offensive, they did not have time to prepare any defensive positions. Therefore, they bitterly contested every town in the path of our counter offensive. There were six small Belgium towns that we had to capture to accomplish our mission. We moved forward so swiftly that we were unable to have much artillery support. The job of the infantry was to clear the roads and the woods so that the tanks could move into position to shell the towns. Our job, with the mortars, was to provide pinpoint shelling on specific targets in the towns. In order to increase our firepower on these specific targets, the mortars were firing entirely by battery (placing all six mortars from our entire platoon in position to fire on a target). To capture a town, we had to fight the Germans yard by yard and building by building. It was an infantry-tank combination in action. We had to fight the Germans during the day and to keep fighting throughout the night. Then we had to fight again the next day and night. After constant bitter fighting in snow and freezing cold, we would finally capture a town. Often the next morning we would have to repulse a German infantry-tank counter attack. Then the Germans would retreat to another town and we would have to drive them out of that town. We not only had to fight a fanatical enemy but we had to fight the devastating cold, the tiredness and fatigue that comes after

days and nights of continuous combat. I was so proud of our mortar platoon. We had to hand carry our guns and ammunition through deep snowdrifts and often against biting winds. We fought along side of the infantrymen and tanks. We were very effective in destroying enemy defensive positions while under consistent enemy fire. However, we paid a high price for being involved in this type of fighting. I was now the mortar platoon leader. This was not due to my ability or skill. It was due to my being the only officer left in the mortar platoon! Both of the other section leaders were killed and our platoon leader was seriously wounded. We also had nine additional casualties in our mortar platoon. One of these casualties was my radio operator. He was hit by a German mortar fragment while standing beside me. He was alive when the medic took him away but later died as a result of the wounds. Thank goodness we did not lose any mortar section sergeants. They became acting section leaders and did an excellent job. Our mortar platoon suffered its heaviest casualties of the war during the Battle of the Bulge.

Our victory over the German Panzer tanks and SS troop was achieved under conditions we had never experienced. The six towns we captured or the number of miles we advanced could not measure this victory. It was measured by individual courage, great stamina and a generous amount of luck. It took us three weeks of continuous fighting to reach our objective. Our action, together with the advance of the Third Army from the south, provided for the final elimination of the Bulge and the restoration of our original front lines in Germany. For our successful counter offensive in the Ardennes Bulge, the Division received a letter of commendation from the Commanding General of the 7th Army Corps. In this commendation, the General stated that the 83rd Division can well be proud of it's record in the Ardennes counter offensive, which may prove to be the decisive battle on the Western Front.

No discussion of the Ardennes Campaign would be complete without a reference to the weather. How cold was it? I can only describe it as arctic-like bitter cold. The biting winds that we encountered created a chill factor that made it feel much colder than the actual temperature. Guys in my outfit who lived in the northern part of the States said that they had never experienced winter months like this. We wore heavy woolen underwear, fatigues, wool field jackets, overcoats, hoods, scarfs and anything else we could obtain. Such clothing was unhandy for fighting but it was either that or freeze to death. The oil on our rifles would often become frozen. The only method we could use to correct this problem was to urinate on the rifle. Probably never before did so many men drink so much water in order to urinate so frequently. We had to constantly guard against frozen hands and feet. To avoid trenchfoot, we actually received orders to make sure that every man under our command changed socks everyday. Many of the Division's casualties were due to the bitter cold and heavy snow. However, none of the casualties in my mortar platoon resulted from the weather.

The decision to have our Division participate in the counter offensive in the Ardennes Bulge was made hurriedly. We never had time to receive our white winter camouflage gear. Therefore, unlike the Germans, we could not blend in with the whiteness that was everywhere. In fact, we stuck out like a sore thumb in our olive drab clothing. This was, as you can image, a distinct disadvantage when compared to the winter white gear worn by the Germans.

After fighting for 21 days, our mission was accomplished and we moved into Army Corps reserve. We needed time to rest, time to train replacements, and time to reorganize. I personally needed time to adjust to a new mental attitude. I was now a veteran of three

campaigns; Normandy, Northern France and the Ardennes. I was no longer that brash young guy who was afraid the war would be over before he had a chance to participate in it. I no longer felt any excitement about fighting the Germans. In fact, I was sick of the war. I was tired of shooting at the Germans and I was especially tired of having the Germans shoot at me. Somewhere I had read that a pilot of the American Air Force, after completing all of his missions, would be sent back to the States to instruct other pilots. The only way an infantryman would be sent back to the States would be to receive what we called a million dollar wound. A million dollar wound was one that was serious enough to prevent you from participating in combat but not serious enough to cripple you for the rest of your life. I was ready for that million-dollar wound.

I often remembered a movie that I had seen about World War One. It was about a soldier who had so far survived the war. He was in a trench, on the last day of the war, when a pretty butterfly landed on the top of the trench. It was such a pretty sight! As he raised up from the trench, to get a better view of the butterfly, he was shot and killed. The name of that movie was All's Quiet On The Western Front. I often thought how terrible it would be if I were killed by the last bullet fired on the last day of the war. Of course, you know that did not happen but I did not know that!

Another thing that concerned me was a saying we used to have in the infantry. Don't worry about being killed by a bullet with your name on it. Worry about being killed by a bullet that has to whom it may concern on it.

THE RHINELAND

This was the first time our Division had been moved into Army Corps Reserve. It was wonderful. We were sent far away from the combat area to a small town in Belgium. We were billeted in private homes. We enjoyed the pleasures of heat, showers, clean clothing, good food and sleeping on a bed with white sheets. We even were able to see a few movies. It was the perfect cure for my low morale. We were also given medical and dental checkups. Most of us had body lice that we had acquired from sleeping in barns during the Battle of the Bulge. We were completely shaved of all body hair and bathed in a delousing vat. Everyone looked like what we now call skinheads. I was concerned that what little hair I had on my head would not grow back. However, getting rid of the constant itching and scratching made it all worth while. The dental treatment was certainly complete. Whatever needed fixing was fixed in one visit. My visit with the dentist resulted in having five teeth filled. That was very nerve racking but it was nothing compared to what some guys had to have done. We got to spend almost three weeks in Army Corps Reserve resting, receiving replacements and re-training. Since I was now the platoon leader, most of my time was spent with the new officers who had not had any combat experience. I was now known as the Old Man of the mortar platoon. They also had us training in river crossing tactics. This was something new for all of us.

During this time, I was lucky enough to receive a weekend pass to Paris, France. What a delightful surprise that was. To say that I had a good time in Paris would be an understatement. I had a wonderful time! There were hardly any motor vehicles in Paris. I assumed that the Germans had countermanded all of the vehicles. When I was there, the main mode of transportation was by bicycle. I could have spent my entire time in Paris, standing on a corner watching all the beautiful Mademoiselles go by on bicycles. However, I did take advantage of this time, by participating in a walking tour of the beautiful and famous buildings and statues. I spent two nights in Paris. I managed to get tickets to the Palace Pigalle one night and to the Folies Bergere the other night. These were the two most famous nightclubs in Paris. After many months of living without even seeing any young women, I hardly knew how to act when these young Mademoiselles came onto the stage and wiggled everything they could. It was also very nice to sit down at a sidewalk café and enjoy a wonderful meal, while watching the people pass by. It was a new experience for me. The Allied Forces did not liberate Paris. Instead they bypassed Paris and allowed the Paris Liberation Parisians to liberate the city. I had an opportunity to talk to some of the men and women who participated in this liberation. They were very proud of liberating the city by themselves and took pride in pointing out marks on buildings that were made by rifle fire from German snipers.

In the year 2000, Grandma and I visited Paris and the Normandy area of France. Our good friends Sally and Doug Thompson took us on this very nostalgic visit. Paris had changed somewhat from the Paris I had visited during the war. I did not see a single bicycle. Cars crowded the streets and all of the cars were driven very fast. The population of Paris had increased into the millions. However, the famous buildings and statues were still as majestic as I had remembered. Also, the relaxed and carefree lifestyle was unchanged. The Normandy area had also changed. Gone were the muddy dirt roads we had walked on. Although the roads were narrow, they were all paved. As a result of modern farm equipment and modern farm technology, all the hedgerows were gone. It was emotional to see the English Channel and Omaha Beach again. I had been only 23 years old the last time I saw these places. There I was again, standing on the same beach sand upon which the

great Allied Armies came ashore 56 years ago. The emotion of the moment was intense and I started to cry. I really broke down the next day, when we visited the American Cemetery, which is located on a cliff overlooking Omaha Beach and the English Channel. There the rows of white granite crosses overwhelmed me. The cemetery contains the graves of more than nine thousand of our military dead. Most of these men lost their lives in the landings and the ensuing engagements. This is indeed a field of honor. I could not help from feeling so sad for these young men, who were between 18 and 22 years old when they were killed. They would never know the joy of having a family and the rewards of having grandchildren. I was so lucky not to be lying in one of these graves myself. I was certainly not ashamed of myself for breaking down and crying. We also were able to visit several museums, monuments and memorials that commemorated the achievements of the American Forces who fought and died for the liberation of France.

During the war, when I returned from my weekend in Paris, it was obvious that our reorganization was complete and we were again ready for combat. You could sense that another great Allied offensive was forming. Everyone's spirits were high. We realized, without any help from Axis Sally, that the objective of this new offensive would be to reach and cross the Rhine River in Germany. The race to capture a bridge across the Rhine was on and every American Division hoped that their Division would be the winner. I hoped that by driving our forces deep into Germany we would crush the German morale. If we could accomplish this, it would hasten the end of the war! Could I possibly be right this time?

Late in February we received orders to cross the Roer River in Germany and relieve elements of the 29th Division. Our objectives were to capture the industrial city of Neuss, Germany and then secure the three Rhine River bridges that connected Neuss with the even larger city of Dusseldorf, Germany. In order to accomplish this mission, we would have to drive the German troops from many smaller towns. We hardly were able to sleep the night we relieved the 29th Division. This was because our artillery pounded the area in front of our position all night long. This artillery assault proved to be devastating to the Germans. By the end of the first day, we had captured several German towns against moderate to light resistance. We were moving across flat, open terrain. Our tactical plan, which was the same for every town, was to out-flank and out-maneuver the German positions and to maintain vigorous pressure without any let up. We were fresh troops, at full strength and with a great deal of firepower. The Germans were tired, vastly outnumbered and discouraged. I had my mortars firing entirely by battery again as we had done so successfully during the Battle of the Bulge. Our firepower was accurate and devastating. It was a great help to the rifle companies. As soon as the German troops pulled out of a town, the streets would become lined with groups of men, women and children, all waving little white flags. They appeared eager to please. They were extremely curious and no one seemed to be openly belligerent. This was not the sight we had expected to see.

We were now moving forward so fast that the Germans could not set up a good defensive position west of the Rhine River. It was obvious that the German army would not defend every inch of their soil and every tree as Hitler had boasted. Town after town was captured as we approached closer and closer to our main objectives. I realize that you might think that capturing these towns was fairly insignificant as compared to the big picture of the war. However, I want you to know that to the infantryman with a rifle, who had to capture these towns, the whole war is seen over the sights of his rifle. We began our attack on the 25th of February and by the morning of the 2nd of March we were on the outskirts of the industrial city of Neuss.

Advancing into a city the size of Neuss was a new experience for us. There were wide avenues, large buildings, homes and apartments. We wondered if the Germans would defend every building? Would they concentrate their defense in the center of the town? Would they not try to defend the city but position snipers so that they could fire at us from every building? We were also concerned about the civilians. Would they form mobs to harass our advance through the city? If so, would we attack these civilians? The only way to find out answers to these questions was to advance through the city and that's what we did. The stillness of our silent advance through the deserted streets was eerie. We met no resistance and darkness found us still advancing but more slowly and cautiously. Then the darnest thing happened to our group. As we moved down the street of a double lane avenue divided by some bushy trees, we heard a group of German soldiers walking in the opposite direction in the other lane. It was very dark but we knew from the sound of their hobnailed boots that these were Germans. I never knew if they were aware of our position in the opposite lane. Unknowingly or not, the two groups passed each other without a shot being fired.

During the next day, our advance was somewhat slowed by machinegun fire from small groups of defenders. These defenders were quickly flushed out from various cellars and buildings. The civilians remained indoors and offered no resistance. My mortar platoon was seldom called on to fire at targets. As we approached the center of the city, we encountered more and more German soldiers. They offered only token resistance and then quickly surrendered. They seemed happy that their days of fighting were over and they promptly marched to the rear of our position.

The next day, much to our surprise, our Battalion received orders to disengage our advance through the city of Neuss and to immediately move to a rear assembly area. Upon reaching this area, we were informed that our Battalion together with a Tank Battalion would form a Task Force. The mission of this Task Force was to maneuver in a wide swinging arch around the City of Neuss. Our objective was to capture and hold the large bridge across the Rhine River at Oberkassel, a suburb of Dusseldorf, Germany. This was the largest and most important bridge of the three bridges that our Division was to capture. I was delighted that our Battalion was given this opportunity to quickly secure a bridge across the Rhine. I suppose we were honored with this mission because of our experience as a Task Force during the Brest Peninsula Campaign. Shortly after midday, we were entrucked and together with our tanks, we started our wide circle around Neuss. This encirclement caught the Germans by surprise. The only things that slowed us down were several roadblocks that delayed the tanks. Just before darkness came, we entered the suburb of Oberkassel. The stillness of the night was only broken by sporadic machinegun fire from surprised defenders. These small groups were quickly overpowered. By midnight we had moved into apartment houses on the west bank of the Rhine opposite the coveted bridge that led to the big city of Dusseldorf, Germany. During the rest of the night, my mortars placed intermittent fire on the east bank of the Rhine, hoping to keep the Germans pinned down and preventing them from blowing the bridge. During this time, one of my mortar squads announced that they had captured a German General bedecked in his full dressed uniform. Everyone was wild with excitement about this feat, until we found out that this individual was the local Fire Chief!

At dawn the tanks were in position to move out and cross the Oberkassel-Dusseldorf Bridge. I had a bird's eye view of this large two-lane bridge, from the apartment house we had occupied. My mortars were firing on the east bank of the Rhine as fast as we could

drop a shell down the tube. The tank started across the bridge with tanks in each lane of the bridge. The two lead tanks were firing their machineguns and their cannons at the far end of the bridge. As I watched our tanks move forward, the excitement was almost unbearable. The shelling of the far end of the bridge was awesome. The tanks were now one-fourth of the way across the bridge! Now the two lead tanks were beginning to cross the center spans of the bridge! We are going to do it, I said to myself. We are going to be the first unit to capture a bridge across the Rhine! At that moment there was a shattering explosion! The center spans of the bridge, including our two lead tanks, rose high into the air as results of the explosion. In what seemed to me to be slow motion, they fell into the Rhine. The Germans had waited until our two lead tanks were on the center spans before they blew up the bridge. I was so upset and disappointed that I almost threw up. The center spans of the bridge had been entirely demolished and the bridge was now useless. We had failed to accomplish our mission! Later, to my dismay, I learned that the Germans had also blown the other two bridges that we had hoped to capture. Several days later, I learned that the 9th Armored Division had captured the first bridge over the Rhine River at a town named Remagen, Germany. However, this bridge soon collapsed of its own accord because of the heavy vehicle and tank traffic.

We established defensive positions along the west bank of the Rhine. Although we failed to capture a bridge over the Rhine, we did have the distinction of being the first Allied troops to reach the Rhine River. We were soon relieved by elements of the 95th Division and moved to a small town in Holland where we again participated in river crossing training. The failure to capture several bridges on the Rhine would not stop but would only slow down the Allied drive deep into Germany. Now it would be up to other Divisions and airborne troops to make assault crossings of the Rhine River. The Combat Engineers would repair and construct bridges that would also permit crossings of the Rhine River.

I am so happy to inform you that finally I was correct, when I thought that our drive to the Rhine River would crush the German morale. The prisoners that we took during this campaign were tired and despondent. Their uniforms were dirty and ragged. Some had rifles but no ammunition. Others had thrown away their rifles because there was no ammunition. They did not fight fearlessly but surrendered meekly. I was now absolutely sure that there was no way the Germans could continue the war. I was wrong again, because I knew nothing about Hitler's Youth Organizations.

CENTRAL GERMANY

After other Divisions, with the help of Combat Engineers, had established bridgeheads across the Rhine River, our Division moved into Central Germany. At first, we moved forward very cautiously, expecting fierce resistance from the Germans. However, it soon became evident that the German army was crumbling. They were retreating so fast, that we had to press into service every conceivable means of transportation to chase after them. If it had wheels, we would use it. My mortar platoon was split and a section was attached to each of the companies in our Battalion. Speed was an essential element of our advance. Several times the retreating German army tried desperately to halt our rapid advance but they were not successful. We had the Germans retreating and we hit them with everything we had, including artillery, tanks, mortars and motorized infantry troops. My biggest problem was keeping up with my mortar sections. Our truck drivers did a remarkable job. At no time were we short of ammunition, gasoline, food or water. The lack of these essential items would have stopped our advance more effectively than the German army.

We chased the German army deeper and deeper into the center of Germany. We fought day and night, over hills, across canals and rivers, through and around towns. We advanced more than 300 miles in just thirteen days! Just to the right of our line of advance were the Harz Mountains. Our Division learned that remnants of various German units were being reorganized in the northern section of these mountains. It was decided, by our commanding officer, that this strong pocket of resistance would be by-passed by the Division. However, some action was needed to prevent these Germans from attacking the exposed flank of our Division and cutting our supply and communication lines. Therefore, it was decided that the rest of the Division would continue its rapid advance deep into the heart of Germany. Our Regiment would be pulled out of this advance and eliminate this strong pocket of resistance. I attended the Battalion meeting where we were advised of this new mission. To my surprise, none of our commanding officers knew the size of this German unit. This was bad news! I wondered if our Regimental force would be large enough to defeat the Germans. I remember thinking that we had fought in the hedgerows, on the plains, in the forest, and in town and cities. Now we would be involved in mountain fighting! You know what? We had never had any training in mountain fighting! I wondered if these Germans had any training in mountain fighting. I hoped not!

I had another hope. I hoped that our Third Battalion would be held in reserve during this action. No such luck! Our Third Battalion, along with the Second Battalion, was given orders to “sweep” up the northern section of the Harz Mountains and eliminate this pocket of resistance. I did not understand the term “sweep” that was used in our orders. I finally decided that it meant to do whatever is necessary and to be flexible in your planning. This was not the usual advanced planning that I was accustomed to. Therefore, the first action I took as we began our “sweep” up the mountains was to run for the rear. No, you know I am kidding! Instead, I combined my mortar sections so that we could fire once again in battery. Firing by battery would provide greater mortar support for the Battalion.

There were no roads to travel on as we moved up the mountain. We moved slowly along fairly wide mountain trails until we would encounter a trailblock of fallen trees defended by a cross section of various German units. My platoon did a great job, under terrible conditions, of placing mortar fire on and around these trailblocks. Mortars need an open clearing overhead to safely project a shell. If a mortar shell should hit an overhanging tree limb, it would explode overhead and kill or cause injury to the section. In the Harz

Mountains it was very difficult to secure an open clearing overhead. We were lucky that we never did have an overhead explosion. However, we had too many close calls. Once our infantry captured or bypassed a trailblock, we would advance several hundred yards and then encounter another trailblock. We often had to advance through mountain timber and underbrush, which were so thick that our vision was severely limited. It was a sniper's paradise. Because of the limited vision, we often could not provide supporting mortar fire. For the first and only time during the war, we were engaged in a small arms guerilla type of combat. I could not get the thought out of my mind about the bullet that was marked to whom it may concern. To say that I was scared was an understatement.

We found out from captured Germans that we were fighting against remnants from Panzer troops, regular army troops (Wehrmacht), old men in various home guard uniforms and a large number of the fanatical Hitler Youth. Many of these Hitler Youth boys had rifles but most of them were only armed with pistols. We captured some of the Hitler Youth; however, most of them fought until they were killed. The ones I saw looked to be in their early teens. It made me sick to see these young boys give up their lives for Hitler. It made me hate him even more than ever.

Because of the mountainous terrain and the great number of snipers, we had to advance slowly and carefully. The majority of our casualties were due to sniper fire. We moved forward from valleys to the top of the ridges. We hunted snipers in their hidden positions. We fought for and cleared a great many trailblocks. Mile after mile of the German pocket of resistance was cleared in our systematic sweep of the mountains. It took the Regiment about two weeks to accomplish our mission. How we did it is still a mystery to me. We captured over 2,500 Germans. Very few of these prisoners were from the ranks of Hitler's Youth Organizations.

While we were clearing our section in the Harz Mountains, the rest of the Division had reached and establish a bridgehead at the Elbe River. The bridgehead was firmly established by the time that we rejoined the Division. We had advanced further into Germany than any other unit. I thought we would now have the mission of capturing Berlin. However, orders came down from Allied Headquarters, to stop our advance and take a defensive position. It seemed that the mission of capturing Berlin was to be given to the Russian Army. That was fine with me. Did it mean that I would never have to order another mortar shell to be fired? Did it mean that I would never have to indirectly cause the injury or death of another human being? I surely hoped so!

We maintained this defensive for several weeks. Almost every day some German outfit would cross over the Elbe River and surrender to us. During these weeks several thousand Germans surrendered to our Division. I had an opportunity to talk to several German officers. They all asked the same question. Why did we not join with them and fight the Russians? I did not realize it then but that might have been a good idea. One day I saw a Russian patrol drive up to our position at the Elbe River. Much to my surprise they were driving American made jeeps. I did not have a chance to talk to any of these Russians. However, they appeared to me to be very arrogant. Just a few days later, we received the wonderful news that Germany had surrendered unconditionally. You might think this was strange but we did not greet this news with any type of wild celebration. I do not know what other guys in my outfit thought. However, for me it was more of a feeling of pride than a feeling of joy. The war in Europe was over. I was proud of the small part I had played in accomplishing this victory. I was also proud of my mortar platoon's accomplishments in combat. However, the war in the Pacific was not over. I felt sure that our Division would

be sent over there to help defeat Japan. I did not believe that my active participation in World War Two was over. Would you believe that ONCE AGAIN I WAS WRONG. However, I have never ever been happier about being wrong.

OCCUPATION OF GERMANY

The end of the war in Germany found us on the move again. Trucks and jeeps moved the Division to the Bavarian area of Germany in the American Occupation Zone. This was a beautiful mountain area with many small towns. This area had not been devastated by the destruction of war. Our mission was to engage in the occupation and government of this area. To take over the government of an area of Germany was a new experience for all of us. My company was assigned to the area around the small town of Alfreichenau, Germany. The reason I used the term “my company” in the above sentence, is due to the fact that I had been promoted to the rank of Captain. Two silver bars replaced my single silver bar. I was now the Commanding Officer of Company M, Third Battalion, 330th Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division. I was very proud to have received this promotion. The men under my command seemed pleased to have me as their new Commanding Officer. As I write about this promotion, I realize that I still (after 57 years) have a feeling of pride about this accomplishment.

Within a few days of that promotion I was also awarded the Bronze Star Medal. The Silver Star Medal, which I had previously received, was only awarded for outstanding gallantry in combat action. However, the Bronze Star Medal could be awarded for either gallantry in combat action or for meritorious service. My Bronze Star Medal was awarded for outstanding devotion to duty and courage as a mortar section and platoon leader, during military operations against the Germans in France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany. As a combat infantryman, I also received the Combat Infantryman Badge. This is apparently a very prestigious award. If you were to wear your medals, the Combat Infantryman Badge is to be worn above all other medals. Also at this time, I received what I called participation medals. One was the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal and the other was the Victory World War Two Medal. I was also authorized to receive five Bronze Service Stars for combat participation in the Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Europe campaigns. However, military regulations state that in lieu of five service stars, an individual will be awarded a Bronze Star Oak Leaf Cluster. I have included pictures of these medals in the Appendix Section.

The first action I undertook, in the occupation and government of my area, was to establish my Company Headquarters in the largest and nicest house in the town. The owner complained about our occupation of his house. He stated that he was never a member of the Nazi Party. He suggested that I should occupy a house down the street from his house, because that man had always been a member of the Nazi Party. I did not pay any attention to this complaint. I was sure that anyone with a home this nice must have been a Nazi. In fact, I did not believe that there was a single German in the entire town who had not been a member of the Nazi Party. “Ich nicht Nazi”, they would always say.

Being the governing authority over this town posed many problems and twice as many headaches. I was supposed to remove any Nazi Party members from public office and replace them with individuals who had not been members of the Nazi Party. This was impossible for me to determine. Therefore, I just removed all the current office holders. After many interviews with other individuals, who claimed that they had not belonged

to the Nazi Party, I appointed new office holders. I had to form search groups to collect and destroy any firearms or ammunition in the town and the surrounding area. I interviewed any German service men, who returned to the town or area. We never had any trouble with these returning service men. They acted as if they were just glad to be back home and that the war was over. We had to inventory all of the Company's equipment and to establish new peacetime supply procedures. I really spent most of my time settling minor disputes between the townspeople and listening to their complaints. I quickly learned that I would never ever want to become involved in politics when I returned home.

However, it was just great being the Company Commanding Officer. I had the pleasure of granting leave to as many of my men as possible. Some got to go to Paris, other were able to visit various recreation spots in Germany. One of the favorite things to do was to take a cruise down the Danube River. I even got a pass to make that trip and it was really nice.

There was to be no fraternizing with the Germans. That was one rule that I was never able to enforce. The men under my command just would not comply with that ruling. This was the closest thing to civilian life that we had experienced since leaving England about a year and four months before and we tried to make the best of it. We tried to take in all the sights, got a chance to spend some money and did a little drinking. It was a welcome change from fighting a war!

Since the war with Japan was still going on, we soon received orders to begin training on the Japanese tactics of war. After several days of this type of training, I realized that in addition to fighting the Japanese, the Allies in the Pacific had to deal with physical stress and conditions far greater than we encountered. I also realized how lucky I was to have been fighting in the European Theater of Operations. Shortly after we received orders that the Division would be participating in a series of small-scale maneuvers, we heard the great news that the Japanese had surrendered unconditionally. What a celebration we had on learning this news. I have seen pictures and videos of the celebration of the end of World War Two in Times Square, New York City. Our celebration was just as good. Everyone was so very happy and hugged one another regardless of rank. Live ammunition was constantly being fired into the air. I made no attempt to stop this action. I only hoped that no one would be shot. Guys were dancing with each other and there were plenty of bottles of a German whisky called "Schnapps" consumed. The victory party lasted all night. The Germans did not come out of their houses. I think they thought the war had started over again. I remembered that I cancelled all duty for the entire Company the next day.

It was really a glorious feeling to realize that the war had ended and we would not have to risk our lives in combat again. The uppermost thought in my mind was that I was going home. I kept telling myself over and over again, I am going home! Going home to the good old United State of America and being discharged from the Army. I thought how wonderful it would be to date American girls, go to movies, wear civilian clothing, perhaps purchase a car, eat a hamburger, have a milkshake, and go to a football game. You can't imagine how much a young man can miss these things that you just take for granted when you are at home. To me these were luxuries that I had been without for so long. I hoped that I would never ever have to eat another "K" ration, be served chipped beef on toast or have orange marmalade.

Fortunately for me, the Army came up with a point system for returning servicemen to the States and being discharged. Points were mainly awarded for participating in the various campaigns (Normandy, Brittany, Ardennes, Rhineland and Central Germany). Other

points were awarded for the length of combat service. One needed 85 or more points for priority consideration. I easily qualified for the first group to leave the 83rd Division. I was transferred to an assembly area camp in France for a sea voyage home on a Liberty Ship. One fond hope that I had was not realized. The officers and men of the 83rd Division did not return to the States as a unit. We left the Division in separate groups. We had fought together, eaten and slept together, shared each other's troubles and had joined together in a victory celebration. However, there was no joint welcome at home that we could share together. I have often wished that we could have marched side by side down the streets of New York City in a ticker-tape parade. My ship docked at a separation center at Norfolk, Virginia. I had left France on December 21, 1945 and arrived at the separation center on January 4, 1946. I had spent another Christmas away from home. This Christmas was not as sad as my first Christmas overseas. We sang a few Christmas Carols and that was it. An eight man Navy band greeted us as we disembarked. We were allowed one free long distance call home. We were treated to a steak dinner and could eat all of the ice cream we could hold. Within forty-eight hours we were discharged from active duty and on a train headed home. On this train ride, I often thought how eager I had been to get into the war and into combat against the enemy. The wheels on the train made a click-clack noise that kept sounding like:

It is over!!! It is over!!!!!! It is over!!!!!!!!!!!!

EPILOGUE

I began my memoirs by quoting an address by General George Patton. I would like to close my memoirs by quoting from a speech that General Eisenhower made to a group of new 2nd Lieutenants. “The 2nd Lieutenant is the commissioned officer closest to the enlisted man. He is the only officer charged with the direct training of the individual fighting soldier. He is responsible for producing the small fighting units that make up an army. It is his privilege to live close to his men, to be their example in conduct, courage and in devotion to duty. He is in a position to know them intimately, to help them when in trouble and to often keep them out of trouble. No matter how young he may be or how old and hard-boiled his men may be, he must become their counselor, their leader, their friend and their old man. This opportunity, that of becoming a real leader of fighting men will challenge the best that is in any officer. It is something in which he must not fail! He must earn the respect, the esteem, the affection, the readiness to follow into danger and the loyalty of his men. This is the privilege and the opportunity of the 2nd Lieutenant.”

Once, Grandma and I attended a reunion of my company. Grandma was pleased at all of the nice remarks my men made to her about serving under me; especially, since I was so much younger than most of them. I really tried to be the type of officer that General Eisenhower described in the speech quoted above.

I have often been asked how young men could leave their loved ones, their homes and their lifestyle to fight in a war on foreign soil. I believe it was because we were young and patriotic. Each of us thought we were immortal. We believed that by participating in this war, we would save the world from Hitler and Nazism. This was the spirit of the American soldier, the GI.

I was only twenty-three years old when I entered into combat against the Germans. I survived the dangers of the war all the way from Normandy, France to the Elbe River, Germany when the war in Europe ended. I also made it from a young man into manhood. I had faced lots of danger and tragedies but I realized that this would be one of the greatest experiences of my life. I was very lucky and I was often very scared. My contribution to the courageous achievements of the American fighting man was probably one of the smallest achievements in the history of this courageous war. I will always remember that I fought in the company of many very brave men.