

MEMOIRS
OF A
MACHINE GUNNER:

Sixty Years Later

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WORLD WAR II COMBAT CAMPAIGNS

82d Airborne Division
 505th Regiment
 2d Battalion
 Company D

CAMPAIGNS	DATES	MODE	LOCATION
Sicily	09 Jul. to 17 Aug. 1943	Jump	Gela
Italy	14 Sep. to 24 Nov. 1943	Jump	Selerno (Paestum)
Normandy	06 Jun. to 24 Jul. 1944	Jump	Ste Mere Eglise
Holland	17 Sep. to 13 Nov. 1944	Jump	Nijmegen
Ardennes	16 Dec. 44 to 25 Jan. 45	Truck	Trois Ponts
Central Europe	02 Apr. to 11 May 1945	Truck & 40 & 8's	Ruhr

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STATESIDE

NOTE: The occasional quotation marks used in this narrative should not be construed to indicate actual direct quotations by the speakers. There is no way, of course, that I could possibly quote verbatim after 60+ years. The marks are used to indicate only the essence of what the speakers' said as I recall it and are used to enhance the smoothness of the narrative and give a touch of realism.

At the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, 7 December 1941, I was employed by the American Flyers at El Segundo (near Los Angeles), California. American Flyers was a flying school where lessons were given on Fleet planes, a single engine, two-place, tandem type, biplane. These planes were not selfstarting; therefore, a person was required to yank down on the props to get them going. That was my job there; and for these efforts, I was, in addition to a nominal salary, given one-hour's flying time a week. I was there for several months and had received sufficient training to begin preparing to earn my private license. Actually, by this time I had earned more than enough hours for my private license, but some time before, on my final approach to qualify for it, I bounced the plane, then bounced it again and then again. By the time the plane had been stopped--she, a woman pilot, had already taken over the controls and taught me a whole new vocabulary--I knew I had failed my test; but she still didn't hesitate to tell me that anyway. A couple of times in fact.

When I arrived at the airport on 7 December to continue my duties and training (I was again to be tested for my private license the coming Friday), I was shocked to see the airfield covered with antiaircraft guns. It was only then, when I went to my station and queried my coworkers, that I learned of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. A few days later I departed California and returned to my home near Sherard, West Virginia, a small farming community on the hills between Wheeling and Moundsville. Shortly after the holidays, 8 January, I enlisted in the Army Air Corps and was sent to Fort Hayes, Ohio and from there to the Orlando Air Base at Florida.

I was not there long before I became discontented. Since I had some flight training, I naively thought I could qualify for flying school. Later, I was even willing to accept an assignment as at least a gunner or even to some other active role; but it soon became evident to me, because of my lack of education and because of over-recruitment by the air corp, that I would never be placed in a position that would bring me the excitement and adventure I desired at the time. Occasionally, I would be assigned menial tasks; mostly, I would eat, lounge about the base, go to Orlando, return to the base, eat, watch a movie, go to bed, wake up in the morning and do the same thing over again. I was sure the war would be over before I saw any action at all. One day, however, while idling around the barracks, I heard that there was a notice on the bulletin board asking for volunteers to the paratroopers. I'd never heard of Army "Paratroopers" before, but I knew immediately that was the place for me. So, without further ado, I signed up.

I arrived at Ft. Benning in the hot summer of '42 for jump school amidst rumors of how tough it was to get through the course and receive those coveted jump wings. Stories such as that actually served to spur most of us. After all, who would not wish to become a member of such a select, elite unit? And, the rumors of the rugged jump school training were not exaggerated. Though raised on a farm where I was accustomed to hard work, the severe exercises and harsh training pushed on us by the muscle-bound physical education instructors were not easy to endure. Farm work, after all, does not build muscles to perform push-ups, pull-ups, squat-jumpers, double-timing etc. which the military concentrated on. After the day's ordeals and chow many of us rushed to the PX for a quart or more of ice cream to replace the bodily fuel. Never a worry about high cholesterol at that time.

Five qualifying jumps were required to earn the coveted wings; and in addition to the rigorous physical training necessary, we were also required to spend much time in pre-jump training. This included learning PLF's (parachute landing falls) which taught the proper way

to land. This tedious training began first by practicing on the ground then jumping from a three or four foot platform. After that we were taken to 250 foot towers where we were pulled, hanging below a parachute, to the top and then released; purpose was to simulate the falling and drifting of the parachute after jumping and to give a more realistic practice of the PLF. PLF's were stressed so highly because without performing the proper landing, bones could be broken. Indeed, despite such intensive training on that one thing, bones were often broken and other injuries suffered. The chutes we used at the time were much different and less safe than those used later by the Army and those that are used by sky-divers.

Then, on to the worst beast of all--the ogre that washed out more would-be parachutists than any one of the other monsters to which we were exposed: The 34 foot tower. This was a shed in which the floor was raised to 34 feet above the ground and the inside built as closely as feasible to the inside of a C-47, the plane we'd be jumping out of. In it was a steel cable running end to end, and attached to it was a static line twelve feet long, comparable to the one attached to the apex of our chutes. The purpose of this unit was to train us in the proper exiting procedures: that we keep our heads down and our bodies upright. What made this training aid so intimidating, I guess, is that it was so close and yet so far from the ground. They may have arrived at the figure of "34 feet" after a long period of research showed it to be the optimum height to inspire the greatest fear. Or the height may have been simply an arbitrary decision. At any rate, most agreed that it was much harder to jump from that than from a plane at 1500 to 2000 feet above the ground.

Now, to the qualifying jumps. Throughout our training sessions, we were advised time after time after time again to keep our heads down when leaving the plane or "connector links" would hit the back of the head, and that would sting. Well on my first jump, the first thing I felt as the chute opened was a blow to the back of the head with a force that, I think, caused me to black-out for a couple of seconds or so. After I got to the ground, I felt the back of my head;

and sure enough there were two large "goose eggs", one behind each ear just as the instructors warned would happen if we didn't keep our heads down. Needless to say, I was never again hit by connector links. Although the bumps have subsided some in size, I still have them. I suppose they could still serve as a reminder to keep my head down if I ever went to jumping again.

On another of my qualifying jumps, the third or fourth, I believe, as soon as my chute opened I spotted another one right below me. As per instructions, I began to slip to evade it, but the man below was slipping in the same direction. I then started slipping in the opposite direction; but by that time, I was walking on his chute. Now, when chutists collide like that, the chute on top loses air and collapses; and that is what happened to mine, or maybe it had only partially collapsed since I was so close to the ground by this time. At any rate, I hit the ground hard. I saw others gathering around, and to my mind, they were going in circles. I was really out of it for a while. (I had nearly forgotten about this incident, and certainly had forgotten the name of the man beneath me, then at our first regimental reunion in 1986 Charlie Wilson reminded me of it, again. I say "again" because this occurred during our qualifying jumps. After we qualified, we were both sent to the same permanent organization, and he immediately reminded me of it. He said when I hit the ground, he thought I had been killed, but other than glazed, crossed eyes, I seemed to be O.K.

Some people may wonder why any soldier, anyone in fact, would tolerate this absurd abuse--the punishing exercises, the constant hazards, the harangues and harassments--when there were easier ways to fulfill military obligations. Well, for one thing there was the extra pay. When I first entered the service, my base pay was \$22.50 per month. Jump pay, or hazardous duty pay as it was officially called, for enlisted men was \$50.00 a month. So a private at that time going airborne would receive extra pay that would be more than double that of his base pay. But, unbelievably, the extra pay was not the main reason, or even a factor, that many volunteered for that kind of duty.

Truely, when I signed up to transfer from the easy life I was living in the air corp, I had never even heard of extra pay for anything. In many cases the primary motivation for entering this type of service is simply the desire for thrills and excitement that comes performing dangerous activities, and in some cases, perhaps to prove oneself. Look at it this way, today there are numerous men and women who pay big money for the opportunity to enjoy the thrills and excitement of jumping out of "perfectly good airplanes." And there we were getting paid for it.

After finishing jump school, I was sent to a holding area for a short time then to a place known as the "frying-pan" area, so called because from the air it looked like one. Here I would be assigned to my first permanent unit since enlisting in the army, the 505th Parachute Regimental Combat Team which had received its colors in late September, '42. We learned that the regimental commander would be Lt. Col. (shortly Colonel) James Gaven reputedly the youngest colonel in the army. Training was exertive and seemingly perpetual. Long runs, long hikes, long hours. There were times during the toughest moments when I wished I were back at the Orlando Air Base idling my time away.

The most memorable event at the time, though a troubling one, took place while we were at the firing range. At a distance to our rear, a jump exercise was taking place. Amid excited shouts, I looked up to my rear to see a man free-falling to the ground. I later learned that the victim was a Canadian Major who, after leaving the plane, was hit by the following plane which was flying lower than the prescribed altitude, and its wing hit the suspension lines of the jumper and ripped him from his harness. I later witnessed a couple of streamers and "Mae Wests"; but it was this one event that stuck most indelibly in my mind, probably because it was the first time I had ever seen a man killed.

On 1 October 1942, we were moved from the frying-pan area to the Alabama Area of Ft Benning where the hectic pace continued as fier-

cely as ever; and this, at least once, got me into a little trouble. On most days we were required to rise early, rush through our breakfast, return to our tar-paper quarters, prepare our appropriate gear for the day and then fall into formation and march off to maneuvers, all in an extremely short time. Well, on one particular morning, I had trouble preparing my gear in the prescribed manner; and while all the other men were in formation ready to march, I was still struggling with my gear. As I finished and turned to join the troops, I was shocked to see standing outside the door at the bottom of the steps the battalion adjutant, Capt. Krauss, glowering. A staccato of questions and butt-chewing followed. The worrisome part of it for me was that the captain had a reputation of manhandling those who defied rules.

Now I need to digress and make a confession: During the early phases of our training I was, I'm sure, looked upon by those around me as being a little "slow." But I have an excuse, one which, of course, I knew better than to use at that time. Consider: I was initially sent to the Air Corp which gave only the minimal basic training and no infantry basics at all, then I was sent directly to the airborne infantry after jump school whereas all the others, except for the few air-corp-men who transferred with me, had received the requisite infantry training. I knew left-flank from right-flank, but not much else. Being on the farm, I could fire weapons, but even the way I did that was different from the way the army taught us to do it. I do, however, believe I deserve...well, let's say a little bit of congratulations anyway, although no one ever gave me any, for sticking with this rough, unforgiving organization amid snide remarks about those "air-corp-men who were sent to us." Of the 15 or so who arrived with me, only a couple, if indeed any, did remain. The others were transferred, voluntarily or involuntarily, to other duties.

Now back to the howling captain who loved to pound privates. So now, the dilemma: I had to pass that officer to reach my platoon; and with his reputation in my mind, I knew I would not--could not--allow him to strike or push me around without defending myself. Yet, I knew doing that, even in self-defense, could get me in big trouble. Recog-

nizing there was nothing else I could do, I walked down the steps, three or four of them, saying to myself, "don't touch me, I just hope he doesn't touch me." I reached the last step and then the ground; he backed off and I went by him. As I made a dash toward my platoon, now on the march, I heard the threatening words from my rear, "If I ever catch you in there again, I'll kick your ass all the way to...." Well, Capt. Krauss never got the opportunity to kick my ass all the way too.... From that time on I prepared my gear the night before, and I made it a point to get back from breakfast in adequate time even if I had to toss away much-coveted morsels of food.

On 7 February 1943 we left the Alabama Area and arrived at Fort Bragg, NC on the 12th where we became a part of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 82nd was first activated during WW I as an Infantry Division. At that time it was given the title "The All American Division" because virtually every ethnic group in the country was represented in it. The most famous individual ever to serve in the unit was to be Sgt. Alvin York, who would become among the most renown ever to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

At this time, however, the most famous personage in the now 82nd "Airborne" Infantry Division was Major General Matthew B. Ridgeway, the commander of the division. Gen. Ridgeway was to have a distinguished career with the division through Normandy, after which he was promoted to commander of the 18th Airborne Corp. He later commanded the 8th Army in Korea and in 1951 replaced Gen. Douglas MacArthur as supreme commander there. In 1952 he succeeded Gen. Eisenhower as the supreme allied commander in Europe. He died in 1993 at 98 years of age.

At Bragg both the officers and the enlisted men continued their training as previously gaining proficiency in all facets of military warfare. The "all work and no play...." adage was apparently understood by our commanders as leaves and furloughs were quite liberal considering the circumstances. Perhaps too liberal for many of the townspeople of Fayetteville and surrounding cities. As with most army

towns, women were not always freely available, so the next best way the troopers could entertain themselves was by fighting and tearing up saloons, dance-halls, bars, and other places of entertainment.

There were also times when some of the most serious and conscientious periods of training would be interspersed with frivolity and humor, both designed and inadvertent. The most memorable to me took place during a class on the introduction of hand-grenades. On this particular day, we were marched to an open field where Lt. Vandervoort was standing on a platform above us. Vandervoort was once in D Co. but was now serving in some capacity at Battalion Headquarters. He began the lecture about the mechanics of hand-grenades and then drifted into their proper use. He had always impressed me as being a little spastic, and this was no more in evidence than now as he carelessly bounced the grenade from one hand to the other. "Now, in order to arm the grenade you must first pull this pin," he began. After you pull the pin, however, it still will not go off as long as you hold this lever down." He pointed to the lever. "Just hold it down after you pull the pin." "So, you see, if you pull the pin then realize for some reason or another that you don't need to throw the grenade, then you can reinsert it, like this." Then he pulled the pin! This crazy, spastic ass pulled the pin of a hand-grenade! He again clumsily shifted it to the other hand, almost dropping it, then reinserted the pin. What a relief. The pin is again back in the grenade, and we relax. Then, unbelievably, he started through the sequence again! "So you see how it works now? You can pull the pin and as long as you keep the lever compressed, it won't go off." Then he pulled the pin and again started to transfer the grenade to his other hand, but this time he dropped it. The lever flew off, and Vandervoort yelled. It became apparent that all of us in the audience had become tense and were fearful of this very thing happening as we immediately took to our heels in a near state of panic only to see the grenade drop harmlessly to the ground several yards to our front while we were still on the run. We had been duped. It had been only a dummy grenade, and Vandervoort had played his role well. We were called back to the stage where the grinning lieutenant promptly informed us that the only proper way to

react to a live grenade in one's midst, whether inadvertently dropped by one of your own or thrown by the enemy, was to throw it as Pvt. "Doe" had just done. Embarrassing for us? Yes, but all except Pvt Doe had fallen for it. I still have the suspicion, however, that the private, who coincidentally happened to be assigned to battalion headquarters, was a "plant"--that he had been instructed beforehand what to do and performed accordingly.

Lt. Vandervoort became respected as one of our best combat commanders. He served as a LTC in Normandy and lost an eye in the Ardennes Campaign.

On 30 March 1943, the 505th distinguished itself at Camden, SC by making the first regimental mass jump in the history of the U.S. Army. This was the culmination of many long and strenuous hours of training and further prepared us for our ultimate destiny.

OVERSEAS

Just a few weeks later we left Fort Bragg and arrived at Camp Edwards, MA on 21 April 1944 then onto our port of embarkation at New York city, 28 April. This round-about route that we covered, so we learned later, was taken to confuse the enemy on our date of embarkation, route, destination, etc. Here we loaded on the S.S. Monterrey, a one-time luxury vessel converted to a troop ship which would take us to Casablanca, Morocco. Though originally constructed for the wealthy to cruise on the seas in luxury, by the time it had been converted into a troop ship it had become a hideous caricature of its former self. Four or five decks of bunks so closely packed that one could hardly roll over in his without hitting the man in the bunk above; and the lanes between the bunks so close one could get through only by moving sideways. And with only salt-water, for the most part, with which to bathe, the accumulated odors in time would be significant. The one consoling pleasantry from the whole ordeal was that we were now free from the ubiquitous, onerous training under the frowning glares of scrutinizing officers. But, even so, we were still required to go on deck periodically for calisthenics. Probably no one is any more cognizant than the army of how quickly one gets out of shape when leisure is prolonged.

We arrived in Casablanca 10 May, and I looked forward to visiting the city. But we were to be there only a couple days, and leaves were given to only a select few. I was not one of the select. Perhaps its just as well because, as shallow as it may sound, what I most remember about the place are the odors and its slovenly appearance while there really was much more to be appreciated. The architecture was truly unusual and indeed unique in instances as was the culture.

We departed Casablanca 12 May by 40 and 8's, a four-wheeled railway carriage made to carry 40 men or 8 horses. No chairs or stools, we sat, ate, and slept on the bare floor. There was some loose straw scattered about, a reminder that some of the previous passengers may have traveled a little more comfortably than we at the time. This mode of transportation was made famous by carrying American and other

allied forces around France during WW I. And American and other allied forces of WW II would continue this tradition when they later arrived in France.

We arrived at Dujda, a smelly town near the Algerian border about thirty miles south of the Mediterranean, two days later, 14 May, and were immediately taken to our bivouac area. Our company was assigned a particular area which was then further broken down into platoon and squad areas. The individual soldier had one-half of a pup-tent, so we were paired and two men lived in this pup-tent. We were instructed to dig a trench around the tent to keep water out of the floor when it rained. Now, can you imagine how much good a trench would do on level ground when a torrential downpour came with accompanying wind, and this occurred more than just a couple of times while we were there. The area was initially covered in wheat, but it was soon transformed into sand; so, as you can imagine, when it rained, we became water-logged; and when it was dry, we became permeated with sand. This experience, along with many more days, weeks, and months of comparable torture--and an additional thirteen years in the infantry after the war--may explain why I have never again particularly cared to engage in any manner of outdoor life. My tent-mate was an over-30, worldly-wise congenial maverick, Pfc. Daniel Kuzminski. He counseled me well on women, motorcycles, and pipe-smoking. I was very saddened when I learned that he had been killed at the Bulge.

Here we continued the training very much as before--physical exercises, night problems, assaults, defense and other such military exercises and maneuvers. When we started out in this hot desert--or, I guess more precisely, semi-desert--in the morning, we had with us only a canteen of water, and this was to last us through our whole day of exertion in the heat. "Water discipline", they called it. Most excruciating at times. Occasionally they would bring to us a listerbag full of water, well heated in the desert sun. But this was rare. Equally painful to me was the skimpy amount of food we were allowed while there. But this may have been of minor importance to most considering that many contracted malaria and yellow jaundice and I think all got dysentery at some time or another. These stresses;

however, were somewhat relieved by the surprisingly liberal pass policy. I do not remember exactly how far Oujda was from our camp, but I do know that I got to go there a few times in our month and a half stay and managed to purchase a couple of cheap, but interesting, souvenirs which I still have.

We left Oujda in early July, 1st or 2nd, by plane this time, for Kairouan, a small place in Tunisia along the Mediterranean. As we approached our destination, I remember coming across one town/city that was surrounded by a high (14-20') concrete or stucco wall. We were sternly ordered, along with an ominous warning, never to enter the place. That warning served to deepen the mystery and surely further aroused temptation in most, but as far as I know, no one yielded to it. We arrived near Kairouan about the day after we left Oujda and here we got the first chance in about a month to take a shower and to swim in the sea, not necessarily in that order; but they were both most refreshing.

Here we went into the final phases of our training, and on 8 July we were given the best meal we had in a long time. That evening, following our "last supper", we were treated to an ice-cream dinner. I believe it was made of canned milk, but I also believe it was the best I ever had. It was either shortly before this or after that we were herded to the front of a large platform where Col. Gavin gave, what I heard, was a rousing speech. I, myself, was so far away that I heard hardly anything he said. But I certainly didn't need to be "pumped up" for the big day anyway. The speech was followed by briefings and a close study of a sand table. We were now prepared for the invasion of Sicily.

Our mission was to drop north of Gela, an ancient city of 60,000 or so located on the south-eastern part of the island. Dropping the airborne troops north of the city was designed to draw the enemy troops from their defensive positions along the coast, thereby relieving pressure from the invading forces coming by sea from the south of Gela and allowing them greater freedom of movement.

SICILY (Husky)

On the morning of 9 July, we were awakened early, ate our breakfast, and then began feverishly packing our personal combat equipment while, seemingly, at the same time packing our heavier equipment-- machine guns, mortars, etc.--in separate bags which were to be dropped by heavier chutes and, in some cases, multiple chutes. These were usually thrown out by the airplane crew in the sequence of the stick as directed by the jumpmaster. Heavier cargo was often secured under the plane and released at the appropriate time.

That afternoon we were carried by truck to the airfield then marched to our designated planes. Of course, we arrived early and had to wait in the blazing sun for a considerable period of time. The shade of the wings offered some comfort, but loaded as we were with heavy equipment, it didn't take long for sweat to build up. There was little said as we waited, each was immersed in his own thoughts. There was some attempt by the officers and NCO's to boost morale by asking questions and injecting a little humor; but for the most part, I think, we just preferred to be left alone.

While lying on my main chute on the tarmac with my arms across the reserve, feeling somewhat, I imagine, like a pregnant woman and, really, trying to sleep, a couple of my superiors, an NCO and an officer, bestirred me with a tap on the shoulder. "Got something for ya, Bowman." When I struggled to my feet, they presented me with a box of .30 caliber machine gun ammo and proceeded to strap it to my chest above the reserve chute. Just what I needed. Some more weight. I had never jumped with a box of ammo on my chest before, and I had no idea how this would affect the opening of the reserve if I needed it. And they didn't either. "Probably won't need it," they said with a shrug. After instructing me how to remove the load upon landing, they moved on. Two or three other members of machine gun crews were given this additional load. As far as I know, this practice was never used either before or after this time. But I had a feeling that this one time was going to be an adventure for me.

Shortly after, we were ordered to prepare to load up. So, we moved away from the shade of the wing to the door; and with the sun still bearing down on us, we waited...and waited. In the meantime I had begun to get hungry, so I took out one of my D-rations, a fortified chocolate bar that was made so as not to melt. It would get soft, such as mine now was, but it would never melt. I began munching slowly on it in the recommended manner, then came the order to load up. I hurriedly downed the remainder of the half-melted bar (big mistake) then climbed up the steps, with some assistance, and into the plane. There we sat as the plane vibrated back and forth in its characteristic manner as the engines were revved to heat them up. Finally, the brakes were released, and we were on our way.

Little was said while in flight, rarely is, really; but even less was said now than usual. As the flight continued, the air became more and more turbulent, the ride correspondingly rougher, and the nausea of the troopers increased. They began passing paper bags around, and some took advantage of them. That D-ration I had so hurriedly consumed was also beginning to take its revenge on me, but I had always prided myself on never becoming air sick; and refused any, hoping I could last the flight out. Finally, the words, "Stand up... Hook up," came, and my nausea decreased considerably. After these commands were carried out came, "Stand in the door." I, being the assistant machine gunner, was second or third behind the jump-master and could see tracers flying in the air. After the passage of a few tense minutes (much longer than usual, so it seemed), the red light went out, the green went on, and the command, "Go", immediately followed. When I left the door, my body was supposed to retain the upright position; but because of the extra load on my chest I began tipping over head-first, a no-no for American parachutists. As the chute opened, the suspension lines grabbed my left ankle; and when the inevitable opening shock came, I thought my knee had been pulled from the socket. That was bad enough, but the potentially worse was yet to come, as I was now going down head first. I frantically worked to untangle the lines from my foot and eventually managed to do so and assume the proper landing position just as I hit one of the Sicilian's ubiquitous stone walls. (I was later told that our plane was at

only 300 to perhaps 400 feet elevation when we bailed out. If this was so, I've wondered how I could possibly have done everything I did in the short time I had after leaving the plane). At any rate, after hitting that wall I rolled over it and landed in a ditch by the side of a dirt road where machine gun tracers were flying by. I have no idea what they were firing at, but apparently it was not me since they could easily have scored a hit had they seen me. After the passage of a long period of time struggling with my harness, I finally freed myself of it; and then by hugging the low wall, reached its top and rolled over to the other side with the box of ammo still attached to my chest. Here, with greater leisure and less anxiety, I removed the box; and now, with this spectacular baptism or fire still in my mind, I prepared to join my unit.

That was easier hoped for than done. I came across troopers, but none that I knew. In time I came across several men and a lieutenant, and the officer told me to stick with them until I came across my unit. It was recognized that both the chances of survival and effective mischief against the enemy was much better in groups than would be possible by the solitary soldier. The Sicily jump was noted for the troops being widely scattered, but as I remember it, our company formed rather quickly. At the beginning, a couple then several of us came together and formed a nucleus around which others formed or some, like I, joined others until we came across our own men. We first coalesced rather much as a company then were broken down into our respective platoons and squads.

The fact that the 82nd was so scattered and disorganized gives the perception to many that the division could have accomplished little. But, as was learned later, our being scattered over much of the island coupled by the initiative taken by individual groups in sabotaging and killing in the rear echelon convinced the enemy that a much larger number of troops had landed than really did. The uncertainty and fear thus generated, so it has been appraised by some military analysts, contributed to the surrender of the enemy, particularly the Italian soldiers, in droves and the eventual collapse of the Italian resistance.

After our own company formed, we launched some effective attacks that rewarded us with considerable prisoners and few casualties to ourselves. Fortunately, throughout the Sicilian campaign, our company suffered comparatively few casualties. As we were to learn in future campaigns, such is combat. Be it any organization, battalion, company, or even platoon many of the units will suffer very heavy casualties or, indeed, be virtually wiped out while their companion units serving on the same mission will suffer little. As for ourselves in Sicily, it seemed that every time we contacted the enemy, the engagement was interrupted by the appearance of white flags. The Italians just no longer had their heart in the fight.

Shortly after the jump, I went to the medics to receive treatment for my swollen leg, and they wanted to keep me there. Being young and foolish and not wanting to miss anything, I resisted. They wrapped my leg and gave me some medication (aspirin?) and sent me on my way.

On the evening of 31 July, we were witness to a real tragedy. At the time we were positioned on high ground not far from the shore where our navy was anchored. Here, we saw planes come in and watched and cheered as our navy shot them down. The following morning we learned that in the planes that were shot down were members of our own division, the 504th Parachute Regiment coming in as reinforcements. Twenty-three transports were shot down with the loss of over 400 lives.

A day or so after this tragic event, we were ordered on a forced march to Trapani, a city about 150 miles north-west of Gela. We made this march, it has been said "non-stop." But that is not entirely true. We did rest and we did sleep, but rarely; and we were shuttled by trucks on occasions. But by any standards, it was a most grueling trek. I was still limping on my very swollen leg when we started out, but amazingly the further I walked on that leg the better it got. By the time we were in our position at Trapani, the swelling was down and the pain nearly gone. (My leg never completely recovered, however.

Though the pain and swelling went away, I later began having trouble that became increasingly worse until I was forced to undergo an operation following my discharge after the war.)

Whether by foot or by truck, the trip through the towns and villages was not pleasant. Through nearly every one of them we passed, we were exposed to powerful acrid odors so strong that they produced a burning sensation in the nostrils. In each of these towns we passed would be flat dough topped with tomato sauce baking in the sun, and atop the dough and tomato sauce would be a heavy layer of flies, sometimes so thick they concealed all beneath them. It is little wonder we were ordered never to eat any of their foods, an order that was probably superfluous as I do not believe any amongst us would have had the appetite for any of it anyway. Similarly, our water had to be treated with atabrin or some quinine-based tablets before it could be declared drinkable. Even so, malaria became a problem.

But worse than this was the sporadic but, nonetheless, intimidating strafing, one time while we were in the trucks when we quickly left them for the security of the ditches, and a couple of times while we were on foot. In all instances our casualties were few, and in all instances we had little opportunity to fire at them, if, indeed, it would have been worthwhile to have done so with rifles and .30 caliber machine guns.

We arrived at Trapani 23 July and immediately engaged in some mopping up operations, exciting at times, but the particulars of which I am now uncertain. The man on the machine gun with me loved to fire it. I don't know what he was firing at, I was too busy feeding the ammo, but the barrel got red hot and had to be changed later. (During the first two campaigns, Sicily and Italy, I was listed on the TO/E as the assistant gunner. Who the listed gunner was I don't remember. In combat, however, the official listing is not strictly adhered to, and the position of gunner/assistant gunner shifts even from one engagement to the other. Deviation in this regard becomes increasingly apparent as casualties mount and discretion assumes greater control. Gunners can become riflemen and leaders; riflemen become gunners, leaders, and

snipers in a matter of hours or less.) In these final operations we garnered a few more prisoners; but for the most part this was the end of our Sicilian campaign.

Allen L. Langdon in his "Ready" rather well summed up the airborne operation in Sicily thusly: "Although the airborne battle for Sicily had not gone according to plan, it had achieved spectacular results. General Patton (not inclined to give out unwarranted praise) stated that it speeded up the beach landings by at least two days. Even greater praise came from General Kurt Student (The German airborne expert) when after the war, he stated that if it had not been for the American parachutists, the Herman Goering Division would have pushed the beach forces back into the sea."

Although D Company casualties were light, John P. McCann in his "Passing Through" states that the division suffered over 1000 casualties of which 239 were fatalities. In Italy the number of casualties would double, and so the casualties would continue to increase as we deepened our advance into Europe.

At this point I am no longer certain of the movements of our regiment except from what I have read. After the Sicilian campaign, I was sent to the hospital for malaria, and when and where I rejoined D Company, I have no idea, but the data I have shows that after the conclusion of the Sicilian Campaign, 17 August, the unit was returned to Kairouan, on 20 August, presumably to await decisions by the high command concerning our next mission and to begin our training for it. On 5 September, we returned to Sicily, to prepare for a jump into Italy. Unknown to the rank-and-file, of course, the generals were hectically reviewing numerous options, including dropping us several miles north of Naples, just south of the Volturno River (Code-named Giant I) and a more spectacular drop near Rome (Giant II). Several other operations were considered but none came to fruition. The most daring and perilous of these was the projected jump on the environs of Rome. From what I have read, the 504th Regiment was to be dropped 8 September and the 505th the following day. On the 8th, however, as

the 504 was loading up, the command received word that the Italian underground would be unable to fulfill its commitments; so that mission was canceled, just in time so it seems. It has been said we were close to making either "monumental history or being annihilated." Actually, in either event I suppose we'd made history.

The latter proposed operation being cancelled, the leaders of the 82nd., so it seems, resigned themselves to sitting out the Italian campaign. Then the 5th Army, which had spearheaded the beach landings in Italy near Paestum, on the Gulf of Salerno, got bogged down; and a German counterattack threatened to push the allied forces back into the sea. Faced with that threat, the commander, Gen. Mark Clark, requested that paratroopers be dropped in as reinforcements. So came about the 82nd's participation in Operation Avalanche.

ITALY (Code Name: Avalanche)

On 14 September, the 504th Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division dropped to the east of Paestum, a coastal town just off the Bay of Salerno near Paestum on 13 September. The regiment immediately went into action, and the men's resolute aggressiveness removed the enemy pressure from the 5th Army; therefore, when the 505 dropped at the same place the following day, there was little for them to do except some policing up. This was to be by far the easiest of the four combat jumps that we made--the jump itself was, in fact, easier than some of our practice jumps. In Sicily, D company suffered only a few casualties from artillery fire and strafing and even less by armed encounters. The most notable of the latter was that of Lt. John Sprinkle who was killed while loading a charge on one of their many block houses. He was posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic action.

In Italy, the fighting and resultant casualties were to be even less than in Sicily--that is, for our company anyway. Unfortunately, though, many of the other elements of the 82nd suffered much greater losses when, by happenstance, opposed by more determined troops. The 504 Regiment, for one, was to suffer severe losses and hardships in their two-months' engagement at Anzio while we were on ship in comparative safety heading toward the United Kingdom. But the real harshness of war was to hit us later. As sort of a tradeoff, I guess, while we were later suffering through the high casualties and the tortures of the Normandy Campaign, members of the '04 would be enjoying milds and bitters with the lassies of Merry Ol' England.

After we assembled following the jump, we took up a defensive position on Mount Soprano. There, we were initially exposed to some shelling and strafing that resulted in a few minor casualties. Aside from that we became exposed to the hardships associated with logistic problems. Because of the inclement weather, the command was unable to keep us supplied with the essential goods including rations. Of course, by this time I was no longer a growing boy, but I still had the appetite of one, and I became hungry. And in time so did the

others. In consequence, one of the more enterprising among us, George Beauvac, who had by now acquired the reputation of excelling in such exploits, came across one of the natives passing by and induced him, for a price of course, to prepare some chickens for us. Well, raised on the farm I had seen too much of the bad in chickens, and for some reason, unlike most people, it turned me against them. Actually, I couldn't even stand the smell of them. But I had no say-so in what was to be ordered. In time the farmer and his son brought the boiled chickens to us, complete with heads and feet--a sight which would have repelled me at any other time. But this time I dug in and devoured my share of the meal--maybe even a little more--with greater alacrity than I would any of gourmet quality since amidst the bantering of others who were aware of my distaste for the birds.

After a week of comparative peace and quite and rest at this mount, we were ordered to Naples, about 40 miles or more to the north west. In the movement we encountered only minor resistance, the usual shelling and strafing. Our most daunting obstacles on this march were the mountains. For the final leg of the trip, we were carried in British lorries to near Naples, but for the earlier many long miles, we were forced to struggle over what was variously known as the Lower Apennines, Western Apennines, and Antiapennines which ran along the western coast of Italy. Though not as exhausting as what we encountered in Sicily, they were challenging. We would march up those mountains for what seemed like hours then we'd come to a point where the incline lessened, and we would think, "now, at last we start down," then after turning a curve, we would see the incline again gradually--or sharply--increasing. Time after time, after time such would be our disappointment.

There was a time on this march when we stopped to bivouac deep in the woods. We stopped earlier than usual, long even before dusk, and apparently a long distance from the front lines as no combat discipline was ordered. While meandering around leisurely preparing our meals (we always heated our K-rations when possible), we spotted a young pig a short distance away and thought about how fresh pork would be a welcome relief from our usual fare of K-rations. So three of

us--Julius Eisner, another man, and myself--decided to put thought into action. After some struggle, we caught the pig and, after an even greater struggle (it was quite a large young pig), managed to cut its throat and then... well, by about this time the whole platoon had heard about it and one-by-one they gathered to share it and in anticipation assisted us in butchering and frying it. While we waited for it to cook, some of the men pointed to an Italian farmer walking rapidly and resolutely toward our company headquarters. How this man ever learned where our headquarters was, I don't know, but he was heading there anyway. Most of the platoon now became uneasy, particularly we three culprits. Shortly, a couple of our officers came down and began asking embarrassing questions. In the end, we three guilty parties payed the farmer for the pig; and then portions of the pig were passed to all members of the company with direct orders given them not to share any part of it with the perpetrators of the crime. We perpetrators ate K-rations as wry comments circulated about a couple of Jews slaughtering an Italian hog. (Incidentally, by way of an apology, none of us involved was aware there would be any repercussions, or at any rate, any significant repercussions, for killing the pig of an enemy, and the Italians, we thought, were still technically our enemy at the time. Another thing, wherever one looked near a battlefield, one would usually see bloated carcasses of cattle lying around, mostly victims of American weapons). Nevertheless, we were soon to become more enlightened on the rules of warfare.

The following morning, much to our relief, we were taken to idling lorries which carried us to almost the remaining distance to Naples--actually to the foot of another large mountain just to the south of Naples where they dumped us in pouring rain. Here we, now a bunch of disgruntled troopers, began our ascent; and the further we went, the harder the rain fell and the stronger the wind blew. As we neared the summit, flashes of lightening and claps of thunder became indistinguishable from the artillery fire. The torrential downpour that soon hit us, combined with the ebony blackness of the night, made it actually impossible to see anything not directly in front of us. This was about when I heard a commotion--a struggle--some distance to my rear. While I slowly wended my way toward the source, the cacophony

of the struggle was interrupted by joviality and haranging between men. I had no idea what went on, but the following morning, those involved, Frank Silanskis, Stanley Kotlarz, William Bennett, and a couple of others, explained they heard movements of what they thought were Germans below one of the vertical terraces and sought to capture them, only to discover that they were cows. I don't know how amusing that incident really was, but because of the way they explained it to us that morning, it became a subject of much hilarity for some time in the company. Shortly after, we were guided to our positions; and after being informed of the security arrangements, were given the liberty of going to sleep. Thanks! Since the storm lasted nearly throughout that chilly night; and since we had only our rain coats or ponchos for cover, I'm sure no one of us got a lot of sleep. I know that the one time that I did begin to doze off, I was awakened for guard duty.

The next day was clear, and we went into town unopposed among cheering crowds with (excuse the cliché) people leaning out the windows and dancing in the streets. More than just a couple of times I witnessed young women being led among the jeering citizenry with their hair shorn and their heads bowed in shame, the age-old punishment for cavorting with the enemy. I've sometimes wondered about the irony of that since the Germans, at the time the fraternization took place, were their allies and the Americans were their enemies. How the fortunes of war and the fickle fates of people so intertwine.

We were allowed only a couple of days enjoyment among the Neopolitan citizenry, when, 4 October, our commander, Col. Gavin was given an urgent call to relieve certain British and American forces at the front. Two battalions, the 2nd, to which I belonged, and the 1st, in that order, were sent to just south of the Volturno River while the 3rd battalion was held in reserve. We encountered some heavy opposition at first. In fact, we again burned up our machine gun barrel (I don't remember who was on the gun with me at this time but believe it was my old mentor, Daniel Kuzminski), then settled into a defensive position. After things settled down, we received a replacement barrel which we quickly installed but used it very little after that at this position. One of the greater hazards here were the numerous

enemy mines. Our medical officer, Capt. Stein, and his driver were slightly injured when their ambulance was destroyed by one, and two other men, an officer and his driver, were killed after hitting one. There were also several personnel casualties from the mines of which I do not know the particulars. Though the casualties in our company were light, Company F of our battalion, took the brunt of a counter-attack and was hit with a nearly fifty percent loss; and what was so unusual, a disproportionate number of these casualties were fatalities. On 8 October, we were relieved by the British and trucked back to police Naples until late November in what amounted to about a five-week R & R (Rest and Recreation).

On 18 November, we packed up and left our quarters at Naples and boarded the large, attack transport ship, the USS Frederick Funston, named after a Spanish American and World War I general. (General Funston was much castigated by many, as reflected in Mark Twain's Damned Human Race, because of his alleged responsibility for atrocities committed in the Philippines while under the command of General Douglas McArthur. Apparently, however, the general has been considered a hero without blemish by most.) Of course, we were never told where we were going, so, of course, that generated a breeding ground for rumors--from the ridiculous, that we would be returned to the States to inculcate into others our combat experiences (after two minor campaigns, mind you!), to the "absolutely absurd": that we would be going to the United Kingdom where we would begin training for the invasion of Europe.

UNITED KINGDOM

By the time we were ordered onto the Frederick Funston, voyages on the water were becoming about as routine as flights in the air. The accommodations, food, ordeals, etc. were all about the same. Though the troop ships lacked amenities, the troops were allowed much more leisure. But, of course, not all our time could be devoted to leisure. After all, we were combat soldiers, so we had to stay in shape. Almost daily the units were staggered to go on deck for the usual military exercises. I must add, also, that this trip differed in one respect from any other sea voyage I have taken. When we left Naples, we went to Oran where we anchored for a week, then we again departed to Ireland (although at this time we still didn't know where we were going). Shortly after, somewhere between Oran and Gibraltar, we ran into a ferocious storm, the worst I ever experienced on ship. At the meal immediately preceding the storm, the cooks fed us sour-kraut. Can you imagine? The crew, including the cooks, I'm sure knew we were heading for a storm, yet they fed us landlubbers sourkraut. I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

For some time it looked more and more as though that first rumor--that we were to go to the states, for whatever reason--was true. For day after day for several days the convoy we were in pushed on in a direct westerly direction. Then it suddenly turned north, to the delight of some, to the disappointment of others, and to the shrug of, probably, the most. We arrived at Belfast and debarked 9 December 1943.

Belfast looked like a nice place to stay for awhile. But we didn't get to stay for awhile. We were immediately trucked 60 miles or more to where quonset huts were set in deep woods near Cookstown. As the crow flies, the distance may be three-quarters of that or less, but an oblong lake spreads out almost directly between the two cities. The lake is situated such that whether one travels north of it or to the south of it the distance between the cities would be nearly equal. Ireland is worthy of being called the "Emerald Isles." Everything green, even the slag along the side of the roads, in stark contrast to

what we encountered in North Africa and even southern Italy. Because of the long nights and short days and the abundant cold rain and snow, we were required to do little training. The primary goal of the command, it seemed, was to keep us in shape with constant exercising. Under Lt. Col. Batcheller, who had replaced Col. Gavin as regimental commander before we had left Italy, we enjoyed more leisure time than we ever had before. We were free on most evenings to go to the delightful little place called Cookstown, within walking distance of our camp; and on weekends, we could often take advantage of the liberal pass policy to travel to the large city of Belfast. On one of my visits to Cookstown, I purchased a Peterson pipe with the name "Cookstown" engraved on it.

On my first pass to Belfast I stopped at the USO Club for a meal. There at the cash register was what I thought to be a sadistic teller who delighted in torturing newcomers by making the complicated British monetary system to be more complicated than was really necessary. At that time the Brits had pounds, shillings, pennies and half-pennies, and farthings. (British pennies, it should be mentioned, were worth more than their American counterparts). When I arrived in front of him with my tray, he rapidly announced in his heavy Irish brogue the price which went something like, "pound, three, two hapence." (one pound, three shillings, two pennies and a half a penny--I believe). Having been exposed very little to the Irish brogue, I asked him to repeat it--several times, and several times he did, without variance in tone, dynamics, tempo, or facial expression. Finally, feeling impatient eyes boring upon me from behind, and out of plain frustration I pulled out some currency and indicated that he take what was necessary. This, he proceeded to do all too willingly. He followed the same ritual with the man behind me. I sometimes wondered how much he profited by suckering individuals such as me into blindly laying down their money so he could take his "fair" share.

I went to Belfast a couple of more times after that and to Cookstown several times. The best tour of duty for me since I entered the Airborne, so it was with some disappointment when I learned in early February that we were to move. This view was not shared by all, however.

The cold, dreary winter weather of Ireland, to which I was inured and thoroughly enjoyed, was just too cold and dreary for some, particularly those raised in the sun-belt.

Around 13 February we were trucked to Belfast where we boarded a British ship which carried us to somewhere in Scotland. From there we were taken by train to Leicester, England and then trucked from there, fifteen or twenty miles, to what became known as "Tent City" at Quarn. To any of us who regretted leaving Ireland, we soon realized that there was no need for that regret. England was great also. And the numerous towns and cities were closer, the people just as accommodating, and the girls more plentiful.

There was one big drawback though, in a way, and to explain this we need to go back to Italy. At the end of the Italian campaign, Col. Gavin was promoted to Brigadier General and became the executive officer, or second in command, to the division commander, Major General Ridgeway. Lt. Col. Batcheller, who had been the regimental executive officer, then became the new regimental commander of 505 and served in that capacity while we were in Ireland. In England, however, Batcheller was transferred to become the regimental commander of the 508th Parachute Regiment (He was killed in Normandy serving in that capacity) and was replaced as the 505 Regimental Commander by Col. Ekman. With the change in command, training again began in all earnestness. Maneuvers, double-timing, sleeping on frozen ground all again became part of the routine. And with training, comes accidents--injuries and even fatalities particularly from practice jumps. In one case, for example, Capt. John D. Rice, who had been our company commander since Fort Benning, was transferred to B Company after we arrived in England; and there, while conducting maneuvers, the plane he was in collided with another killing him and several others.

Here at this time, the food we were served was better than usual and passes were given freely, but the extra emphasis on training and keeping in shape coupled with the liberal issuance of equipment as numerous rumors swirled about indicated to us that something big was coming up.

NORMANDY (Overlord)

On the morning of late May 29 or 30, 1944, word was passed down through our pyramidal tents, our home for the past three and a half months, to pack up and prepare to move out. No one told us then. No one had to tell us. We knew the "Big Day" was nigh. All passes and other liberties were cancelled, and we were warned under threat of dire consequences if any left camp. A day or two later we were transported by buses to the Cottesmore Airport and billeted in huge hangars. There we were taken to sand tables and given one briefing after another regarding our missions after the jump. We learned at this time that our regiment would be the only one of the airborne regiments with combat experience that would be making this crucial jump to free Europe, and that it would be made in Normandy. The 504, our companion regiment, had spent much time fighting at Anzio and was in no condition to participate in any further action at this time.

Our "last meal" was given on the 5th of June as that was the date initially set for the invasion. It was probably the best we ever had in the army till that time. Even better than most Christmas dinners. However, because of inclement weather, D-Day was set up one day; and the real "last" meal was only so-so at best.

As we approached France, flak began flashing around before the order to "standup" came; and when we stood in the door, it looked even more ominous, though, as far as I know, none came dangerously close to our plane. On this jump, I was to have a rather unsettling experience. This time I was placed right behind the jumpmaster who usually would be our platoon leader, Lt. McClean, or our platoon sergeant, or some other officer or high-ranking NCO within the company. But this time, the jumpmaster was an officer whom I'd never seen before, so presumed he was either a recent replacement or, perhaps, one from a different unit. Normally, as we approach the D2 (drop zone), the jumpmaster would look out the door, and at the appropriate time by his estimation, give the word to standup and hookup. This accomplished, he goes down the line inspecting each member and assure that all are hooked up. Following this, he

returns to the front of the stick, hooks up, stands in the door, and prepares to jump when the green light comes on. This standard procedure, our jumpmaster followed; but after standing in the door, he pulled back as though suddenly thinking of something, mumbled to me or a crew member standing nearby, then disconnected his line and, I believe, went to the rear of the plane. Now I, a Pfc., at the front of the stick. But I'd seen jumpmasters do that before during practice jumps and then would return to their position before the green light came on, so I really didn't think too much of it. Then, the red light went out and the green light came on. I was wholly unprepared for this and was uncertain what to do. But the heavy pressure pushing on my back and the impatient gesture from a crew member made the decision easy for me. I figured that some explanation would be forthcoming sometime after landing. Not so. After landing, everything, as usual, became hectic, and I never heard anything more about it or of the officer. And this rather well attests to his making the jump. If he had not made it, then there would have been a lot of questions, I'm sure.

After my chute deployed, I saw tracers on the ground, which I was sure were those of the enemy since we were among the first of the allied forces to hit France. I do not know where I landed, but I know it was not where I was supposed to have been. In parachute jumps things rarely turn out as planned, and this situation certainly applied to me on this jump. From the beginning I noticed I was for some reason drifting away from the others in my stick and slipping my chute was of little help in correcting the problem. I landed in a hedgerow where I hit, probably, a tree which momentarily knocked the breath out of me. (Incidentally, those "hedgerows" so ubiquitous in Normandy and so widely talked about is a misnomer. They were, and are, full-grown rows of trees, some actually quite large, often with a heavy growth of underbrush.) Upon recovering and disentangling myself from the suspension lines, and the brush, and the harness (the quick-disconnect harness, long used by the British, had not yet been issued to us), I emerged from the hedgerow.

By this time, the planes had passed, and I was completely dis-oriented as we were instructed at the briefings to use them as a guide to our point of rendezvous. I do not know how long I searched for my unit and for the equipment bag where the machine gun and ammo were. I found what I thought was our equipment bag, but it was emptied of its contents as I sort of expected it to be. Inquiries of others about the location of D Company were fruitless as they were as confused as I. I no longer remember how I reached my unit, or for sure how long it took. I remember it was night--the following night so it would had to have been approximately twenty-four hours. I know I had become hungry and thirsty during this search, but those I ran across were generous in sharing my needs. By the time I reached my unit, I had been challenged many times and approached it warily and with some trepidation as men under these conditions are inclined to become "trigger-happy". As I approached my unit, I heard a muffled "halt" and the closing of an M-1 bolt. That's something one does not forget. Whether I answered the challenge with the "cricket", given to us before we left England for that purpose, or with the more conventional sign-counter-sign I don't know. After the challenging duel was over I was, with great relief, escorted to my squad. As difficult as it was for me to locate my company, there were several who arrived much later than I.

I also witnessed the tragic landing of the gliders of the 325th Regiment. Whether this happened before or after I rejoined my company, I am unsure (I remember many events but am often uncertain of their sequence). But watching the gliders come in was a truly tragic and depressing sight. One by one as they came in, they would almost invariably crash into one of the hedgerows. Inside would be a mass of heavy weapons, equipment and flesh crushed together. The frustration to the witnesses and the would-be rescuers was compounded by the fact that there was little or nothing men with bare hands could do to alleviate their suffering.

Less than an hour after returning to my unit, we became involved in a short but active skirmish along hedgerows in which we used the ditch for protection. This engagement was primarily a contest of

small arms with numerous flares shot up by both sides. Some time later we glimpsed, from the light of these flares, movements of the enemy withdrawing. Cease fire was called and soon thereafter we were ordered to move out. I do not believe we suffered any casualties in this encounter though numerous bullets ricochet around us. The enemy casualties were unknown, but prisoners were taken.

We must have entered and left the city we landed near several times, because I recall seeing the sign "Ste Mere Eglis" on different occasions. The sight of a road leading into the town has been burned into my memory. We went down it, possibly three times. The first couple times, there was nothing extraordinary. The last time, however, as we trudged down the road, there were soldiers in both sides of the ditches--airborne, infantry, American, and some German--lying head to toe for a considerable distance into the town. This may have been the outcome of one of the battles in which our unit participated that I'll talk about later.

Early in the Normandy campaign our machine gun crew was instructed to take up a defensive position on a dirt road somewhere on the outskirts of Ste Mere Eglis that was running parallel to a hedgerow. "Rebel" Haynes and I were on the gun. Pfc's John Daly, George Beauvac, Chaisson, and others were with us. Our squad leader, Cpl. Roy King, double-timed us down to our position. Daly dropped the ammo and he and the others took up positions on our flanks. As soon as Haynes and I were in place we caught sight of Germans scurrying at a distance in the high grass; we hurriedly set up our gun and began firing and received fire from several sources--mortar, artillery, rifle--in return. Return fire was rapidly increasing when a runner came by telling us to pull back, with haste. The men on our left were given the word, and they rushed passed us as Daly stopped to pick up the ammo and Haynes and I hefted the tripod and machine gun. We quickly moved back along the dirt road from which we had so recently come. As stated earlier, the road was parallel to a hedgerow; and as we continued up the road we ran across a short clearing in the hedgerow where, just a few feet to my left on the opposite of the ditch, I saw a German moving in the opposite direction at a good clip. We

glanced at each other and kept going. Figure, I had a 30 odd pound gun on my shoulder and Haynes with the tripod was several yards behind; and the German appeared equally encumbered. Anyway, at the pace we were traveling, we could hardly have nodded at each other if so inclined. After arriving at our point of rendezvous, a quick accounting disclosed that Daly was missing. I believe someone was sent back to look for him while the remainder of us were taken to a new defensive position. We learned later that a mortar shell had landed directly on his back. Apparently, he had hit the ground to evade shrapnel from a previous mortar shell, or from an artillery round, when he had become a victim to that one. A rarity indeed.

Shortly after this action, we were back near the same area only further to the right, just past the extent of the hedgerow that had previously served as a cover. There we could see Germans at varying distances of a hundred to two-hundred yards. We took our positions in a shallow ditch and began firing bursts. In time we ran short of ammo; so I took the opportunity of a lull to go to the rear to pick up a couple of boxes. On the way back, something inexplicable happened. I was crossing an open field surrounded by scattered trees with a box of ammo in each hand and was within sight of our position when the next thing I knew I was lying on the ground. I was dizzy, had a headache, and neck pain. Actually I believe I hurt all over. I tried to get up and fell, about like a punch-drunk boxer. After I did get up I looked for my helmet and couldn't find it immediately so continued on with the ammo to our position. (That helmet, which I had from my first days in the airborne, I never did find. I found a replacement later.) When I arrived at the position, awkwardly crawling with the two cans, Haynes was still serving as assistant gunner feeding the belt into the gun, and Beauvac was lying in the shallow ditch firing it. The ammo was about gone. Both were excited and irritated and were sharp with their inquiries as to where I had been and what had taken so long. They also exclaimed that several men had been hit. I don't think I even bothered answering them or commenting on the casualties. I just picked up Beauvac's rifle and went to a rifle position to fill in for one that had been hit; and from there, I fired away until cease fire was called.

I am not certain how this bit of action was terminated other than after the Germans withdrew we ceased fire and were relieved by a British infantry unit who, presumably, were to press an assault. Here, for me at this time as a private who just followed orders of those who supposedly knew, things became quite confusing. While waiting for our next orders mortar shells began to rain upon us. Fortunately, the source of these shells, evidently, were from the feckless German 50mm mortars because they merely stirred up dirt that only powdered our trousers with dust but doing no other damage--for the most part. One man did get hit, but apparently the wound was superficial since he returned to us before the day was over. Small enough damage considering the large number of shells that exploded at such close proximity. After this, came strident orders by redfaced officers and NCO's, using very colorful language, to spread out, concluding with the tiresome cliché, "One round'll get you all". Shortly after, we were removed to another area.

Now to return to my own strange experience and explain my own analysis of what occurred when I was knocked to the ground: I am not sure; but I believe, that a bullet from a sniper (there were some in the area, and a few men had been hit by them) may have just nicked my helmet with sufficient force to stun me momentarily. The headache and the stiff neck would seem to confirm that.

At any rate, the pain continued, so one time during our company's perpetual peregrinations, we passed a medical aid station, and I decided to run over for treatment. As I neared the place, however, I saw the medics working feverishly over badly butchered soldiers and instantly had second thoughts about continuing on to complain about a pain in the neck. I returned to the unit and later received pills (aspirins?) from the company medic. After taking a few of these, the pain gradually subsided.

Here, again now, although I recall most of the battles, I am unsure of the sequences in which they occurred. And so with this next one, a combined infantry-tank attack which developed into the most heated encounter in which I participated in Normandy. The first

memory I have of this battle is that we were walking in a very broad front parallel to and several yards from the right of a road on which tanks were traveling. I do not know, never did know, how broad our front was--company/battalion--but we were on the left flank, and tanks were interspersed between us as far to the right as I could see or hear. We were moving forward while under constant artillery and small-arms fire. The resistance was so heavy that we could move only in spurts. We'd hit the ground, open fire, get up, rush forward a short distance, and hit the ground again (There is a term for this type of maneuver, but I can't think of it now). A few men were hit during these movements. Some just lay there; others limped to the rear. Tanks continued to move laboriously on the road to our left flank, and I could hear the rumble of tanks to our right.

At some point in this movement, Haynes and I were ordered to direct our machine gun fire to complement that of the machine gunners to our right, Pvt. Donald Mac Phee and Pfc Thomas Byrd. Enemy fire from several sources continued and, in fact, may have increased. After a passage of time, I heard Byrd yelling "Mac Phee"! "Mac Phee"! (I learned later that both had been killed around that time. I have often been curious about the circumstances of their deaths and the cryptic shouts of Byrd, but inquiries on that have been futile).

As we continued our advance, 88 fire from the enemy tanks increased, and for a considerable distance we were forced to endure the sight of burning tanks and their hapless crews. One would see tankers, mostly German, I believe, but also many Americans, draped over the turrets burning atop their burning tanks. No quarter was given on either side as would be expected under these conditions. When the tanks were disabled and the surviving crews attempted to abandon them, the opposing forces would mercilessly cut the men down.

Some time later, Haynes was hit and went to the rear, I believe without assistance. He was replaced by another man, can't recall who it was. In fact, I can't remember much of what happened from this time on in this encounter or how we finally disengaged. I know that

as the advance continued, opposing fire decreased until we were threatened only by artillery and mortar shells; but for some distance we endured the sight of burning tanks and the fates of their hapless crews.

A day or so after this engagement, on our way to another assault, we passed through a large town or small city not far from where the previous day's battle had taken place. I do not remember the name of it now, if I ever did know, and I mention it only because of the magnitude of its destruction. The place was leveled. The whole area was literally leveled. I never saw anything like it before or since. I don't think anything in that small city was above knee high.

At one time during our foray in Normandy, shortly before we were pulled out, we were taken to a defensive position where "second-hand" fox-holes were at our disposal. The former occupants, whoever they were, had dug good foxholes, so that gave us some time to relax. No longer on the move or required to prepare defensive positions, we could shave and clean up--sort of. Actually, washing oneself from a helmet-full of cold water is not the recommended way to bathe, but it beat by a long shot anything we were able to do before. And we received C-rations instead of the usual K's, another improvement of sorts. Although our new position was a sedentary one, we still had problems. Mortar shells continued to be lobbed in, and the shrill whistle and raucous explosions of the ever-dangerous 88's always posed a threat. Not posing a threat but most displeasing were several cows to our front, three or four. They had been killed some time before, and now their stench was overpowering. Incidentally, it was not all that unusual to have emplacements not far from decaying animals, including humans, but never as close as they were this time. And what made it even worse is that before we were pulled out a shell landed near one of the cows causing it to burst open. That resulted in the putrid sight and burning stench to increase by several fold. Needless to say, this did nothing for our appetite while trying to down the beef in our C-ration. Also lying with the cows initially were a couple of Krauts in the same state of decay, but they were

humanely removed shortly after our arrival. Really thankful I wasn't "volunteered" for that detail.

As uncomfortable as this was, a more disturbing matter were the in-coming shells from some high trajectory weapon. Never learned what it was; but periodically and strangely, as though by automation, every few hours a barrage of several shells would drop in a convex semi-circle in front of us. And this created a serious concern for us since it appeared that if the gunners simply elevated their weapon a couple of degrees they would make a direct hit, on us; and I can't think of anything more demoralizing than a shell landing right beside you in your foxhole. And a shell from a high-trajectory weapon can do that. Therefore, when our platoon leader, Lt. Mc Clean, came by inspecting our position, we asked him about that threat. He brushed off our concerns with a wave of the hand and assured us that they would never get any closer and walked off. We never learned how he came up with that info and could assure us of our safety with such certitude. But he was right. Throughout our stay here the explosions from those shells never veered significantly from that one pattern. All we had to do when we heard the shells come in was get down in our foxholes and remain there until the debris stopped flying. Now, the next logical question: "What did the Germans hope to accomplish by squandering their valuable shells so promiscuously?" Privates and Pfc's apparently are just not privy to such information. And I'm still curious about how the lieutenant acquired his info, and why the Germans could not elevate their big guns.

We eventually became accustomed to the periodic interruptions, then BB's started coming in varying volleys at unpredictable times and aroused us to greater alertness. Eighty-eights were high-velocity, flat-trajectory shells, comparable in these respects to the shell from an M-1 rifle, as a result shrapnel from the explosion could arrive before we heard the shell arriving. These weapons, in fact, are generally considered by weapons experts to have been the most lethal of weapons against personnel, whether on ground or in tanks, in the German arsenal. And, in fact, it is usually conceded that they were

superior to anything the allies had or would ever come up with during the war. It killed several of our men while we were at this position. One of the men was an old-timer. That is he was with us from the beginning, and he was killed along with another man in the same ditch that they both had jumped into for cover. The old one had just married a school teacher before he left the states. Another old-timer from our platoon, in the mortar squad, Pfc. Davis, who had also married just before we left the states, was killed by an 88 while we were at that position as were several others.

I, myself, was also hit while we were here. But it was not the heroic type of hit that merited a purple heart. In fact, the experience was downright embarrassing. We had been in this position for some time and had become inured to the periodic shelling to our front and even the sporadic explosions of the 88's. We became relaxed. Obviously, as we would soon learn, too relaxed. At the particular time of this event, I was sitting on the gentle slope of a low hill just above our emplacement with another trooper eating C-rations and conversing in general. The other man on the gun had the good sense to remain in his foxhole. Suddenly we heard the scream of an in-coming 88. Knowing instinctively that we could not hope to reach our foxholes in time, we just flattened ourselves where we were. This shell landed much closer than most of them had; and immediately after the explosion, or possibly even before, I felt a sharp pain in my leg. I said, or yelled, "I've been hit." The assistant gunner yelled for the medic, and this was echoed by the man near me. The medic rushed over and looked at my leg. The boot was rent, and the sock frayed but no sign of blood. That was a relief to me, and, I'm sure, to the others as we were becoming short of personnel by this time. After removing both articles, we found only minor abrasions, more like "strawberries" so familiar to paratroopers, but no break in the skin. I'm sure I was red-faced as I apologized. The medic just brushed it aside as though my peccadillo was nothing all that unusual and left. A bruise and some pain that soon disappeared was all I incurred. Embarrassing? Of course. But damn, when that piece of shrapnel hit, I thought it had torn my leg off. My embarrassment was

somewhat allayed later when I learned that an officer went through a similar commotion when he was hit but not wounded.

At one time, toward the end of the Normandy campaign, there was a lull in the fighting. Whether we were in the rear in reserve at the time or whether it was one of those respites that occurred from time to time I am now unsure. At any rate, a rumor circulated here that George Beauvac, whom we affectionately called "Bivouac", for obvious reasons, was to be returned to the States; and in time, the rumor was confirmed to be true.

Why that came to pass has always been a mystery to me. His health, as far as I knew was good--in fact he was to live for over another forty-five years--and he was unmarried, so there could have been no complications from that quarter.

George Beauvac was well liked in the company, disciplined and dependable. He had an extraordinary gift of gab and was an excellent scrounger, somehow able to bring to his squad members extra food and other amenities. I said "he had a gift of gab". In army terms, that meant he was a good bull-shitter." He was on the machine-gun with me occasionally or positioned near our emplacement; and at the times we got together he often waxed eloquent on his girlie conquests, motorcycle exploits, or whatever. At times we may have been a little skeptical about the veracity of much of what he said, but the tales were always entertaining. They were, at the least, good fiction.

So now that Pvt. Beauvac had orders to be returned to the States, did he like Pvt. Ryan protest this decision made by the U.S. Government, emphatically declaring his wish to remain with his old comrades? No way. Like the most of us, had we been in his position, he was not about to jeopardize his present fortunate opportunity with bravados.

I had earlier loaned him some money; and after he had packed and was ready to leave, he glanced over to me with a wry smile and said, "I'll send you your money as soon as I get to the States, Bowman." Of

course, I knew the rascal wouldn't; and he didn't. His last words to us were a chuckle, "see you later suckers." He turned and walked away amidst good-natured haranguing and quickly disappeared over the crest of a low hill.

On 8 July, we were relieved by an infantry unit and hauled to our last position in Normandy. It was a large, gentle sloping hill with sparse vegetation. Yellow from the clay was the most prominent color. Only occasional shells came in, enough to remind us a war was still going on. Casualties were rare, but they did occur. One of them was Sgt. John Razumich whom I saw being led to the rear with a gaping wound where his bicep had been. He was returned to the States.

Just as in my discussion of Sicily and Italy we engaged in more fighting than I am relating here because of lapse of memory. I know, for example, that we engaged in house-to-house combat at least once, but I do not remember the details sufficiently to warrant writing it down.

After a short stay at the above mentioned position, we were moved to a beach and loaded onto LST's which returned us to England on 13 July. There we resumed our trips into the surrounding towns picking up where we had left off in our visits to the local towns and cities; lounging around and throwing darts in the jolly ol' pubs, and frolicing with the local damsels. But on a more serious note, we also picked up where we had left off on our training; and that was just as harsh as anything we had experienced before. Of course we, the low-rankers, that is, did not know it at the time; but we were preparing for a new invasion--the jump into Holland, operation Market Garden.

HOLLAND (Market Garden)

The jump on Holland was another daylight combat jump; and with no flak while in the air, and no significant enemy opposition immediately after landing. The jump itself was unspectacular and uneventful. But this was to be only the calm before the storm.

Upon landing we assembled at our designated areas without the confusion we experienced on a couple of our previous combat jumps. We hastened off the DZ and began our movement to Nijmegen, but somewhere along the way, we ran into some rather heavy fire near the outskirts of the city. I don't recall much else of this encounter, but we did suffer some casualties. The next thing I remember, we had our machine-gun set up within the city facing the Waal River not far from The bridge. To our immediate rear were residential homes, immaculate and imposing. The people came out and greeted us. They were exceedingly friendly and conversed with us in English. Many, if not most, could speak it very well.

We exchanged delicacies; though, of course, they had little to offer, we gave chocolates and tobacco products, mostly from C-rations, freely. We compared tobacco products--some of the men had cigars--and I sensed that they were not particularly impressed with ours which should not be surprising, I guess, since GI's were given only the cheaper machine-made type. They, apparently, even under German occupation, were used to something better.

One notable exception to their friendliness was the umbrage they manifested when we called or referred to them as "Dutch". "No, no, we not Deutsch!" they invariably and indigently protested. "Ve Nederlandsch. Deutsch over der", they would say pointing to the south. (Of course, we now know that the people we call "German" call themselves "Deutsch". It is interesting in this regard to note that the Pennsylvania Dutch are actually of German descent. Why the Americans came to call the Netherlanders "Dutch" I have never known. At any rate, when my wife and I were over there on June '04 during the six-

eth anniversary of Normandy, I asked a few of them if they were now offended to be called "Dutch" and they replied that they were not. "Gut people," they replied. The ones I queried, however, were of the younger generation, so I'm not sure if these sentiments are universal over there.)

But this pacific congeniality we were enjoying was short as German artillery quickly began its vengeful work. Glass, brick, and wood from the stately structures rained on us along with shrapnel. Few were the American soldiers who did not suffer along with the "Dutchmen" over their losses despite experiencing casualties themselves from the merciless 88's. A small sliver of glass or other debris hit my hand causing a little blood to appear. The smart-ass assistant on my gun, probably thinking of the embarrassing goof I made in Normandy, suggested I call the medics. I ignored the sarcasm. By the time we had left our position here, many of the residences of the people who had so warmly welcomed us here had, to our dismay, been badly damaged or destroyed and they, themselves, were removed to a more secure area.

An equally troubling emotional experience occurred at the environs of Nijmegen. I have no idea when it took place sequentially in our numerous encounters at Holland, but we were ensconced defensively in another residential area where 6-bys churned up beautifully manicured lawns. The residents here did not seem to welcome us as amiably as the previous ones. Suddenly, there came into view a large, low-flying American bomber. We could hear the engines cutting in and out as the pilot struggled with them. It initially appeared that it was coming directly at us. Then it veered a little to the left then made a sharp left turn, steadily losing altitude as it disappeared behind the trees and houses. Seconds later we saw a plume of smoke arising at a distance behind the trees, and this was shortly followed by the sound of a crash and an explosion. Witnessing the loss of the American crew and reflecting on their own feelings as they faced certain death, deeply affected us at the time. We knew none could have survived as the plane was much too low for any to have bailed out.

Another unfortunate event that I well remember but cannot recall the time or sequence or the location was when our gun, on which Frank Aguerberre and I were, was positioned along the edge of heavy woods, an unlikely place for an attack, I thought at the time. The powers-that-be apparently thought otherwise, however; and the varied rounds of artillery and mortar shells that poured down on us later seemed to vindicate their decision. Sometime around noon during a lull in the bombardment, Lt. Mc Clean and Pfc. Ulysses Emerick came by carrying binoculars, clipboards, etc. and informed us they would be forward of our position. In other words, hold fire until they returned. Several minutes passed with no shelling, then a mortar shell exploded to the front, closer than usual. Less than a minute passed after that when Lt. Mc Clean appeared, blood-splattered and visibly shaken exclaiming that Emerick had been killed.

Lt. McClean survived the war and has attended our reunions. Frich Grove, a grand-nephew of Emerick also attends our reunions on occasions.

There was in our company a lieutenant about whom it could be said became a legend in his own time, among the men of the regiment anyway. Lt. Waverly W. Wray arrived in our company at or near the formation of our regiment. He was an unusually strong man, I suppose he could, without exaggeration, be called "Powerful". One time, for example, as we were preparing for Sicily, three men from the air corp were struggling on the tarmac to load one of our equipment bundles onto the plane. Wray was walking by at the time and observed them for a moment then picked the bag up and hefted it inside much to the amazement of the men. As he walked away, one of the men exclaimed, "Geez, all you paratroopers that strong!?" Well, no. As much as we'd like that image, we're not. He was strong even for a paratrooper. And I guess he could be called a paradox. Contrary to the usual coarse, rascal-lian image of rough paratroopers of the time, he neither smoked, nor drank, nor cursed, nor ran around with women. He was from Mississippi and evidently strictly followed the tenets of the church of that region, except for the sixth commandment--in time of war, anyway. He was fearless in his pursuit of killing Gormans. Many accounts of

his feats attest to that. He would go where no man would dare tread unless he was leading them. In Normandy he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Army's second highest award for his heroics. Since he was the platoon leader of another platoon, I had never served under him. Then he was assigned to lead the first platoon, along with other elements of the company, on a mission to remove German resistance along railroad tracks leading to a bridge crucial to our advance.

On this mission, Haynes was again with me to the right flank of the advance on the machine gun; and we and a number of riflemen, including a BAR (Browning Automatic rifle) team, led by Cpl. Julius Eisner to the left, were supporting Lt. Wray and Cpl. Lord as they advanced up the tracks toward the bridge. Wray was firing a bazooka at a control tower, perhaps ten feet or so high from which heavy enemy fire was coming and blocking our way. He stood erect while firing, and, as was his usual manner, made no effort to conceal or otherwise protect himself. He would fire the weapon, move a short distance--in an upright position--wait for Lord to load the rocket into the launcher and hit the ground, then would again fire the weapon. Such was the constant cycle for those two as we advanced up the tracks. We on the machine guns would fire a few bursts then move forward with the bazooka team. Since the officer and NCO in charge were working on the bazooka, we, the supporting group, were left pretty much to our own initiatives. In fact, Haynes and I did not think the tower the primary target until later in the operation since heavy fire: mortar, small arms, and, maybe, artillery, were also coming from different directions at ground level. Some time after we concentrated our fire at the tower, our gun jammed. I glanced to my left and was shocked to note that Haynes was nowhere in sight so assumed he had been hit and left for the rear. (I later learned that was exactly what had happened. When I next saw him in France following the campaign, he chided me for ignoring him when he punched and yelled at me as he lay "bleeding to death". He was great for hyperboles. I guess because of the noise and distraction at the time, I was just oblivious to his efforts.) I worked with the gun for a while trying to get it operat-

ing again then.... Here I have a short memory lapse. The next thing I remember is that I was continuing up the tracks carrying a carbine, probably one I had picked up that was left by a casualty. At this time I was some distance behind the bazooka team and hastened to catch up. A couple of men who had been hit passed me going in the opposite direction, one of whom I remember was Eisner, who had a large chunk of flesh torn from his right leg just above the knee.

At one point of the advance while lying on my stomach firing at the tower, movement of Germans slightly to my right caught my attention. They were running on a low, concrete platform, apparently heading to reinforce their comrades to our front. By the time I repositioned myself and began firing at them, only the characteristic German boots were visible between the platform and the bottom of a freight car through which I was sighting. I emptied the carbine at them; but because of the small targets, the fact that I had, of course, never zeroed-in the weapon, and the rapid pace at which they were moving, I am uncertain if whether I had hit a single one of them. One did fall, and I fired a couple of quick shots at him before he arose and hastened (Hobbled?) away, I believe without assistance.

How I had wished then that I still had my machine gun. They'd made an almost perfect target for it, and then I'd known for certain that I had gotten rid of some of the enemy, a duty for which I had been trained. In combat one is often not sure of that. After all, under these conditions, the enemy is in the grass or woods camouflaged, or otherwise concealed just as we are, and we are separated by fifty to a hundred yards or more. We know the enemy is out there because we are receiving fire from there, but we'll not always see him. In consequence, we are ordered to cover a certain area. (In the case of machine guns, to traverse the area and just hope that some of the enemy gets in the way of our bullets; and, of course, because of the number of bullets flying around, there will always be the unfortunate who do.) There are also occasions that the enemy does expose himself, such as when moving to another position, or while attacking or retreating. Under these conditions we sometimes will see them drop, but we can rarely know if it was a tactical maneuver on their part or if he fell

victim to the bullets of one of our comrades who is as equally anxious to get rid of the enemy.

While I'm digressing a little, I also wish to comment on the results of a study made several years ago, and widely circulated at the time, pertaining to the behavior of soldiers in combat that sort of puzzles me a little. In the article disclosing their findings, the researchers concluded, some way or another, that many soldiers in combat never fire their weapons; or, if they do, will fire them in the air. Fire them in the air?! Unbelievable! I do not know how they arrived at that conclusion, but it seems incredible to me. After all, those very soldiers' lives are on the line, and, so it would seem, they are going to be instinctively anxious to remove that threat as quickly as possible. From what I have seen, the bigger problem in combat is that soldiers are all too often too anxious to remove the threat. In other words, the bigger problem in combat is, seemingly, not that the soldier refuses to direct his fire at the enemy but that he does so judiciously. Casualties by friendly fire--from the "triggerhappy"--I had always thought until I read that article, was of greater concern in combat; and there are, of course, many more of these, than are reported.

Now, to get back to our problems in this singular engagement: After emptying my carbine at the Germans on the platform, I was now effectively without a weapon--an empty carbine with me and a jammed machine gun sitting somewhere to the rear. I still had my .45 and three magazines of ammo, but I felt it futile and foolish to fire this weapon at that distance. I thought about going to the rear for ammunition. But only momentarily. I quickly realized that if I ran back to the rear in the midst of this heavy fire..., well, it'd probably have gone over--to use a common army expression of the time--about like a sack of shit. So, I stuck around, uselessly lying low thinking I might help later. Our ranks were now rather depleted. Though I know others were still with us, the only ones I remember now are Jesse Samaniego, Cpl. Weed, and Frank Aguerberre.

And all the while to my left-front, just a short distance away, were Cpl. Lord and Lt. Wray still doing their thing: loading, firing, and advancing, loading, firing.... Enemy fire continued to increase. Then, either as Wray was preparing to fire another round from his bazooka, or immediately after he had just finished firing one, I glimpsed the sight of his helmet flying off and he hit the ground on his back. I started crawling in his direction at the same time as Cpl. Lord quickly inspected him. The corporal then stood up, faced the rear, waved his arm, and shouted, "Let's go!"

Thus ended this engagement as we hastened to the rear with Cpl. Lord in the lead. As I rushed on, I heard bullets zing by that spurred me on while gravel to our front continued to be kicked up by shells and small arms fire. After we reached the rear, a quick debriefing took place, primarily between Cpl. Lord and the officers. Later a couple of the officers approached me and asked if I knew with certainty that Wray was dead. I had to explain to them with some uneasiness that I didn't get all the way to the lieutenant before we were ordered to the rear. Then one of them eased closer and sharply asked where my machine-gun was. With even greater uneasiness I had to confess, "it was somewhere up there," as I pointed to the front. Reproach followed. After all, it's axiomatic that a soldier keeps his weapon within immediate reach at all times; and here's mine a long way off. True, I had no assistant to help me carry it and the tripod, but an air-cooled machine-gun (technically called a "light" machine-gun) can be carried by one man without his being slowed down a whole lot. At the time, I just had no answer at all as to why I didn't think about bringing that weapon back with me. At any rate, I did get it back shortly, whether retrieved by myself or by someone else, because I remember being directed to fire the gun in the windows of several houses just after we returned from our recent debacle. I do not remember a whole lot about this last conflict; therefore, assume it was only a short, routine encounter.

Epilogue to and reflections on the Wray tragedy:

Lt. Wray was recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor for his heroics but was given a lesser award. After we were relieved at Holland, we were sent to Suippes, France. Here, at a parade Cpl. Lord was awarded a Silver Star for his meritorious service during the attack, and leading the men back to the rear. "Hell, the only reason he led us to the rear," opined a few wags at the time, "was because nobody could catch up with him." But this flippant remark should not be taken seriously. With the tension and duress we were under at the time, when the order came to withdraw, I don't think anybody wasted time questioning the decision; and the bullets whistling by us spurred us to ever greater speed. If any could have passed him, I'm sure they would have.

Actually what Cpl. Lord did during the attack I thought was heroic. His standing up fully exposing himself to enemy fire while loading the bazooka for the suicidal Wray was all that could be expected of anyone. And I say "suicidal" Wray because of what I perceived to be the mind-set of the lieutenant at the time, I can not imagine how this engagement could have concluded any other way. Consider: We were on the attack, exposed, and outnumbered and the enemy was entrenched or otherwise well covered. Under these circumstances there were two alternatives--withdrawal or death; and for Lt. Wray, I do not believe the former could ever have been an alternative.

Sometime later, I believe it was near the end of our Holland campaign, our platoon was involved in an encounter along the Maas-Waal canal. I remember a short nighttime engagement in which Frank Aquerrebre and I were involved on the machine gun. I do not recall any casualties on our side but as we continued our advance we passed by several dead Germans.

The following morning we arrived at a brick factory along the canal where the company command post was set up. Aquerrebre and I were guided to a position about a mile away which would be our defensive position for a considerable period of time. Here we were told to

emplace our gun at a luxurious, by foxhole standards, two-room foxhole which was, for some coincidental reason, facing in the proper direction--toward the German lines. It was an ideal machine-gun position with a covered room for one to sleep and an open adjoining room for one to stand guard and wide enough to accommodate two men during action. Here, we awaited an attack, or counterattack; but a full-scale one never came though the anxiety from the expectation of one persisted.

One time, while there, I was called to company headquarters and given a number of grenades--close to a dozen I suppose--and told that after nightfall to carry them to the crest of the hill, which was probably less than fifty yards from my emplacement, and to toss them at the buildings along the edge of the canal and to report any activities. Strange order it seemed; but never one to question orders from my superiors, at nearly midnight I proceeded to carry this one out. There was a little moonlight; and when I tossed the first couple or three, I could see they were falling far short. So, in a crouched posture, I ran much closer to where I was sure I could reach my targets. The one beguiling attraction to throwing hand grenades is that the thrower is aware that the enemy will probably never know from which direction they came. Thus assured, I scattered the remaining grenades with abandon and witnessed no activity whatsoever. Great, I thought, but when I reported this to headquarters, the officers stared in disbelief as they grilled and then dismissed me. Well, where had I gone wrong, I wondered, since I obviously did not get the desired response?

The following day, or perhaps it was the second day following, several men led by an officer and NCO in broad daylight, passed by our emplacement and cavalierly followed the same path I did down toward the canal as though on a Sunday stroll. They returned shortly; and from what I learned later, my report of "no activity" down there was vindicated.

Our greatest threats at this position came from infrequent 88 barrages and the more frequent shelling from demoralizing rockets referred to colloquially as "howling" or "screaming mimmies". These

were five--usually five--circularly bound rockets approximately six inches in diameter. Each one contained over 20 pounds of explosives and were mounted on two-wheeled trailers for mobility. The five rockets would be fired sequentially--a barrage of five. Being concussion weapons, they were not as lethal to personnel as the 88's; but they were highly destructive of buildings and emplacements. This, and their characteristic abrasive or screeching sound, which gave them their informal name, followed by five powerful explosions in succession, also gave them significant demoralizing value.

Well, there was this one time when I was alone on the machine gun (Auerreberre had been called back to company headquarters) when I heard the discomforting loud screeching which by now had become so familiar. I felt, by the low rumbling sound coming in that this barrage of five was going to be close, so I crawled back into the covered part of the hole. Big mistake! When the shells hit, the concussion caved in the upper portion of the walls and allowed the heavy earthen roof to collapse trapping me beneath. Fortunately, some officers from battalion headquarters were standing around nearby, presumably surveying and discussing the merits/demerits of their position; and when the shells hit, they, I'm sure, had flattened themselves on the ground. Since the shrapnel from these shells was minimal, and since the officers were not within a structure and were further away from the explosions than I, they emerged unscathed. They immediately shouted "You okay Bowman?" I replied that I was but couldn't move. They assisted me in freeing myself. I suffered only a slight, momentary nosebleed, either from the concussion or from some debris. The really interesting part of this incident, and somewhat flattering, I guess, was that those Battalion officers knew the name of a lowly Pfc. out on the fringes of their command. I imagine, though, that they picked up this information as they passed through company headquarters.

The disturbing fact now was that our comfortable "home" was now in shambles. Auerreberre and I spent much of our remaining time there on restoration. We never completed the job, however, before we were relieved by another group and force marched toward another area.

Postscript to the above operation

After the war this operation would occasionally return to my memory, as would most operations, engagements, and other events of the war, and, indeed, all facets of our lives, often at the strangest time. There came a time, however, when the name of the person on that gun with me faded away, and try as I may to recall the name, it never returned to me. He had been a replacement--came to us just before our jump in Holland--and I usually didn't retain those names as well as I did those of the old-timers. Then at the Orlando Reunion in 1997, Frank Aguerrebere introduced himself to me as the other member of the machine gun team along the canal at Holland. (This was the first time I had seen him since the war, but he and his beautiful wife and daughters have come quite regularly since then.) He then confessed, in his inimitable way, that he had deep reservations about being on the gun with me because of my voice that carried and that I "didn't know how to whisper" when the enemy lines were so close. Then he went on to say that he was alarmed about the amount of smoke that spewed out of my pipe that could betray our position to the enemy. (I'd never thought of that as being a danger of exposure. I never smoked at night, of course. No one did. But during the day...?) At any rate, he went on to say that after he learned I had never been hit through all these campaigns, "I want to stick around with that man." I don't think I ever told him that "Rebel" Haynes had different sentiments about me in this regard. He complained, "every time I got around Bowman, I got hit." He reminded me of this a couple of times on the phone after the war. Haynes was great for exaggeration, however. I know that he earned at least a couple, perhaps three of his five purple hearts, when he was nowhere around me. He, apparently, attracted shrapnel like a magnet. Aguerrebere was also hit later, but he was nowhere around me then. I don't know if there is a moral to this or not.

Around this time, we had again run short of rations because again the weather had prevented flights from England. And we, at the same

time were ordered not to appeal to the Hollanders for assistance. Some of the soldiers did, however; and the citizenry gave very generously though they, themselves were very short of supplies. Some of the men came across cans of rations left behind by the retreating Germans. It was rumored to have been horse meat. I can't vouch for that, but it did have a gritty texture and tasted like nothing I ever had before. When one is hungry enough, I suppose he'll eat almost anything.

Now, to get back to the forced march. We had been traveling at a fast pace for some time when a couple of recent replacements, Arthur Skinner and George Rowe began hickering with each other. So here we are now, hungry, thirsty, nearly exhausted, sleepy (it was around midnight), barely able to slog along and these two men have enough energy to squander on disputations. Not only that, but they soon began slug-ging each other. Of course, with both being as weary as they must have been and carrying the heavy equipment they did, neither could have done much damage to the other. They were quickly separated, and we continued to our destination.

Postscript: The irascible Skinner was killed in the following Arden-nes' Campaign. The likable Rowe is still around and he and his attrac-tive wife frequently attend our reunions.

From what I learned later, the reason for the shortage of food and equipment was due to heavy rains which began falling after the 82nd should have been pulled out of Holland according to established doctrine for airborne units. These units are neither prepared nor equipped for extended operations, but Field Marshall Montgomery coerced the division to remain for about another month; thus exposing the personnel to greater deprivation and casualties because of limited supplies to begin with and the later inability of the air corp to adequately resupply the troops due to inclement weather.

Finally, 13 November, the division was relieved by Canadian forces, and we of the 82nd, looked in anxious anticipation of return-ing to England for our deserved rest and recreation.

ARDENNES (The Bulge)

Following the Holland campaign, members of our unit looked forward to returning to England. To our dismay, however, we were transported by truck to France and arrived at Suippes 14 November 1944. But Suippes, France ended up not being so bad after all--flirty women, pretty good food, and lots of leisure. And, the war was nearly over, such we learned from the "Stars and Stripes", anyway; so we settled down to enjoy the holidays. Thanksgiving was as good as could be expected away from home, and Christmas was fast approaching. To further add to our composure were the various reports affirming the rapid advances of Patton and allied forces to Berlin. I, for one, anxiously awaited the weekly arrival of "Stars and Stripes" so I could peruse their updated maps that portrayed how far the Allied forces had advanced toward Berlin since the previous week.

Everything was rosy. Restraints were minimal, and the men came and went rather much at will, and curfew was relaxed. Occasionally, some would return to their quarters after a night of wild partying and disturb those who remained at camp. And so it was in the wee hours of 18 December 1944 when we were awakened by raucous laughter and boisterous voices of inebriates loudly exclaiming how they had carried one of their more inebriated celebrates back in a wheelbarrow they had confiscated from one of the citizenry. They were soon quieted, and we went back to sleep. But not for long. Sometime before dawn we were again aroused, this time by urgent commands to pack our field equipment and prepare to move out. No further explanations were given at the time. We were just handed K-rations and told to mount the "sixbys" idling near by. Of course, it didn't take any great imagination to figure out that something of crucial importance had transpired; and as we continued our slow, tortuous trek north, rumors circulated that a German breakthrough had developed, the magnitude of which would not be known by us until later.

The Battle of the Ardennes, as it became officially called but more popularly known as the Battle of the Bulge, would be our fifth

Ardennes Campaign. Belgium, sometime before the snow fell.



Far right, standing: David Bowman
Left-front of Bowman, standing: Stanley Rotlartz
Far left, kneeling: Melvin P. "MP" Brown
The only three known by name.

campaign. Fought in the winter of '44-'45 not far from the North Sea against a desperate German army, it was destined to be ranked among our most grueling and sanguinary encounters.

Our company's initial assignment was to occupy a defensive position just south of Trois Pont, a town by the Salm River in Belgium. Here we remained for over a week suffering through the cold. On Christmas day the company cooks, almost miraculously, managed to send us a fine turkey dinner with all the trimmings! Though not exactly hot, it was still a welcome relief from the K and U rations regularly served us since leaving Suippes. And to add to the plaudits earned by our cooks is the fact that the majority of the company cooks did not even attempt such a feat. But a tragedy was soon to occur that dampened the joy of a fine feast and the spirit of Christmas.

At Trois Pont our platoon (the first) was positioned on high ground overlooking long, heavily constructed brick buildings occupied by German snipers. These became the targets for strafing and bombing by P-47's on Christmas day. Unfortunately, while we looked on in gratitude at what the air corp was doing for us, one of the 500 pound bombs went astray and hit some of our men positioned on the lower ground, killing and wounding several of them. One of them killed was Cpl. Harald Schramm, with whom I developed a certain closeness since he was from the nearby town of Wheeling, W.Va. His aunt, in fact, lived only a mile or so away, a neighbor in farming-community perspective. Others killed that I remember were Sgts. Donald Olds and Henry Jakiela.

At a recent reunion, I encountered an old trooper who disputed my recollection and declared that "Jake" Jakiela had been killed earlier by a sniper. At the most recent reunion I struck up a conversation with another one, Jesse Samaniego, who argued insistently that the sergeant had been killed by one of his own men, a "trigger-happy" recent replacement. Three versions. Here, now, is a classic example, not too uncommon at reunions, where one person "vividly" remembers an event in which both had participated or had witnessed

so much differently than the way others "vividly" remember the same event; and, sadly, there's no way the conflict can be resolved. After all, "that is the way I vividly remember seeing it."

At any rate, Jakiela's body was lying with those killed by the errant bomb. That evening after nightfall William Bennett, myself, and two others were detailed to remove the bodies. When we arrived where they had been stacked, a Jeep with a trailer was idling nearby. As callous as it may sound, we simply picked each up by the shoulder and feet and tossed him into the trailer much as one would so many gunny sacks full of feed. One touching moment in this whole episode came when Jakiela's body began to roll off. Bennett, his close friend, grabbed and repositioned him, at the same time saying in a soothing and casually intimate way "hold on there, Jake". The jeep then pulled off without a second glance from any of us, a scenerio much different from the way Hollywood would have portrayed a comparable scene.

Shortly after Christmas one of our men was struck by a bullet fired from one of the buildings nearby, and when Lt. Charles "Frankenstein" Qualls, a giant of a man, went to his rescue, he, in turn, was fatally shot. These two violent actions prompted efforts to rid the area of any further German threats. The targeted building, the one nearest us, perhaps a hundred or more feet in length, sat on a concrete foundation several feet above the ground that extended approximately four feet in front of the building; thus, creating a platform or deck that could be used as a walkway. The building was solid brick with no windows, only doorways with no doors, spaced around ten feet apart. I have no idea what their original purpose was, but one of them was now being used by the Germans as a shelter for snipers. Several of us from different platoons were detailed to rid the building closest to our positions of any of the enemy that may be inside. There was now no evidence of enemy fire coming from any of the other buildings.

Sometime after darkness fell, each of us was given an incendiary grenade and told to carry out the operation as instructed earlier: To

stealthily creep along the walkway and post ourselves at the edge of our assigned doorways. Upon signal, the firing of a flare, we would pull the pin and toss the grenade through the opening then rush back to the assembly area. We were further cautioned that the grenades must be thrown sequentially--that is, the first thrown would be the one furthest down then on to the nearest so as to minimize the chances of anyone being hit by the residuals of the burning grenades that would certainly be flying out of the openings after they exploded. Since I was at the furthest end, it was incumbent that I throw mine first. But when I attempted to pull the pin it would not come out. Cursing, I again pined the ends of the pin and again jerked on the ring. Still it did not budge. Desperately, I gave a couple of more yanks and finally it dislodged and the lever flew off. The grenade now armed, I tossed it through the opening and took off. By this time, however, the grenades further down the line were spewing out their burning fragments. Realizing there was nothing else I could do I rushed by them as rapidly as I could as I smelled my heavy wool overcoat burning. Overcoat burned, but at least I emerged unscathed. Upon returning to the assembly point, an officer, the same one who admonished me about leaving my machine gun behind in Holland, looked at me and my smoldering coat, shook his head and scoffed, "Fouled up again, didn't you, Bowman", as he put his hand on my shoulder and sent me on my way.

As I returned to my emplacement, I wondered how in the hell did I manage to get that one damn grenade with the faulty firing pin anyway. At any rate, I did complete my mission, such as it was, and that sarcastic lieutenant can And, actually, he didn't really use the less reproachful term "'fouled' up" either.

I really wondered then if any of the enemy had been holed up there at the time we threw the grenades. But I also thought if there had been, they'd certainly be harmless enough now; and the fact that there was no further sniper fire from that area for the duration of our stay, convinced most that our operation had been a success.

(Several years ago at one of our reunions, a few of us were reminiscing about this event; and when I finished my spiel, one of the members directed a comment to me, "No, you did not get that one bad grenade. I also got one myself, but after a couple of quick tugs I just tossed it with the pin still in. I wasn't about to play the damn fool." We laughed understandingly. He then went on, "Hell who knows, it may have hit some Kraut on the head and given him a concussion.")

Ever since we had been positioned near Trois Punt, the cold, winter temperature had been steadily dropping, and keeping warm, particularly at night, became increasingly difficult. We set our sleeping bags atop leaves and other dry material to insulate us as much as possible from the frozen ground, and atop our sleeping bags we placed our overcoats. I, myself, always wore two pairs of wool socks then put my boots over them. Still, since the boots were not insulated, I would awaken on occasions with cold feet which I attempted to remedy by getting out of the sack and jumping up and down or walking around while shooting the bull with others experiencing the same pain, then crawl back into the now cold sleeping bag. I'm sure there were times I regretted I had not remained in the air corp.

Though all this was bad enough and we thought we had reached the limits of our endurance, worse was yet to come. Shortly after the beginning of the new year of 1945, we were relieved from our defensive position by an infantry unit and placed on an offensive posture. This meant that we were required to turn in our sleeping bags, overcoats, and other equipment not essential for combat while the temperature continued its steady drop to zero. We still kept our field jackets, gloves, and a light-wool cap under our helmet that protected our ears from the chill. When we started out, a light powder of snow covered the ground from previous days' snowfall, but the weather was now clear as we began our march shortly after dawn. Soon, however, light flakes fell that became heavier as we trudged on; but the temperature, if anything, seemed to rise. Or perhaps it was the quickened pace that made it feel that way. But the snowfall itself continued unabated until we could see only a short distance before us. It never reached

blizzard proportions, but the accumulation did reach such depths that it impeded our progress.

Combined with the duress suffered from the effects of cold and snow, was the uneasiness resultant of sporadic incoming artillery fire of different sorts--mortars, 88's, howitzers. I passed by one man with whom I had a passing acquaintance. He used to be in one of the headquarters--battalion, regiment--but he got into some kind of trouble and was reassigned to a rifle company, a place for which, I'm sure, he was not entirely prepared. He was now lying in a low clearing a short distance from the path we were traveling. He had been hit in the left buttocks by shrapnel, a large piece, so it appeared, as some of the muscle, tendons, and other fleshy parts were hanging out. But he seemed to be in good spirits as he smiled and waved nonchalantly as I passed, evidence that he had, at the least, been treated with morphine and was now awaiting the arrival of transportation to be taken to the rear. It did not appear that any vital area had been hit, but I later learned he had died. Possibly from exposure, as did many of the wounded on both sides during this campaign.

Normally the wounded could expect to be treated on the spot or in a covered position nearby by the unit medics then transported to the rear for more extensive treatment if necessary. But the situation was now different. All available vehicles were now abysmally inadequate to carry the wounded; the medics, themselves, were suffering unusually high casualties, and the heavy snow and extreme cold constantly crippled efforts everywhere. As a result, the severely wounded, the non-ambulatory, who could normally be expected to be carried by vehicle to a hospital in the rear, were now frequently destined to remain where they had fallen, often even without the comfort that would come from morphine. (Although all were instructed on the means of injecting himself with morphine when necessary, not all were always in position to do so). For such unfortunates, analgesia would come only with the numbness of cold and the cover of snow.

Later that evening we stopped for rest, K-rations, and sleep. Sleep? I don't think any of us got much of that, what with the sub-

zero weather and the snow coupled with the fact that the only covering we had were the clothes we had with us. We spent most of the time moving and jumping around to keep warm. In fact, it was very much of a relief when in the wee hours of the morning we heard the order to pack up and move out. We may have spent several nights such as that. Somewhere and sometime later our march was interrupted by considerable small-arms fire and a smattering of artillery. Now, whether we were attacked or went into the attack I do not recall; at any rate, we soon went into the assault posture and routed the enemy. In the end, we were rewarded with many prisoners, though at quite a high cost to ourselves including my assistant gunner who was replaced by a rifleman.

After this engagement, our platoon apparently was placed near the rear of our company since I passed by the bodies of some of our men. Two that I remember were Pvt. Alexander Wilkerson lying on his back and Pvt. Joseph Zahachewski on his stomach with his face buried in the snow (I later learned--about sixty years later! from Frank Bilich, a man with an enviable memory who keeps up with such things--that Zahachewski now lives in the mid-west). After passing that last casualty, we made a sharp turn to the right then, after a short distance, a sharp one to the left. There I witnessed a depressing sight--one that to varying degrees has haunted me to this day. On a shallow slope several yards away to our right kneeled a wailing young woman by her young son(?) beating the ground with her fists--a virtual living portrait of the wailing woman in Picasso's "Gurnica". But this woman could not have cradled her son's head in her arms as did Picasso's woman. This child's brain was lying in a mass on the snow-covered ground. Several times I saw her raise her arms and hit this frozen, snow-covered ground with her fists in anguish as we walked by. Cows, calmly chewing away stood nearby, and a small light-colored house with smoke whiffling from the chimney a short distance away brings up questions. The boy, was he sent by his mother to bring in the cows, and the fierce shelling caught both off guard? And the young mother. Did the sub-freezing weather eventually force her to the warmth of her house? If so, could she have remained there as the snow mercilessly covered her child's body? Or did she inconsolable and oblivious to time and cold remain by his body until she, herself, succumbed and was blanketed along with the boy by

her side under the relentless snow? I have often wondered what happened to that grieving young lady in the snow.

As we moved along, now about 10 January, the snow rose above our ankles, then to our knees and above, nearly to our waists. Dusk arrived and we finally came to a halt at what would be our bivouac area, and this right in the midst of harassing fire from sporadic artillery shells. As we were meandering around waiting to be told our positions for the night, Frank Silanskis and Stanley Kartlarz, smiling, yelled from a short distance away, "Hey, Bowman, we thought you had been killed back at ____ ____". It so happened that when they had come across Zahachewski, whom they, like me, thought was dead, they were sure it was me since they could see only his back and black, kinky hair. Their nonchalance about the whole affair was sort of unsettling to me momentarily. I'd hoped for a little solemnity by my comrades if I'd been killed. But why should I? And why should it have bothered me? If the situation had been reversed, I'd probably not even have mentioned it. Such becomes the attitude of men after much time in combat, even of their good friends.

The assistant gunner and I were soon directed to our position and to our pleasure, our winter gear: overcoats, sleeping bags, etc. were finally returned to us. We set up the gun and flopped down. I was beginning to become comfortable--well, as comfortable as possible in two to three feet of snow at zero degrees--when I received word to report to company headquarters. I always hated such orders. Usually nothing good comes of them. As I slogged my way over, a shell exploded near the headquarters, and activity there increased. I quickened my pace, and upon arrival saw Cpl. Olszewski lying on the ground with blood pouring from the area around his heart. The company clerk, Henry Matzelle, who was standing nearby, told me the blood had been spurting out like a miniature geyser. A captured German officer who had been standing by observing the whole thing coldly mumbled "Kaputt" and walked away.

Olszewski dead. That was hard to take. He was one of the old-

timers, both in age and in the time spent with the 505. He was in his early 30's and came into the '05 at the beginning--at the frying-pan area, and remained with us throughout. He was a stout, strongly-built mesomorph whose only weakness was that he found it difficult to keep up on our frequent sprints of double-timing. One of the rare times when he dropped out, I heard him bitterly moan, "they can't make a race horse out of a work horse." I do not recall his ever missing any combat at all--from wounds or from illness. Now, near the end of the war he is killed. As has oft been said, "It's all as in the toss of the dice."

I stood there for a moment musing then went on into the headquarters. There I was given an M-1 and informed that Melvin P. "M.P." Brown and I would conduct prisoners to the rear. Two men with M-1's to conduct a large number of "supermen" to the rear. A daunting task, I thought. We lined them up in double, or triple, columns and marched them off on a well-traveled, gravel road that was in some places nearly clear of snow. After going a mile or so into the deep woods, Brown approached me and suggested that we get rid of these S.O.B.'s and go on back to our unit. I studied him a little, uncertain if he was serious or not. In the shaded moonlight I could observe only a straight face. M.P. Brown was tall, raw-boned, and rugged. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, the quintessential Aryan. Adolf would have been proud of him. And he was a damn good soldier. Among the best, but there were times, it seemed to me, that he went a little out of his way to create a reckless, macho image; and this is what I suspected he was doing now because ole' M.P. wasn't stupid. Two men with M-1's against thirty-plus enemy? I don't think so. And I'm sure he, like I, could not stomach the thought of killing in cold blood, anyway. (I have sometimes wondered what his expression and reaction would have been had I said, "Hey, that's a great idea, Brown. Let's do it!" I'm nearly a hundred percent sure he'd have quickly backed down.) But I just played his game, in a sense, and simply told him that I preferred to continue on to the rear for some warmth, hot coffee and doughnuts, and to purchase some delicacies from the P.X. (Though it was now late in the evening, the both of us, for some reason, took it for granted

that such amenities would still be available). Brown acceded to my suggestion without comment; and when we arrived at the compound, he handed the guards the papers given us at our headquarters. The guards made a quick count of the prisoners and dismissed us. The fact that two men could escort such a large number of prisoners through a densely forested countryside for a considerable distance without losing a single one attests to the more compliant attitude of the once-proud and defiant German soldier. Frigid weather and defeatism had done their job.

After taking advantage of the services offered at the encampment, we began our return to the front. As we neared the terminus of the encampment and about to enter the darkness of the forest, we passed a large aid station; and Brown, who had been sniffing throughout this whole ordeal, said he wanted to stop by and pickup some medication. Upon entering the warm tent, the medics greeted us congenially and offered us coffee, cookies, etc., which, though we had just recently eaten our fill, we could not decline. They treated Brown then asked if there were any other problems. He then suggested that they look at his feet. (Since we entered this campaign, we had been given occasional, somewhat perfunctory warnings about frostbite, its symptoms, and preventive care. Brown thought he felt some of the symptoms.) He removed his footwear as requested, and after inspection was told he was in good shape. They then turned to me and asked how my feet were. I replied that they felt OK and prepared to leave. I just didn't wish to go through the bother (and embarrassment since I knew that my feet, like every other part of my body smelled) of removing my boots and socks. But, for some reason we were detained for awhile. I think they continued further examinations of Brown whose cold symptoms they seemed concerned about. Then as we again turned to leave, a doctor asked, or ordered, that I remove my foot gear. He took one look at my feet and without hesitation pointed to a stretcher and told me to get on it and, he emphasized, "stay on it."

As I lay on the stretcher contemplating the present situation, I began to have mixed feelings. This quonset hut was warm and clean

providing comfort I hadn't felt in a long time, and the food, I knew, would be much better than I would get after returning to my company. But now Brown was forced to return to the unit on this cold, cheerless night by himself. When he bade me good-bye, he did so with a forced smile, but his body language betrayed that he may have been a little perturbed, or perhaps disappointed, or perhaps both. And there was an additional reason for my discomforting thoughts, perhaps, silly and nonsensical to some: I had been in this unit--same division, same regiment, same battalion and company, same platoon, and even the same squad--since being assigned to the '05. And I had never missed a single day of combat, or even a day of training that I can think of. I was sort of proud of that. After all, not too many machine-gunner's could boast of that--and I did, on occasions, get an "ata-boy" pat on the back for it. True, though, I did acquire malaria in Sicily, and I was forced to leave the unit early in Normandy. But in each case, the fighting was over when I left. This time, however, the campaign still had a long way to go (Though I learned later that for the 505th, the Ardennes' campaign was not to last much longer).

Then a pang of guilt hit me: Why did I happen to come down with frost bite? Brown didn't, and I don't believe the majority of the men did. Did I neglect to do something to have prevented it? We had been instructed to rub our feet and take other precautionary actions at every opportunity. But when comes the opportunity? We marched or fought until we got a break, then we flopped down from fatigue. And even if we had had the energy to have undertaken preventive measures, we still would not have had the time. But why was I among the minority to come down with frostbite?

The above lament is actually a reflection of my feelings at the time. I have since learned that in reality the vast majority of men who went through the whole campaign, particularly after the severe weather hit, suffered frostbite to some degree or another. A significant number, however, escaped frostbite when they were sent to the rear early from wounds. When the subject was brought up at a recent

reunion, Dr. Franco, a unit medical officer, dryly retorted, who didn't get it [frost bite]? Don Ellis quickly answered that he didn't, that he went through the whole campaign without injury, wounds, or frostbite. There were, on the other hand, some whose frostbite was of such severity that their only recourse was amputation. Such are the vagueries and intangibles of life.

Yeh, amputations. That's something to think about, and something I've thought about at times. I am now in my early eighties and am somewhat crippled by neuropathy, one of the residuals of frostbite, and it has been worsening over the past couple of years. But suppose I had not been assigned to escort the prisoners to the rear at that particular time, or Brown did not feel the need to stop at the medics as we passed by, or that the medical officer did not see fit to insist that I remove my boots for inspection? What, then would be my condition now?

Another thing that bothered me a little is that I felt I was considered rather much of a goof off/goof up to some degree, the carry-over from my initial lack of proficiency in infantry matters because, as mentioned earlier, of absence of basic training. But that wasn't entirely the only reason. I had always been an undisciplined youth, and in the army this manifested itself in my difficulty, in garrison duty, often to perform my obligations properly and timely. I would miss curfew then be put on restriction. The next time I would go to town, regardless how hard I tried to get back on time, I would again miss curfew. Restriction again, ad nauseam.

One time, I believe it was near the end of the Normandy campaign, a group of us were talking about one thing and another when my name was brought up--while I was standing there! "You know," opined one, "Bowman may be a goof-up in the rear, but in combat he's always there when we need him." Others chuckled and a couple made agreeing remarks. Though sort of a left handed compliment, I think I was kind of glad to hear it. But now, since I would be sent to the rear in

the midst of combat, I was concerned they may think I was again goofing off, and this time in combat. After all I was not hit, I was not sick, and I felt no pain. In fact, I felt great, and a little ashamed because of it that I was lying here.

After a stay of about a month at the Cherbourg hospital, I was released to be returned for full duty. On my way back, however, I was, for some reason, shunted to a deposition depot (or something like that) where I was to be retained for several days. There, I became acquainted with another man, I'll call "James" for convenience since I don't remember his name. He was a member of the '05 but from a different company. Being detained this close to Paris was just too much of a temptation for the both of us. By observing the departure of troops (and I also believe James was acquainted with one of the dispatchers), we somehow arrived at the approximate time that we would be due to leave--about two days or so. Plenty of time to get to Paris and back. The environ of that city was within walking distance; so after roll-call one morning, we managed to talk ourselves past the bored, lackadaisical guards at the gate, then we were on the road to Paris. We didn't walk far before we were picked up by a "6 by" full of soldiers and dumped off near the center of the big city. We wandered around for a while looking over the city and toward evening ended up at the famous Pigalle (called "Pig Alley" by the GI's for reasons that should require no explanation). Here, we explored a few bars before discovering one we considered worth lounging in. Soon, we found it preferable to split and made plans to meet the following afternoon. The following afternoon we arrived at the predetermined location and headed back to the depot. I have no recollection at all of how we managed to get back to the depot, but I do know that when we did get back, it was not much too soon.

We had just settled down after our return when we were called into one of those periodic formations whereby the men would be assigned to the trucks that would return them to their units. They did not get far into the assignments before it became evident to James and me that we had been caught. After the formation had been dismissed and

each of the others went to their own way, James and I were escorted to a headquarters where we were interrogated then left standing as officious superiors passed in and out--ignoring or glowering at us as was their wont. They then transferred us to another headquarters where we were again exposed to the same humiliating indignities. Finally, I guess tiring of their little game, a couple of NCO"s, carrying orders and other ominous-looking documents, escorted us to our trucks, handed the material to an NCO sitting in the cab, and sent us on our way. Whether there was anything in those documents pertaining to the two of us, I don't know. I never heard any more about our little escapade, and I never again saw James to learn how he had fared.

CENTRAL EUROPE

I arrived in Suippes at my old unit a couple of weeks or so after they had arrived from the Ardennes' campaign. The first thing that caught my attention was the change in personnel. Certainly there were a lot of the older troopers around, but they seemed to be largely outnumbered by men I had never seen before. To receive replacements after campaigns was nothing new. But previously, the proportion of the replacements to the cadre was small. But now, the situation was different. Many of the old-timers suffered from the effects of old wounds, old injuries, and old ailments, malaria perhaps being the most common. One that I knew well, for example, was William "Rebel" Haynes who suffered recurring bouts of Malaria and from the effects of several wounds. I also learned that many suffered worse than I from the ravages of frostbite. In consequence, many of the oldsters were returned to the States for more intensive and extensive treatment and for plain old rest and relaxation.

The Bulge was our fifth campaign, and the first we entered without jumping. At Suippes, however, resounding rumors circulated that the next operation, which would be very shortly, would be made by parachute--a jump across the Rhine. The high command, however, so we were told, anyway, may have felt that the "glory" needed to be spread around, for it was the 17th Airborne that ended up getting that "honor." Many of the old-timers would agree with the logic of the high-command. But moving into combat as a "straight leg" certainly did not guarantee that the fighting would be any easier, as we discovered at the Bulge; and going to the Elbe River and Central Europe, as we were shortly ordered to do, 2 April '45, by trucks was no easy struggle.

Although much easier than some of our previous campaigns, due largely, perhaps, to the physical and psychological degeneration of the enemy, our campaign into Central Europe was still not without deprivation, fatigue, and casualties. Much of the latter were due to the drownings which occurred during the river crossings (the Elbe River) in which the troops had received little or no training and had had no experience. Since I remember so little

about the later campaigns, paradoxically, even less than I do the earlier ones. I shall forego them, but from what I have later heard and read, these operations began as the most disorganized and botched operation in which our division ever participated, and ended up being one of its most successful. Our regiment, the 505th, however, was never to be involved in the river crossings.

On 26 April we were loaded on 40 and 8's and taken to the Ruhr Valley to contain any attempted breakout of the Germans from their ever constricting pocket into which they had been squeezed. Sometime after this, our advance continued virtually unimpeded, the most serious impediment to it being the countless German refugees seeking sanctuary, and the droves of German soldiers hande hoch carrying white flags seeking safety among their enemy.

Ironically, it was during this final phase of the war, that some of the men in our platoon, and some of them old-timers, came closest to becoming KIA statistics than at any previous time in the war. Since the war was about over, we became careless; and the usual precautions were not followed. On this particular day, a heavy cold drizzle was falling so several of us--Frank Silanskis, Stanley Kotlartz, Floyed Billingsly, Shelby G Irwin, myself, and a couple of others--huddled inside one of the large, brick pigpens so common in this area of Germany. Then suddenly, from seemingly out of nowhere, a shell exploded on the roof sending debris and shrapnel upon us. Then another shell hit, then another, and another.... I don't know how many hit; all I recall was that Frank and I scrambled over one helmet with some frolicness (believe it or not), each claiming it to be his. Each time one of us got possession and attempted to put it on our head, another blast would knock it away. At the end of the battering, we began searching for our helmets, which had been scattered about, and for wounds to ourselves; not necessarily in that order. (Incidentally, helmets have straps to put under the chin to hold them in place during explosions such as this. But in combat we were ordered to fasten the strap behind the back of the helmet since the blast from the concussion getting under the helmet could snap the neck if the

strap is placed where it was designed to be. So, of course, its better to have helmets flying off your head when shells are exploding around you than to risk having your neck broken. So why the strap??? Army traditions die hard.

Despite the scare, the casualties suffered from our imprudence, although serious--all casualties are--were not as serious as feared or as bad as they could have been considering the number of shells that fell upon us. The one real tragedy was that of Billingsly who was lying unconscious in a pool of blood some distance from the building, his shoulder severed right against his body. He had evidently run from the building when the early rounds landed and was hit by shrapnel from succeeding rounds. There was just no way for us to apply a tourniquet, of course, or treat him otherwise; he died shortly after the medics arrived. Silanskis and Kotlartz went to the aid station but returned either that day or the next. Frank Silanskis was to carry a small scar on his lip from the wound suffered here to his grave over fifty years later. Another man hit there at the time was returned to the States.

This shelling was done, we learned later, by a young, angry German maverick who had just happened upon a howitzer and a cache of ammo and could not resist the temptation to wreck as much havoc as possible on his hated enemy. A Parthian shot so to speak. We were told that after his apprehension he was dealt with quite severely.

The shelling at the piggery and the death of Billingsly was the last of the enemy fire of any severity that we faced. Subsequently, we were charged for a time with the task of frisking prisoners and caring for displaced persons. The war with Germany ended 8 May 1945 while we were at, I believe, Vielank, Germany, but there was no celebration out of respect for the men still fighting and dying in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Several days later we were sent to Camp Chicago, Laon, France and arrived there in early June. There, we whiled away our time playing poker, craps, reading, etc. while rumors whirled about that we would go to the Pacific to participate in the

invasion of Japan--that we would not pass the U.S., but would go directly to the Pacific Theater of Operations. Then, to our relief, we learned that Hiroshima and then Nagasaki were hit by Atomic bombs, 6 and 9 August respectively. Though hundreds of thousands of the enemy would eventually die from the effects of the two bombs, I do not believe any of the combat GI's gave that a second thought since the stories of the Bataan death march and the other well-publicized atrocities committed by the Japanese were fresh in their minds. After all, consider: most of these men had already participated in numerous high-casualty campaigns, so it would be improbable that any would care to further jeopardize their chances of survival by engaging in another one regardless of the costs to brutal assassins. Coupled with this--the purported peace efforts of the Japanese at the top echelon notwithstanding (the troops were, of course, wholly unaware of the negotiations anyway)--was the recognition of the suicidal tenacity of the Japanese soldiers as manifested by their stubborn resistance in the battles at Okinawa, Tarawa, and other places.

After the surrender of Japan, 14 August 1945, we were sent to different places, the cities of which, I no longer recall. I believe, however, that it was at Epinal, France where the elements of the 82d Division were divided--the "high-pointers" (the old-timers) returning to the States and the "low-pointers" (the younger replacements) going on to Berlin to serve as America's Guard of Honor.