

The Valiant Die Once

A Memoir

Excerpts from “The War Years”

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife Earlene. Her love and friendship have given greater meaning to my life. Without her the greater part of my life would have been empty. She has been a wonderful mother for our children and all of us have been truly blessed by having her as a partner in our lives.

Preface

This book is for my children. It occurs to me as I enter the last phase of my life that it might interest my children to know something about the various events and self-imposed choices that have shaped the man they know as their father. The dual demands that a father impose discipline within a family and that he set an example for his children frequently work against the kind of close communication that both the parent and the child desire. I hope that this book will close some of that gap and indicate to my children that I am a man of whom they can be proud. I also hope that they will realize that I made a significant contribution as a soldier in that my actions saved the lives of many men who, like myself, survived the war and became fathers. For their information, my role in the Lorraine Campaign and the crossing of the Moselle River has been described in texts used at The Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia and at The Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

The title of the book is suggested to me by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. The words paraphrase something that Caesar says and describe in terse, simple terms an essential philosophy which a soldier must possess. All of us go through life in a form of perpetual concern about what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. Unhappily, men have little control over the events which govern either the present or the future. Therefore, most people live in a sort of low-level apprehension and fear. Long ago, I became a true realist and realized that I had to do the best of which I was capable and then I had to accept what fate dealt to me. There should be no place for constant concern and low-level fear—hence, the title of this book. Incidentally, the complete and correct quote is from Act II, Scene II of the play and reads as follows:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The Valiant never taste of death but once,
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

A final word: it may appear in the sections entitled THE WAR YEARS that I won the war. I did not win the war nor did my regiment, the 317th Infantry, win the war. Remember, however, that this is a story of your father and the war as he saw it. My account is, therefore, highly personal and subjective to the degree that I, like any human being, have biases. However, I have tried to be truthful and as objective as possible in describing the battles in which I participated. In some of them, truth to tell, I did play an important part. In other battles, I participated like the millions of other infantrymen to the best of my ability. Let it be said that I did my duty, and I am proud of my service to my country.

Chapter 5

The West Point Years

Once I had made the decision to enter West Point, I turned my attention to that task. I had a rough time of it because of the demands on my time: I had to work to earn tuition; and, I had to go to school.

The entrance exams presented problems. They contained subjects which were basically new to me. I had not looked at geometry, history and English literature for at least four years, so I had lots of studying to do. In addition, I had to study complex chemical concepts like strength of materials, advanced physics, and industrial applications of chemical engineering. Time became a precious commodity and had to be hoarded and used wisely.

Fortunately, West Point published its entrance exams in a booklet which could be obtained from the Academy. I quickly determined that most of the exams were similar in nature: there really are very few variations on algebraic and geometrical themes and ancient and modern history are largely a matter of memory. English literature was somewhat more complex because numerous questions could be asked about Shakespearean plays and the host of books and poems written by writers all the way from the Vikings to modern English authors. Even so, one could tell that certain kinds of questions appeared more frequently. English composition was simply English composition and one had to take what was asked in the test and make the best of it.

The big fear I had was the physical exam. I had no way of knowing whether I could or could not meet the numerous standards listed in the booklet outlining the qualifications for entrance. These standards were somewhat incomprehensible for someone not skilled in medical terminology. The terms seemed formidable and included things like malocclusion of teeth, poor bite, albumin in the urine, flat feet, extreme ugliness, deviated septum, color blindness, and a host of technical terms which I could not even understand.

I had no way to get a check on these various requirements. First, a physical was simply beyond my means. Second, even if a civilian doctor said I passed that carried absolutely no weight with the Army doctors who conducted the examinations.

As events developed, I passed the mental exams with extremely high scores. I found out much later in life from Major Greene, later Major General Greene, that I had ranked first among all the National Guard candidates. In addition, I had no trouble with the physical exams and found later in my career that my eyes, which had been a big worry, were actually perfect. I could see 20/10 and had no trace of astigmatism. It was also a relief to know that the doctors did not consider me as being extremely ugly.

One of the happiest days of my life came when I received a letter from the Secretary of the Army accepting me as a cadet in the Class of 1942 and with orders to report to West Point on 1 July 1938.

I also connect 1 July 1938 with a touch of sadness. My life with my parents ended and I was on my own. After that date I spent very little time at home. In fact, because of the way the Academy was run in 1938 I never received a leave of absence for the first eighteen months as a cadet. I got my first leave during the Christmas Holidays in 1939. I also received the summer off in 1939 at the end of my yearling year. However, in 1940 and 1941 I was scarcely home for a week each year and after graduation I rarely came home for more than a few days a year. During the war years which actually began in 1939, a military career demanded all one's time.

When I entered West Point, I was one of the oldest members of my class. Moreover, I had completed ROTC at Drexel and was a few weeks away from being commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant. Nevertheless, I had no qualms about entering West Point. I smiled perpetually at the thought that my military career had started. In addition, I had complete control of my situation in that I could stay calm in the face of all sorts of harassment, and I could work well under pressure. All these traits got me into deep difficulty with some of the new yearlings who thought that everyone should be in a constant "storm" as the cadet slang went.

Unfortunately, my control and good spirits infuriated the younger members of the Beast Detail (new cadets were called beasts). These immature yearlings were determined for some reason to make me into a good "plebe" which in their meaning of the word meant that I should be in a constant panic. The fact that I exhibited efficiency, coolness, and intelligence infuriated them. The final straw for them turned out to be a stamp with my name in 1/4" letters and an indelible ink pad. Thus, when we had to mark our clothing with our name, I completed the task in a matter of perhaps a half hour. When the inspecting upperclassman entered my room, I was seated at my desk reading the *Bugle Notes*, a sort of Plebe information book. For reasons unknown to me, he flew into an absolute rage because I had completed all the assigned tasks. He hazed me mercilessly and in a personal manner (really a big no-no) all of which I endured with equanimity, further enraging him.

This particular individual convinced his classmates that I had a "bad attitude" and they made my life miserable for most of Beast Barracks and the rest of the Plebe year. I survived it but came away with the feeling the "system" left much to be corrected. My conclusion that some of the younger members of the "Beast Detail" needed more supervision served me in good stead when I became an upperclassman and a member of the Beast Detail. I also came away from my experience with the conviction that all my actions as an upperclassman would be impersonal. So far as I can tell, I always was impartial and many of the underclassmen told me after they became upperclassmen that I treated them fairly and impartially. I carried this resolve for fair treatment with me throughout my entire army career. Many of those who served under me told me in later years that my attitude could always be characterized as fair even though I insisted upon strict standards of discipline.

Beast Barracks ended and we entered into the academic life of the Academy. Here I excelled. In particular, I excelled in mathematics, French and any other subject that required a knowledge of mathematics or spatial abilities, such as drafting. At the end of the first month of academics I was either first or second in my class in most subjects and stayed that way throughout my cadet career.

At graduation, I won the Robert E. Lee Saber Award for excellence in Mathematics and a prize for Chemistry.

The Robert E. Lee Saber was a beautiful sword with a gold “JHH” monogram on the hand guard. The blade carried elaborately scrolled devices based upon the Lee coat of arms. Unfortunately, the world and the War were changing things, and the saber was useless to me except as a memento. Far better would have been the presentation of a pistol. Ultimately, the saber was stolen during one of the many moves our family made and I received \$200 in reimbursement for it, a considerable sum in the 1950s when the saber was either lost or stolen during transit.

Life as a cadet followed a fixed routine. Little stands out as memorable during my yearling and cow years. One day tended to be like every other day even though after Germany’s invasion of Poland we all knew that the United States would probably enter the war at some point. Of course, Pearl Harbor changed all of that. Now we knew that we really would serve in combat. In an odd way, cadet life became, if anything, more boring because a great war was raging, and we knew that we would be an important part of it but first we had to graduate, and time hung very heavy over us. First, however, I do want to tell you about one or two memorable events.

I suppose the highlight of my plebe year came when “E” Company won the inter-mural championship in soccer from “M” Company. To understand the importance of the victory in the minds of the “E” Company players you have to realize that at that time the various companies had cadets of one height. The tallest cadets, the so-called flankers who were six feet or more in height, were in “A” and “M” companies while the shortest cadets, height 5’6” were in companies “G” and “H”. These were the runt companies. The remainder of the cadets, taller than 5’6” and shorter than 6’ manned the remainder of the companies. The purpose for this height distribution was to create a line on the parade ground that appeared to be of one height. The tallest cadets were at the ends and the shortest in the middle so that by the laws of perspective everyone appears the same height.

During the inter-mural season in soccer each company played with each other company in a round-robin tournament in each half of the corps. The winners of their respective round robins then played each other for the championship of the corps. The playoffs led to a hard-fought game and as the time ran out the score was 0-0 with but a few minutes to play. Finally, “E” Company scored, and we were leading 1 to 0 when “M” company received a free kick because of a penalty call. This meant that they could tie the score and quite possibly win in an extra period. I was the goalie and “M” Company picked Carl Hinkle to deliver the free kick. He had been an All-American football player before he entered the Academy so confidence ran high in the “M” Company ranks that he could easily kick past me and tie the game. That concept was their undoing because rather than try to finesse his kick he relied on brute force and kicked right at me. He did not realize the quickness of my reflexes, particularly when placed under pressure. I had read his intentions perfectly and as he swung his foot my calculation of the trajectory of the ball as well as its speed came instinctively, and I deflected it. That ended the game, really, because only ten or so seconds remained to play, and the game ended before the ball could reach a position for another goal try. My teammates carried me off the field in triumph (for the second time in my young life) and we won the championship. We

received our numerals, 1942, to place on our cadet sweaters. More to the point the numerals were presented to us by the Commandant at the next awards parade and everyone on the post knew that the runts had beaten the flankers for the Corps inter-mural championship in soccer.

As noted earlier, the essential dullness of cadet life changed with Pearl Harbor. Thereafter, most of us realized that our training had a deadly purpose. Actually, I guess I was one of the few cadets who realized that war with Japan was probably inevitable. I had learned this from Grandpa Hayes' naval service.

The United States Navy always knew that one day there would be a gigantic confrontation in the Pacific with Japan. Japan's political outlook as well as their code of Bushido made for expansionism as did their almost complete lack of raw materials. When they had become a manufacturing nation they had, to their dismay, to import virtually all of their raw materials. They turned, therefore, to military conquest to find the materials they needed to keep their industrial machine running.

The Navy knew that Japan would someday be an enemy when Japan cheated on the terms of the of the tonnages allowed by the Washington Naval Conference of 1922. The terms agreed by the conference set naval tonnages in the ratio of 5-5-3-1.75-1.75. The ratio meant that for each 5 tons of capital ships (battleships) possessed by the United States and Great Britain, Japan would have 3 tons and France and Italy would each have 1.75 tons. In essence, this relegated Japan, France, and Italy to lesser world powers because the tonnage of capital ships had become a measure of national military power. Whatever the terms of the treaty, Japan had accepted and signed them. Theoretically, the treaty was a solemn oath by each nation to do certain things with their naval strength but Japan, of all the powers, proceeded to violate the treaty from the moment it was signed. Ultimately, each signatory violated the treat except the United States which actually sank some of its battleships to abide by the terms of the treaty. I clearly remember my father ranting about this stupid agreement and our muddleheaded approach to international morality. He repeatedly told me that someday we would have to fight the "yellow peril" as the navy called it and as it the Hearst newspapers sensationalized the threat.

Most of my classmates knew little of this agreement and cared less that Japan had violated the pact. Cadet life became a seamless mold of sameness and most of us found varying ways to cope with academics. However, I kept writing English themes about the inevitability of war. I finally refrained from this subject when I found that most of the English instructors found the subject uninteresting and were prone to give me poor marks for even choosing the topic.

Germany, however, had a special place. We studied French because the army knew that sooner or later there would be another war in Europe and we would be allied with the French and British against Germany. Ominous signs strengthened this belief beginning with the German reoccupation of the Rhineland and the French and British policies of peace-at-any-price policies. Our government, riddled with isolationism, did nothing to stop Hitler. In fact, when I entered West Point the United States Army and Army Air Force were barely 100,000 strong. Our equipment, particularly, tanks could not match those of Germany. Our artillery still had 75mm cannons instead

of the 105mm possessed by most other armies and most of our cannons had seen service in World War I.

The fall of France in 1940 and the disaster at Dunkerque awakened the nation to the danger posed by Hitler. We enacted hasty programs despite the large isolationist group in the congress. The leadership of President Roosevelt rose to the occasion, and he pushed through the Lend Lease Program which provided crucial destroyers to the British Navy for the submarine war in the Atlantic. That one program probably meant the difference between defeat for Great Britain and the ultimate victory over Hitler.

Our academic program remained the same, but our summer training programs changed drastically. We went to active-duty units to participate in their training. For instance, I spent two weeks with the 29th Division at Camp Hill and served as a platoon leader with one of their companies during the summer of 1940. This was invaluable training for me as a prospective infantry officer. We also had the opportunity to engage in artillery training and acted as crews and forward observers for some of the firing of the 75s.

Incredibly, the United States Army in 1940 still had a cavalry division and several cavalry regiments including the famous 10th Cavalry composed of black soldiers. This regiment had a distinguished record of fighting in the Indian Wars and had been assigned to West Point to train cadets in cavalry tactics. I like to think that I led what might have been the last cavalry charge in the history of the United States Army. Only those members of the Class of 42 who participated appreciated the significance of this wild charge across the fields bathed by Popolopen Creek. The whole thing reminds one of a Graustarkian opera and, fittingly, took place on the last real day of our senior class cavalry hike.

In our senior year, the class divided into two halves each comprising an oversized cavalry troop with a few attachments from the 10th Cavalry. In particular, we enjoyed the services of Benifield the 10th Cavalry bugler. Benifield towered over everyone because his was at least 6'8" and had to have an special large horse otherwise his legs would scrape the ground as he rode. In any case, on the last day I commanded a platoon of the troop lead by my friend Lauer (later killed in action in Europe). Benifield was assigned to me because my platoon had a key role to play in the battle we saw taking shape. I should mention that in addition to other talents Benifield was what I would call the first rapper. As he woke us each morning with his bugle he would shout verse in the rapper style. These were humorous and extremely vulgar but were in every sense of the word rapping as we now know the form.

Our troop advanced towards Popolopen Creek when our forward scouts reported that the other half of our class (the second troop) had taken defensive positions behind the creek. Lauer decided to flank them with my platoon. Benifield's bugle call would announce that I was in position and signal the charge for the entire troop. According to plan, I found myself leading about forty men and horses across a field while simultaneously trying to use a small copse of woods as cover to prevent the enemy from observing our maneuver. The opposing commander had, of course, stationed security on his flanks. One of the security men was George Sherman (later killed in action

over Europe). I immediately recognized that he had seen us, and I turned to my second in command and said something like, "it's George." Benifield, riding to my left, thought I said "charge" and immediately sounded the bugle call for the charge. None of the cadets had reckoned on the fact that the horses had been in the cavalry far longer than we. At the sound of the charge, the horses went wild! With minor exceptions none of us were good riders so we found ourselves incapable of controlling the horses and became passengers. The charge picked up speed, the horses lowered their necks, threw their ears back, foamed at the mouth, distended their nostrils, and thoroughly enjoyed the exhilaration of the charge! In an instant, a stone fence appeared, and we jumped over it only to encounter another fence and then another! Then abruptly the horses realized that they would run into an almost vertical hill unless they made an abrupt left turn.

By now the horses were really foaming at their mouth and became totally uncontrollable. Nevertheless, they had the presence of mind with some persuasion and reining action by the cadets to get onto the road which led directly into the left flank of the enemy troop. Despite my best efforts at control, I found myself at the mercy of the horses running helter skelter toward the enemy who because of the coordinated action of the remainder of our troop found themselves incapable of much action. Behind me was my platoon, holding on to their horses for dear life and to the left of me was Benifield still blowing the charge! One of the enemy, Pierce (killed in action when his plane was shot down), moved his horse out into the middle of the road in such a way that I could not avoid it. The impact threw me and my horse to the ground and the rest of the platoon began to pile up on us because they could not move around the pile comprised of me, Pierce, and our horses. The ensuing pile appeared as a mass of hooves, arms, legs, cadets, and a huge figure blowing the charge! Several cadets were injured as well as several horses and the equivalent of cadet 911 and veterinarian 911 soon appeared on the scene to transport the injured to the appropriate hospital.

I could see my career dissolving before my eyes before it even got started. Instead, we had a critique by Captain Peter Haines, later a General commanding an armored division. His remarks stunned me: the charge was in the finest spirit of the cavalry, that Cadet Hayes understood the value of shock action, and that I should be commended for my prompt and forceful decision!

The cavalry charge and the service with the 29th Division highlighted the summer. When Academics began, I became a "Cadet Instructor" in mathematics. Twenty of us took the places of instructors who had left to command units or to activate new units. The resultant shortage in instructors left the Academy with no other recourse than to appoint those of us who excelled in certain subjects as instructors.

I paid a price for the honor. Those of us chosen as instructors became, in effect, 3rd Lieutenants but we could no longer compete in class standing because we did not take classes. At the time I ranked 2nd in my class and only a few tenths of a percentage point separated me from the man who ranked first. I had intended to work hard in my senior year to make an all-out bid to be first. The competition never materialized, and I graduated second in my class but did receive the saber for excellence in mathematics and recognition as first in Chemistry.

The Valiant Die Once

I taught the yearlings calculus and found that I had a real flair for teaching. Somehow or another, my explanations made a complicated subject seem non-complex which coupled with a real rapport with the yearlings made for a good understanding on their part of the lessons I was trying to teach. I suppose the Yearlings rather admired the fact that as a cadet I had enough knowledge to become an instructor. Whatever, the reasons for this newly found skill in teaching made the year pass quickly. May 1942 leaped at us, and the Class of 1942 became 2nd Lieutenants in the greatest Army and Air Force the world has ever seen.

Early graduation also carried a price. We did not receive the normal 3 months of graduation leave but, instead, immediately reported to our branch schools for training. After short visit of a perhaps three days with my parents I reported for duty for Basic Course #36 at Fort Benning, Georgia. Thirteen weeks later I reported for duty with the 80th Division at Camp Forrest, Tennessee. My initial assignment was as a platoon leader in Company "G", 317th Infantry.

One of the saddest aspects of the war came from the torrent of casualty reports concerning friends. My class lost almost a third of its members during the war. My roommate during my last year was John Gimperling, another cadet instructor, who died in a training accident when his plane crashed after another plane chewed off its tail during formation flying training. One of the best friends I ever had, Frank Smiley, was shot down over the China Sea. Lauer, Sherman, Pierce, Leonard, Murray, Horan, Dziuban, Bilstin, Patch and many others were killed in action. Others like Hyde lost their sight, Hanst and Williams lost legs, and Bart's arm was so severely mauled that he had to retire. The nation was well served by the Class of 1942.

The deaths came as a natural part of war. War's nourishment comes from man's violent and cruel nature and man, seemingly, is powerless to help himself because wars come with such frequency. In any case, we knew the road ahead could not be easy when our graduation speaker, General George C. Marshall, spoke to us. I remember very little of his graduation speech except the sentence, "I promise you that you will land on the shores of France." Most of us did and many of us died or ended our military careers there. However, as you read the next chapters on the war years, you will see that the sacrifices were worth it. A world ruled by Hitler and his Nazis would have been a world without freedom, no respect for the law, and no dignity for mankind. However much we may criticize democracy, its problems are insignificant compared to what the problems would have been under Hitler and his bullies.

Chapter 6

The War Years

Training

When Hitler invaded Poland, I knew with absolute certainty that the United States would eventually enter World War II. The many themes I had written about the inevitability of World War II and our entry into would come true. That the war would also include Japan, given Grandpa Hayes' lectures did not surprise me. I did not expect the disaster at Pearl Harbor but had, instead, expected that the war would begin somewhere near Yap Island, the favorite spot for Navy pre-war games. Nevertheless, Pearl Harbor happened and as Sherlock Holmes often said, "The game is afoot."

Like most Americans of my generation, I remember exactly the circumstances when I first heard of Pearl Harbor's bombing. I had been to the movie on Sunday, 7 December 1941. As I left the movie theater, I saw troopers of the 10th Cavalry running about the post in what appeared to be an aimless pattern. You could feel the excitement in the air as troopers dashed through the streets as if they expected to be shipped overseas that afternoon.

That moment in time started the great adventure of my generation. The events which unfolded broke the spirits of many but, by and large, strengthened the spirit and resolve of most of us. Thousands of men and women who would never have met did so and created your generation. The resultant mixing of gene pools has without a doubt increased the intelligence and ingenuity of Americans. Your generation benefited in unknown ways from this great mixing of Americans. But for the war, your mother and I could never have met, and you would not be alive.

I knew that my parents would be extremely worried about what would happen to me. Therefore, my first act was to write them a letter to try to put their minds at ease. In any case graduation was six months away so they could put their minds at ease for at least that length of time.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the last months at West Point seemed redundant because our main focus centered on joining the war effort. Consequently, when we heard that graduation would be in May rather than June most of us welcomed the news even though we knew we would get no graduation leave. In effect, we got into the war effort about four months earlier than if graduation and graduation leave proceeded at a normal pace.

I visited my parents for perhaps two or three days and then took the train for Columbus, Georgia preparatory to entering Basic Class #36 at Fort Benning. The course went at a furious pace and became a gigantic hazing formation. We trained six days a week for about twelve hours a day, given the time it took to proceed to and from the training areas. The training taught us to serve as platoon leaders whereas West Point had trained us to be generals—a major change had to be made in our thinking processes. The training also emphasized physical exertion and fitness. We ran between training sites located in the same general areas. Moreover, we ran in June, July, and August

in Georgia where the temperatures routinely hit 100° in the shade. The expenditure of energy was enormous, and we all became lean and mean.

Our basic training ended in September 1942, and we reported to our units. I had my first choice of assignments and chose the 80th Division at Camp Forrest, Tennessee. The division had been activated but a few weeks earlier. I chose the division because the rumors had it slated to go to Europe, the theater which all of us knew received first priority in equipment as well as strategic attention. My choice turned out to be a correct one and ultimately, I found myself fighting the Germans in France.

In all the 80th contained five members of the Class of 1942. Three from the infantry, one from the artillery, and one from the Engineers. Hank Harmeling, Jesse Miles and I were the ground pounders, Dopey Stephens was the artillery man, and Bob Rawls was from the engineers. All but Hank Harmeling stayed with the division until its deactivation in December 1945. Hank Harmeling became a cadre to the unlucky 106th Division, much of which surrendered to the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge.

When the infantrymen reported for duty were given our choice of regiments: 317th, 318th, or 319th. Because I was a senior according to our rank upon graduation, I had first choice and chose the 317th. Jesse went to the 318th and Hank went to the 319th. Upon reporting for duty with the 317th I became a platoon leader in “G” Company whose commander was Captain Edwards, a National Guard Officer from Tennessee. Oddly enough, he had the same name as the National Guard Officer who commanded Company “A” of the 103rd Engineers from which I entered the Academy. One other officer, 1st Lieutenant Komer commanded a platoon and was the company executive officer. The other platoons were commanded by sergeants whose names I have forgotten.

I learned quickly that the draft had reached deep into the pool of men eligible for service and that several of those down deep in the barrel had been assigned to my platoon, the 3rd. Jason, Mulcahey, Rutledge, Frost (Jack, of course), and an Irishman whose name I have forgotten. Jason and Mulcahey were absolute morons with IQs to prove it, Rutledge had slightly more intelligence but not much, Jack Frost was on par with Rutledge, and the Irishman slightly more intelligent (he had been in the Black and Tam Rebellion earlier in the century and had a gouged eye). It was impossible to train these men to be soldiers for several reasons: first, and uppermost, they simple could not learn the simplest motor skills such as aiming and shooting; second, they had little desire to remain in the Army and rode their stupidity for all it was worth; finally, what little they did learn required tremendous expenditures of time on the part myself and the sergeants and we had no time to waste.

These men had tremendous other problems. They seldom bathed so I received constant complaints about their hygiene from the other platoon members. They could not stand guard because they could not read and, therefore, could not memorize the general orders which all sentries had to enforce. Finally, they created mini disasters every time we had an inspection. Captain Edwards and I had a hard time trying to find excuses as to why these particular men should not stand inspection. Sometimes we failed as I will explain later.

The degree of intelligence displayed by these men is best illustrated by the scar I have on my hand from a bayonet wound. I had instructed my platoon on the proper technique for making the long thrust used in bayonet fighting. Then I wanted to see that they had mastered the technique, so I told them to sheath their bayonets in the bayonet scabbard. Finally, they had to lunge at me using the proper technique. In this case the target of the long thrust was the neck. I made an error in assuming that each of them would understand the simple instruction: "Put your bayonet on your rifle and leave it in its scabbard." Incidentally, I never again ever assumed that anyone would automatically understand an order. I always checked a second time and, in some cases, a third time to assure myself that my orders were clear to all who heard them.

In short order, I regretted my failure to check that each man understood my order. As I checked the man next to Mulcahey all seemed to be in order, so I stepped in front of him but unfortunately did not turn my head quickly enough from watching the other man. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a naked bayonet coming towards my throat! Fortunately, there is a procedure for disarming someone armed with a bayonet: the rifle is pushed to one side by hitting the blade of the bayonet at its mid-point with the right hand, then the trigger guard is grasped with the left hand and is pulled forward while simultaneously using the right leg to kick the enemy's right leg from behind causing him to fall. You continue to hold the enemy's rifle in your left hand as you reach for the butt of the rifle with your right hand and pull it forward. Thus, your right leg acts as a fulcrum and the enemy falls backward leaving you in possession of his rifle which you can then use to bayonet him in the stomach or neck.

I disarmed Mulcahey but in the process failed to hit the blade properly because his thrust was so unexpected. Instead, I hit the point of the blade with the palm of my right hand. Though I succeeded in pushing the blade aside it pierced the palm of my right hand where the little finger joins it and cause a deep wound requiring seven stitches. When I left the aid station, I found Mulcahey unrepentant. His explanation was simplicity itself. He didn't know what a scabbard was and besides I had told him to stab me! I verified to my own satisfaction that Mulcahey was telling the truth and was simply doing what he thought I had ordered him to do. He thought he was being a good soldier! It gave me a lesson I never forgot about knowing one's subordinates and it certainly left me wondering about the intelligence and education of most of the soldiers in "G" Company.

Later when I became Company Commander, I gave all the men a test in which I asked simple questions like, "which is nearer to the earth, the sun or the moon?", "Where is Europe?" With few exceptions, most of them failed the test. Those who didn't flunk were men who had been drafted from the professions—several lawyers, a petroleum engineer, an English professor, and a few others who had read extensively on their own. The more educated and more intelligent were quickly lost to me because of the insatiable demands for officers. By the end of December 1942 most of the men in my company who had AGCT scores which qualified them for Officer Candidate School had been sent to Fort Benning or some other OCS training camp.

The men who ended up in "G" Company were representative of most of America at that time. I must stress that these were good men who had, in most cases, been denied education as children.

They came from farms, coal mining regions, or from families who eked out a living by whatever means possible. These men had to work as children to help support their families so that most of them had never even graduated from elementary school. Indeed, the big dream of any family who valued education was to have their children graduate from high school. College for most Americans seemed out of reach.

Life as a second lieutenant of the Infantry seemed like a kaleidoscope of hectic activities. We did not have enough officers and frequently had only one or two per company instead of the normal complement of six. If we did get additional officers, they quickly left in the frequent levies to provide replacements for the losses in the North African campaign. We worked long hours and rarely had a weekend free. One or two experiences stand out.

When I first reported to the regiment, I was assigned to a room with another second lieutenant named Joe Bailey. The room held two cots and two footlockers with difficulty and had hardly any space to hang up uniforms. Fortunately, neither of us had many belongings so we struggled along with some difficulty. I had never told Bailey that I was a West Point graduate and he simply assumed that I had graduated from OCS as he had. He had little respect for West Pointers whom he felt had earned their commissions “the easy way” whereas OCS with its thirteen weeks of training was “the hard way” to get one’s gold bar. Finally, someone told him that I had graduated from West Point, and he came to me to indignantly demanding to know if I had indeed graduated from the Academy. Thereafter, he was so jealous that he hardly spoke to me. Within a week or two after our encounter he was taken by one of the numerous levies for North African replacements and I never saw him again. Moreover, I did not get a new roommate and had the room to myself. When I became a company commander, I even received a slightly larger room!

Another incident that sticks in my mind also relates to my being a recent graduate of West Point. My battalion commander had also graduated from West Point, I think in 1933. He called me to his office to give me the good news-bad news routine. The good news: he thought I was the best 2nd Lieutenant in the regiment. The bad news: he could not promote me to 1st Lieutenant because he did not want to be thought of as giving me special consideration because we were both graduates of the Academy. Fortunately, the regimental commander, Colonel Cameron, also considered me the best 2nd Lieutenant and gave me command of “G” Company in December 1942 and shortly thereafter promoted me to 1st Lieutenant. At the time, a magnificent increase in pay of \$16.00 per month. I found out many times during my career that senior officers didn’t promote me earlier, even though they believed me to be outstanding, because they did not want to be thought of as giving special consideration. Ultimately, this kind of thinking on the part of many senior officers, who were senior because they had received early promotion as young officer, became an important consideration in my decision to retire from the Army in 1965.

The scope of responsibilities of a company commander quickly convinced me that delegation of duties had to be an important element of any successful commander’s arsenal of leadership techniques. The ability to delegate and then to oversee and check on subordinate’s performances is absolutely key to successful command. However, supervision has to be precise and fair as well as

demanding of excellence. The other side of the supervision coin, however, relies upon responsible and loyal subordinates. The higher the command echelon the more the commander must rely upon trusted subordinates and staff personnel to execute and oversee the myriad details involved in making a unit cohesive, dynamic, and motivated.

An organization ultimately assumes the characteristics of the commander because he rates subordinates and gives both praise and punishment. The leader must, therefore, avoid the slightest hint of favoritism, moodiness, or a lack of confidence. He must, in addition, reward excellence as soon as it shows itself and must punish dereliction of duty immediately. The commander must accept responsibility for the actions and decisions of his subordinates when those actions result from actions taken in good faith. Finally, the leader must eschew petty annoyance and must set goals which the organization can accomplish. Let me give you two examples, one good and one bad.

When the 80th Division completed the first phase of its training at Camp Forrest we had a full field inspection by the Corps Commander, Lieutenant General Lucas. While inspecting the 317th he unerringly stopped at one of "G" Company's major problems, Pvt. Rutledge. I had reported in the prescribed manner and had the sinking suspicion that he would stop at either Rutledge or one of my other problems like Jason, Mucaney or Frost. As the General stood before Rutledge, Rutledge smiled at the General. The General smiled back and asked Rutledge his name. Rutledge, the friendly farmer, relaxed, leaned upon his rifle and said, "My name is Rutledge, what's yours?" At that point I hoped the ground would swallow me because I could see myself as the perpetual 1st Lieutenant. The General turned to me with the following comment which engraved itself in my brain, "Well, Lieutenant, I guess we all have a cross to bear." This type of understanding coupled with a sense of humor demonstrates leadership of the highest sort. Unfortunately, for the General his tactical and strategic leadership was less adroit. At Anzio Beach during the initial landing, General Lucas failed to seize the high ground around the landing site in a bitter replay of the Gallipoli landings of the first World War. Then as at Anzio, the high ground remained unoccupied and undefended for several days until in World War I the Turks seized the opportunity to take it at no cost. Then, as at Anzio, the possession of the heights around the landing site cost the Allies thousands of needless casualties from brutal pounding by enemy artillery and mortars.

My memory contains many examples of poor leadership by my second battalion commander, Russell E. Murray. He had replaced Lt. Colonel Elegar, the West Pointer who had become the Division G-3 (operations and plans). Major Murray was in his early thirties (I think) but he was obsessed by appearances rather than substance. As an example, during one of the Tennessee Maneuvers my company marched and fought without rest for 72 hours. We had marched incessantly, had always taken the initiative against the "enemy", and now we had orders to return to an assembly area because the maneuvers had ended. We were tired, bedraggled and thoroughly exhausted. Moreover, we had not eaten for about twenty-four hours because of a breakdown in the battalion supply system. As we slowly lifted one foot after the other, Major Murray drove up in his jeep. He had obviously recently shaved and changed clothes. He had obviously also slept well the night before. He called me from a distance, so I had to double time to his jeep, and he made no

attempt to meet me even halfway. He waited while I doubled timed with all my forty or fifty pounds of gear flapping around my waist and striking me on the legs and arms. As I saluted and stood at attention, he said something very close to this, "Hayes that man has the top of his boot unbuckled and his fatigues are partially out of his boot." This kind of insensitive remark showed the man's concentration on appearance. In point of fact, we had captured many of the enemy, seized an important hill for artillery observation, and had acquitted ourselves in an outstanding manner, according to the critique given by the maneuver judges. To make a long story short, this man who concentrated on trivial appearances showed during combat that he could not make the hard decisions required of a combat leader. On 24 September 1944 Colonel Cameron appointed me as commander of the 2nd Battalion and I informed then Lieutenant Colonel Russell that I was relieved of duty and assumed command of the battalion.

The Division spent the summer and winter of 1943 in the Tennessee Maneuver Area. Maneuvers, we soon found out, require the expenditure of tremendous amounts of energy. However, my experience with the maneuvers was a great success. For instance, in the first part of the maneuvers when regiment maneuvered against regiment, I came to the attention of my battalion commander in the opening moments of the first day of the first maneuver. Incredibly, no one had thought to bring maps! However, I had a map of the entire area which I had scrounged from the engineer battalion. This map became the only map available to the regiment for almost the entire first day. The regimental S-2 had obviously fouled up and had forgotten to requisition the maps necessary to conduct the maneuver. I also pleased Colonel Cameron, the regimental commander, with my tactical acumen. His recognition had the merit of placing me under regimental control rather than battalion control and throughout the rest of the regimental maneuvers, I rarely served under Major Murray whom I disliked as I explained earlier.

Company "G" had two other officers during this period: 2nd Lieutenants McGuire and Katz. Both of these officers fulfilled their duties superbly and I liked them. They were taken from me at the end of the maneuvers to fill one of the numerous calls for replacements for the Italian and Pacific theaters. A few months later I received a letter from Lieutenant McGuire's parents. Their son died in action in the Italian theater. Almost simultaneously, the brother of Lieutenant Katz wrote to me to tell me that his brother had been killed in one of the numerous island invasions taking place in the Pacific Theater. In both instances, the letter said that they wrote to me because both of the Lieutenants had voiced their admiration for my professionalism and for the leadership, I had given them. These letters touched me deeply and I still remember receiving them. Both were fine young men. However, war is no respecter of person and death on the battlefield strikes without discrimination. Both men, one a Christian, the other a Jew fell victims to the ambitions of a modern-day monsters, Hitler and Tojo. As I write this, I must admit that if I had the opportunity, I could have executed both Hitler and Tojo as well as a large number of their henchmen without the slightest qualm. These two monsters and their chief assistants deserved no mercy.

I had become friends with Lieutenants McGuire and Katz. They were among the first of many friends and classmates to die in action. Many of the soldiers of Company "G" also were killed in

action. I knew many of their families as well as their hopes for the future. My later reaction to all these deaths was, I later learned, characteristic of many of us who saw heavy fighting. I refused to make new friends because I knew that statistics showed that they had a good chance of being killed or wounded. Wartime statistics showed that over 80% of all casualties came from the infantry. Therefore, one's own chances as well as those of one's friends were poor. For instance, the 317th Infantry, about 3300 strong on arrival in France, suffered slightly more than 8000 casualties of which slightly less than 2000 were killed in action or died of wounds.

In the infantry, the chance of survival could be poor even during maneuvers. I had several close brushes with death during the Tennessee Maneuvers. During one maneuver specifically designed to teach us to operate during foul weather conditions a lightning bolt struck in the middle of Company "G". Several of the men were hurt and one, Sergeant Adams, never returned to duty with the company because of the trauma he experienced. I had another lightning incident during a maneuver when, as a cadet, I served with the 29th Division. Lightning struck a tree behind me. Both I and Sergeant Goff who marched beside me, were stunned. Fortunately, neither of us experienced any permanent injury and we continued on with the exercise. When you consider the odds of being struck by lightning, I guess I've had my share of good luck!

I was also in several motor accidents during maneuvers. The worst occurred when a truck in which I rode slid off a narrow road in Tennessee and rolled down an embankment perhaps fifty feet high. Though I received numerous bruises I did not suffer any major injury nor did any of the twenty odd men who rode in the rear of the truck. The medics took them to a field hospital where they spent the night. After seeing to their welfare, I returned to my command and continued on with the maneuver during the night. In another close call, a truck rolled over the rear of the pup tent in which I slept and missed my head by only a few inches. I learned from these and the numerous other close calls with death during combat that one shrugs these things aside and continues on with one's duties. What is done is past; the future lies before you and life must go forward.

The series of maneuvers in Tennessee turned into a grueling exercise in physical and mental endurance. The maneuvers turned groups of men into regiments and groups of regiments into divisions prepared to meet the best that Hitler and Tojo could field. The maneuvers became a series of marches, countermarches, and counter-counter marches because commanders could not decide what they wanted to do. Finally, however, they all ended, and we had learned to live in the field work as units and felt prepared to take on the enemy. I did well during the maneuvers and Company "G" received the accolades of Colonel Cameron as well as the rest of the high-ranking officers of the division as an excellent infantry company. My reward came swiftly: promotion to Captain in July 1943. Colonel Cameron also notified me that I would attend battalion commander's school at Fort Benning as soon as the regiment had a vacancy.

Other aspects of the Tennessee Maneuvers, not related to war made various impressions upon me. For instance, the Blue Ridge Mountains in Tennessee contain numerous "hollows" or valley areas. Some are quite large and exist as almost isolated areas. As we moved through the area, we noticed that most of the hollows did not have electricity and lacked means of communication with

the outside world because the telephone and radio had not yet penetrated into those particular hollows. When we first started the maneuvers, we actually found people who did not know that there was a war going on in Europe and Asia! Most of the people could not read and most eked out an extremely precarious living by cultivating the hillsides. In all cases the hillsides of the hollows were extremely steep and appeared to be made up of extremely poor soil because the rain washed the best soil to the so-called bottom lands.

I had one particularly pleasant but slightly ego deflating experience. We had entered a hollow which had obviously not been visited by any other unit. We had marched for several hours so I called a halt and sent word back to the kitchen to bring our evening meal to us. The daughter of the owner of the farm on which we had temporarily bivouacked was an extremely pretty young lady, so I struck up a conversation. She knew nothing about the military and as I tried to explain to her what a company was and what a company commander was, I mentioned that I had graduated from The United States Military Academy at West Point. This produced absolutely no reaction of recognition because she had never heard of West Point! In any event, we stayed only long enough for the evening meal and immediately received orders to move to a new area in preparation for an attack the following morning. I never saw this pretty, young but uneducated young lady again.

At the end of the Tennessee Maneuvers the 80th Division received orders to move to Camp Phillips, Kansas. I have no idea why we went to this particular camp. Its location on a huge plain over which a cold wind constantly howled made it one of the bleakest and barest places I have ever seen. None of the barracks had central heating. The quarters I shared with about seven other officers had only one potbellied stove for heat. The quarters never heated up to a comfortable temperature and we froze each morning because the pot belly simply did not hold enough wood to burn through the evening. We took turns starting the fire in the morning, but it never seemed to really deliver any heat. Worst of all, we had to go outside and dash about a hundred yards to the sanitary facilities, some of which were outdoors. Finally, the winter hit hundred-year records for low temperatures. Personal hygiene became a major enterprise each morning as we fought for survival in constant sub-zero temperatures.

Training began early in the morning before first light. Winds blew across the camp at what seemed to us to be hurricane force and the camp appeared to us to be a huge icebox specifically constructed by the War Department to haze us. We did not have the proper equipment for the temperatures we had to endure so we simply suffered in silence. Had we but known, the situation we encountered at Camp Phillips came to haunt us in December of 1944 when we first entered the Battle of the Bulge.

I escaped some of the winter at Camp Phillips because I received orders to report to the Battalion Commander's School at Fort Benning. While I attended school at Fort Benning, the 80th Division received orders to report to the desert training ground at Yuma, Arizona.

The Battalion Commander's Course at Fort Benning turned out to be another hazing formation interspersed with what appeared to be decision making problems that a battalion commander encountered. My main source of information, however, turned out to be Captain Bill Gordon, a

member of the 1st Division who had served in Africa and Sicily. He had seen a lot of combat and his war stories, however exaggerated they may have been, rang true and provided me with a lot of information about how a combat situation really evolved. In many cases, what he said seemed in direct conflict with what the Infantry School said. I later found out that theory and practice do not often turn out to be the same thing. Actual combat turns out to be stranger than fiction and more complex than theory simply because the enemy has a will and doctrine of his own.

My schooling ended in January or February of 1944, and I reported back to the 317th and became the acting regimental S-2. I welcomed this assignment because the slot called for a major and I knew that Colonel Cameron had already indicated that he would promote me. What I did not welcome was the weather on the first night I reported for duty in the desert: it rained! As a city boy my images of the desert came from the movies and always included sand dunes, camels, and oases. I had been raised on *Beau Geste*, *The Sheik* and other desert movies of the same ilk. Not only did it rain but we had a flash flood and my sleeping bag as well as all my other gear became soaked. I must add, so did everybody else's because the command post had been located in a wadi, a natural channel for any flash flood waters making their way down the surrounding mountains. Of course, none of this ought to surprise anyone because no one knew anything about the desert. Most officers, like myself, were city bred and believed that deserts did not have rain storms.

Like everything else in our training, we adapted quickly and continued on with our desert training. No one in the War Department seemed to notice that the need for desert training no longer existed because North Africa had been liberated and Rommel's Army no longer existed. Departmental inertia kept the juggernaut rolling and the desert training center remained open until almost the end of the war. The one thing we did know from our training was that we were headed to the European Theater rather than the Pacific Theater. Divisions headed for the Pacific trained in the Louisiana jungle training center.

A month or so after arriving in the desert, Colonel Cameron issued orders formally naming me as Regimental S-2 and the previous S-2 became assistant Executive Officer and soon disappeared from the regiment. A few weeks later orders came through promoting me to major with the magnificent pay of \$250 per month. My relationship with Colonel Cameron was one of mutual respect. He was a fine, if pragmatic man, who had risen through the ranks. He had served as an enlisted man in World War I and had been in the expeditionary force sent to Vladivostok at the end of World War I. That expeditionary force fought the Bolsheviks and aided the White Russians who supported the Czar although the Czar and his family had been executed by Lenin. During that campaign, Colonel Cameron received a battlefield commission.

Throughout my service with Colonel Cameron, I found him to be an extremely honorable man, stubborn, fiercely loyal to his regiment, and one of the bravest men I ever knew. He seemed to fear nothing. I remember one incident in which his fearlessness almost resulted in his and my death. The 2nd Battalion had attempted a crossing of the Moselle River at Vandières, a small town north of Pont-à-Mousson and roughly halfway between the large cities of Metz and Nancy. Lt. Colonel Murray seemed to be in a real funk and appeared incapable of making a decision, so Colonel

Cameron and I went to see for ourselves the situation at the 2nd Battalion's hasty crossing site. When we arrived, the battalions' leading companies had occupied the east bank of a canal which paralleled the Moselle, and the German artillery had the site under fire. A shell had hit an ambulance and killed all the wounded in it, several of the foxholes contained dead men, and Colonel Murray seemed disoriented. In any case, Colonel Cameron walked out in front of the positions and moved towards the east bank of the Moselle River. I accompanied him and at his request found our location on a map I had with me. He spread the map on the ground in plain sight of the Germans who knew instantly that a commander had come forward to make a reconnaissance. Artillery fire started to fall almost instantly and, in a moment, began to come perilously close to us. Colonel Cameron calmly finished what he was doing, gave me the map which I hastily folded and then he calmly began to walk, not run, back to the 2nd Battalion positions. The artillery and mortar fire continued to fall around us but miraculously missed us.

Colonel Cameron and General McBride had served together in the peacetime army and made no secret of the fact that they disliked each other intensely. In the long run, this resulted in Colonel Cameron's relief from command by General McBride and I never saw Colonel Cameron again until the early 80s when I learned that he lived close to us in California. I called him and we had lunch. Thereafter, Colonel Cameron and I met on numerous occasions although by this time he was in his mid-eighties. I also met Mrs. Cameron who told me that I had always been her husband's favorite officer because of my attention to duty and my willingness to take on any mission. I considered this high praise from a man who always set the highest standards for his own personal conduct and attention to the duties of regimental commander. One of my last meetings with Colonel Cameron came shortly after the death of his wife, an event which left him totally depressed and lost.

Sometime around the early part of May 1944 the division moved from the desert training area to Camp Dix to begin preparation for overseas movement or POM. We received new clothing, in some cases new weapons, and had numerous inoculations. POM lasted, in all, about a month. Finally, sometime in June we boarded the Queen Mary and five days later landed in Greenock, Scotland. In all, the Queen Mary had about 28,000 men and women. The units ranged from our division to field hospitals, to bomber crews returning from R&R.

Life on the Queen became a crashing bore. Lines, lines, lines. No sooner did one finish breakfast than you stood in line for supper because the two mess halls simply could not handle the 28,000 troops. The food was almost impossible to eat. Breakfast consisted of fried kippers or kidneys served with some sort of mush. The second meal consisted, invariably, of boiled meat and potatoes or again some type of mush. Most of the men survived by buying candy bars at the ship's canteen. Candy wrappers flew off the rear end of the ship in a huge cloud of multi-colored paper. I marveled that some astute submarine commander did not find this paper trail across the Atlantic and used it to predict our future position to some other U-boat.

Of course, the secret of the Queen's success as a troop transport lay hidden in its speed. Whereas a submarine could go at perhaps 10 to 15 knots submerged, the Queen could do perhaps forty at full speed. In order for a submarine to sink the Queen the sub's captain would have had to

know the Queen's exact course and be waiting for her. Fortunately, that never happened and the Queen's record as a troop transport became legendary.

Late in June or early in July, we landed in Greenock, Scotland. Here I encountered fields of Heather for the first time. The fields and flowers gave the flowing hills a brilliant and shining beauty. I could see why the name Heather was so popular in England. When Heather was born my first wartime experience in Scotland played a big role in deciding her name.

The 80th quickly debarked and moved to troop trains waiting for us. The 317th detrained at Goldsbrough near Liverpool. Our camp surprised us by its lack of training space. However, England at that time had little space to spare because every available empty lot served as a repository for some kind of equipment like trucks, tanks, and cannons. We spent the time trying to prepare for the combat which we now knew to be imminent for us because the invasion had taken place while we were enroute to Europe (I think) and preparations were now underway for the huge battle at Avranches which ultimately led to the breakthrough.

As part of our training, we invited officers from one of the nearby hospitals to speak to us. Our meeting with these officers proved one thing to me: at the lower ranks like platoon and company very few people understood the overall situation. For instance, one of the lieutenants who had been wounded by an exploding hand grenade tried to explain what had happened to his platoon and it soon became evident that his knowledge of the battlefield encompassed no more than what had happened without a radius of perhaps fifty feet of him. When we spoke to some of the enlisted men, they knew even less of the situation because their sphere of influence on the battlefield extended no more than the distance to the man on their right and left. Most of us did not appreciate the full import of what these men told us until, of course, we ourselves entered into combat. Then we realized that intuition, luck, and a constant effort to reconnoiter and gather information were indispensable ingredients for victory and survival.

In late July we began preparation for movement to the continent because by this time the beach head in Normandy had grown steadily larger and the plans for the great battle at Avranches required a pursuit force. Once again, we entrained at night, pulled the curtains down over the passenger car windows and soon found ourselves at one of the channel ports. We boarded a variety of vessels from LSTs to ferries. I boarded some sort of tugboat and shared a cabin with one of the tug's officers. We landed at Omaha Beach on one of the huge causeways constructed shortly after the invasion. From there we moved inland to an assembly area preparatory to moving south to the Avranches battle zone.

All of us immediately noticed that the assembly area into which the 317th moved had a peculiar and unforgettable odor: dead men who had begun to decay. Once smelled, the stench of a decaying body is never forgotten. In the next ten months that stench stayed in my nostrils as if it would never go away. Those first dead bodies reminded me of something odd. Dead men's eyes are open, unlike Hollywood where the dead die gracefully.

Two days after the 317th landed in France it engaged in its first combat action at Evron. The Evron operation, though minor and insignificant, showed that combat differed markedly from maneuvers. For one thing, maneuver casualties returned to duty the following day. In combat the dead and wounded stayed dead and wounded.

As we now prepared to enter significant combat, I suppose all of us had to come to grips with the possibility of killing and being killed. Truth to tell, I didn't dwell on my own death too much because I felt, fatalistically, that I would have little control over the timing and manner of my own demise. Anent the possibility of killing another human being my reactions seemed the acme of realism: either kill the enemy or he'll kill you.

It is important that the word *enemy* appears in the sentence above because by ascribing the pejorative epithet enemy to all those who fought us, I neatly erased any psychological reaction from my mind. The enemy is simply that: an evil creature devoid of humanity and devoid of any desires other than to kill you. Under these circumstances, it is easy to kill somebody who is dehumanized and who, furthermore, desires nothing more than to kill you. The exaggerated television reactions of remorse to killing an enemy are, to me at least, false and misleading mostly written by people who probably never actually engaged in combat and had friends killed or themselves shot.

When I knew for the first time I had killed an enemy, I had no reaction other than one of having saved my own life. I never regretted killing the two men who manned a machine gun and who had killed or wounded several of my soldiers. Later when I knew I had killed some more of the enemy, either directly or indirectly, I felt elation that they could not inflict damage on me or my unit. My own guess is that I probably killed at least four Germans, two machine gun nests, directly and that I indirectly directed mortar fire which killed another fifty to sixty Germans. Later, in my role as a battalion commander, my orders no doubt led to the death of several hundred Germans. By the time the war had ended, most of my friends in the 317th had either been killed or wounded. Only a few of us remained. My reaction, therefore, to the enemy became even harsher and more pragmatic and I felt satisfaction in destroying the enemy. In my estimation, the more of them we killed the sooner the war would end, and all the killing would cease. I had no compunctions whatsoever in doing my duty. To this day I do not like the collective German enemies, the collective Chinese enemy of 1950/51 or the collective North Korean enemy of 1950/51. I never saw combat against the Japanese, so I do not have the same strong feeling against them as the enemies I have actually fought. As the story of the war years unfolds the events which led to these killings unfold in greater detail.

Chapter 7

The War Years

The Break-through at Avranches and the Dash to the Moselle River

Approximately two days after the arrival of the 317th Infantry in France it received orders to move to a new assembly area somewhere north of Avranches. I don't remember the exact area, but Colonel Cameron ordered me to go with Brigadier General Sommers, the assistant division commander, to select an appropriate area for the regiment. We moved out late at night under blackout lights and moved into an area south of Omaha Beach and north of Avranches. A fierce battle raged at Avranches where the Germans tried to close the breakthrough made several days earlier. As we drove south flashes of light from thousands of artillery pieces illuminated the sky as if huge lightning bolts were striking the battle area. We continued south through the countryside and through many small, demolished, and deserted towns. Fingers of bricks grasped for the darkened sky as if praying for the right to continue to allow their town to continue to exist. The smell of death reached into our nostrils. Dead horses, dead men, and ruined equipment littered the roadside. We could occasionally see a dead man grinning in the moonlight. I felt like I had entered into a part of Dante's Inferno.

We reached the assembly area without incident thanks to the fact that I had brought a map with me. Once more I was the only officer in the entire group to have the foresight to get a map. I thought that we had learned this lesson during the Tennessee Maneuvers but as I noted earlier, combat is not maneuvers and men do strange things when adrenaline really begins to kick in and fear becomes an emotion with which one must cope. Fortunately, men learn quickly in combat, or they become a casualty.

Later that morning the advance elements of the 317th arrived and prepared to execute the anticipated first order from General Patton. The 80th had a rendezvous with fate and death. We would exploit the Avranches breakthrough as part of the 4th Armored Division/80th Division team. In the coming months, this team spread fear and confusion in the German ranks.

The 317th received orders to move to an assembly area north of Evron, France. We moved out before daylight. Our route led south along the coastal road. As the dawn broke and the sky lit up, we passed Mont St. Michel, the famous monastery. Mont St. Michel lies on a huge hill rising out of the sea. The only road leading to the monastery is covered by water most of the time and the monks as well as visitors must wait until low tide to leave or to enter. The monastery quickly disappeared from sight, and we continued south towards Avranches.

As we passed through the town square of Avranches, moving south, I noticed a dead German in the middle of the road. Vehicle after vehicle had passed over this poor soldier until he became shapeless and flat. I remember ordering my driver to try to avoid him. The memory of this flattened German infantryman remains as one of the vignettes of the war. I had, oddly, no feeling for him as a human being. He was an enemy.

Early in the afternoon we reached our assembly area near Evron and prepared for further orders. Orders came to seize Evron by a night attack. Colonel Cameron called me and ordered the reconnaissance platoon to send patrols into the area to ascertain the enemy dispositions. In accordance with my long-held notions about leadership I led the first patrol. It turned out to be an anti-climax. The Germans had evacuated Evron, and we met no resistance. We seized the town without shedding a drop of blood. Unfortunately, however, we had several wounded and, if I remember correctly, one man killed because of misunderstood passwords and itchy fingered sentries. The word of these casualties, our first, spread through the regiment quickly and produced a great deal of sadness. One of the wounded, Staff Sergeant McCoy, was a popular mess sergeant who had been bringing the evening meal forward.

The next morning as we moved through Evron I saw another example of how the few casualties of the days before had affected our men. A dead German lay on the sidewalk before one of the many boulangeries (bakery). As the GIs passed this man who had obviously been left behind to snipe, each soldier fired one or more rounds into him. The burial details received a surprise when they tried to pick up that body because it must have weighed a ton!

The following day, the breakout from Avranches gathered full steam and the Germans began a general retreat to the east towards the Meuse River. The 4th Armored Division supported by the 80th Infantry Division began a grand sweep around the shattered German Army. We met light resistance and my regiment suffered only a few casualties. In fact, most of the casualties resulted from accidents and, unfortunately, from sentries who demanded passwords. Unlike maneuvers, sentries carried rifles loaded with real bullets and as noted earlier, they had little tolerance for anyone who hesitated in giving the proper password.

In the middle of August, we moved into the area around Alencon in preparation for a movement to Argentan, the town through which the German Army intended to escape to the east. About the middle of August, fighting for Argentan began in earnest and the 317th suffered its first significant casualties. Sergeant Carruthers of Company "G", one of the men I had trained and promoted, was killed by shell fire along with several of the men in his squad.

Sergeant Carruthers death stunned all of us and we entered the extremely harsh realities of combat. We immediately saw that the flow of combat induced adrenaline did strange things to the body. Some men were exhilarated (as I was); other men simply fell apart from fear; a few men became "shell-shocked" or more euphemistically "battle fatigued". Whatever the reactions, things did not work as well as they had in maneuvers. Officers had to be relieved because they could not cope. Communications did not work because shell fire and tank movements ruined telephone wires (we still communicated by phone in those days rather than by radio). Men got lost or killed and the dead did not return to duty the following morning as they did on maneuvers. Those who got lost ended up, more often than not, as prisoners and they, too, did not return the following morning.

Doctors forced themselves to take practical steps to save those who could be saved. At Avranches I saw triage for the first time. As I passed an aid station, I noticed men who seemed sedated but otherwise unattended even though they seemed severely wounded. A surgeon explained

to me that they had no chance of living for more than a few hours or even minutes hence he sedated them to prevent suffering and turned his attention to the men whose lives he could preserve. These he treated and sent to the next medical level. The lightly wounded he treated and returned to their units.

Whatever feelings of sadness Sergeant Carruthers's death exposed us to, the war now assumed a logic all its own. The battles went on. At Argentan, the battle turned into a nighttime affair. Night became snapshots of horrors as shells exploded and guns flashed. By the time the morning came the battlefield contained the grisly results of numerous individual hand-to-hand combats. One German halftrack, I remember, had tried to escape down a road which the 317th controlled. As the halftrack passed one of the squads of "G" Company several grenades were thrown into it. The half dozen or so Germans in the vehicle were blown, literally, into bits and pieces. Arms, legs and parts of torsos filled the half-track and blood drenched its sides and floor.

Cruelty became commonplace and uneventful. I saw a dying German, his entrails spilling out of his abdomen onto his lap, protesting an American soldier's attempt to take his wristwatch. The American hit the German alongside of the head with his rifle butt and said something like, "Shut up you damned Kraut". The incident ended in a moment and though I started to try to do something to prevent such incidents in the future, something else required my attention and I never did get around to speaking to the American soldier about his conduct. Later, when cruelty became so commonplace as to be the normal, such incidents came and went without particular notice.

Argentan also introduced me to another part of my job as regimental S-2. The necessity to assess battle damage done to the enemy and the pressing need to acquire as much information as possible about the German Army. This meant that I needed to search the bodies of dead Germans to find their Soldbuch. The Soldbuch, the soldier's individual service record, contained information about all his assignments as well as his personal information such as date of birth. After I collected the Soldbuch I sent them back to division headquarters where specialists in the German Order of Battle tried to reconstruct the composition and strength of the retreating German Armies.

My first reaction to searching for the dead bodies left me feeling somewhat eerie, particularly because August had turned hot and some of the bodies had begun to bloat. However, like all other things in combat the job had to be done. In the long run, it saved American lives in the 317th Infantry as well as the rest of the division. Obviously the more you know about an enemy the better. Ideally you strive to catch him completely unprepared with no chance whatsoever of fighting back. When you get an enemy on the ropes or on the ground in combat the next step is to kick him, stomp him, stab him or kill him in any other way that is convenient. Combat is, axiomatically, not fair nor does one try to be fair. Chivalry, if it ever existed, had no place in World War II.

The German attempt to escape through the Argenton-Trun-Falaise Gap became a disaster for them. We pounded them with the artillery fire from several US and British Divisions. Our machine guns raked them from the high ground overlooking the area. The Air Force added to the carnage by strafing and bombing them during the day. I flew over the area in a liaison plane in an attempt to assess the damage and even at an altitude of 500 feet the stench of decaying bodies pierced the

nostrils. I wish I had had a camera to record some of the scenes I saw. The carnage stretched for a mile or so along the road and covered a wide area on either side of the road.

On the second or third day of this battle I captured an entire German Regiment single handed. I confess to no great feat of arms in this capture because the Germans who had managed to stay alive or get out of the gap acted like zombies. The regiment I captured lost so many men that its ranking officer was a captain who surrendered to me. He and his men could barely stand, and they had not eaten for several day. They had only a few rounds of ammunition. Some of the men had clearly lost their senses and simply stared into a distant horizon which only they could see. I accepted the surrender and told him to stay in his assembly area and I would arrange to have him collected and marched back to a PW concentration area.

I talked to the captain through our regimental interpreter, a specialist named Glick, who was also the chief of the Order of Battle Team assigned to the 317th. After a few moments of conversation Glick told me that the captain had requested a truck to move some of his men who suffered various types of wounds or had simply lost their minds. In the ensuing conversation, I told the Captain that I could probably arrange for one truck but not more. However, I stipulated that only those soldiers really in need of transportation could ride in the truck. I also told him that I was amazed that the German Army would request help from the Untermensch Americans. The Captain acknowledged the insult by clicking his heels and saluting but he accepted the offer of the truck. He turned on his heels, barked out a series of orders, and a group of the Germans step forward two paces to form a new rank. Then the Captain went down the line approving or disapproving the request made by each of the men who claimed to be tired, wounded, or otherwise in need of transportation. Finally, he reached one of the Germans who could only be described by the term "sad sack" and carried on an animated conversation for a moment or two. Then the Captain, despite his fatigue, smiled ever so briefly and denied the request for a ride. I turned to Glick and asked him what excuse the soldier had used in an attempt to get a ride back to the PW area. Glick told me that the soldier had told his captain that he needed glasses! This revealing moment of truth showed me that the German Army could not be the supermen their propaganda has spread. They, like every other army in the world, had their good men, bad men, and simply sad sacks. At that moment, I knew for certainty that we could beat them even though the victory might take many more months. In point of fact, it did take us almost ten more months to win but win we did!

The mopping up operation lasted another day. The next day, I set off in my jeep to assess the damage we had done. Though I had seen the battle area from the air, the ground view appalled me anew.

The Falaise Gap resembled the worst pictures of hell, an inferno transferred to a bucolic but now hellish area. Bodies and parts of bodies of men and horses littered the area. Destroyed vehicles, abandoned aid stations full of dead bodies, and overturned artillery and antiaircraft guns blocked the roads and trails. A few German medics awaiting capture tried futilely to treat some of the wounded. Over the entire area the stench of death permeated into the smallest places because August had turned warm, and the sun beat upon the dead bodies causing them to putrefy even more rapidly.

Many of the dead men and horses had died days earlier and they in particular had become bloated. Men and horses had distended and bloated stomachs. When a horse began to putrefy its stomach distended and caused its legs to form a vee shape. Finally, when rigor mortis set in the vee became a signpost on the battlefield and served as landmarks to identify particular locations. The men, unlike horses, went into rigor mortis in the position in which they had died. Some men had hideous grins. Others looked sad and bewildered. None of the dead looked peaceful. Worst of all were those who had been blown in half so that only the upper or lower portion of their body still remained.

The destruction of the German Army assumed monumental proportions so cleaning up the area became tedious and time consuming. Yet August had turned into an extremely warm month, and this sped up the decay of the dead soldiers and dead horses. In a final part of this sickening process, when the bodies had putrefied to the extent that the stomachs of men and horses could no longer contain the gas within them, the skin ruptured and the stinking gases in the corpses lost itself into the area heightening the pervasive smell of death. As disgusting as this process seemed, I had by now become used to it and moved throughout the area doing my job of damage assessment.

In the midst of this disaster, life had to continue. Kentucky, my driver, and I stopped and had a "K" ration for lunch. Like the veterans we had now become, nothing seemed amiss to us, but I have often thought of that moment. There we sat in the midst of chaos which neither one of us had even dreamed possible a few weeks before. The stench of death hovered over the entire battlefield and yet we ate our lunch as calmly as if we sat in a restaurant in the US. The human body and spirit is infinitely resilient and it quickly adapts to any circumstance, given a strong mind which can assess the situation.

Another unique phenomenon emerged. I could tell by a particular odor that the German Army had been in a particular area even if no wrecked vehicles or dead could be seen. The peculiar smell seemed overly sweet and came, I finally realized, from the oil used by the Germans to lubricate their weapons and equipment. The odor came from some material used in the refining process and continued to indicate to me throughout the war where the German Army had bivouacked or otherwise stopped for a period of time. Later in Korea, I noticed that North Korean and Chinese forces also left distinctive odors in their bivouac and assembly areas. Naturally, I also realized that we, too, left distinctive odors and that we, like other races, could not detect those odors because our nostrils became used to them simply because the odors pervaded the places we inhabited. These observations of combat, as well as many others, led me to write a paper in 1951 when I attended the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. That paper suggested, among other things, that the Army begin to develop people sniffers. I never did get the paper published because the man who reviewed it at Leavenworth was an old colonel of cavalry (who still wore his spurs) and he believed that such a suggestion gave away military secrets. His view was, of course, silly because other people had noticed the same things I had noticed and in due course industry did develop people sniffers as well as most of the devices I had recommended. However, I did not get credit for thinking of those ideas although, to be truthful, I suppose I was not the first man to think of those devices as useful in combat.

We did not linger in the Falaise Gap. Our orders came quickly and directed us to follow the 4th Armored Division in a wide sweep around the remaining parts of the German Army in Normandy. The following days produced a blur of road marches, motor marches, and small brief actions punctuated for me by endless missions with my reconnaissance platoon. Colonel Cameron had given me complete control of the platoon and, in keeping with its purpose, I had it constantly out in front of the regiment. We scouted for alternate routes and safe routes to move the regiment forward as quickly as possible. From time to time, we sent vehicles to either flank to see if something threatened the 317th. However, this part of the pursuit was relatively safe and casualty free because the Germans wanted to avoid us and tried to remain hidden during the day and marching by night.

My ability to speak French helped immensely during this period. The French wanted to give us information about the Germans and the direction in which they retreated from any given village. Moreover, it served as a sure sign that no Germans remained if when we approached a village, the peasants had already turned out to greet us. Colonel Cameron delighted in my ability to speak French and my driver seemed amazed that anyone spoke a language other than English! He had been dumbfounded to discover that French was different from English. His ignorance came from lack of education, not lack of intelligence. Kentucky had a quick and intuitive native intelligence, but he had never attended much beyond say second or third grade. Consequently, he could not read very well, nor could he write very well. However, he was a superb mechanic and an excellent driver. He stayed with me during the entire war. I have since stayed in touch with him and try to call him sometime during the holiday seasons. He still lives in Mount Vernon, Kentucky and was still alive as of Christmas 1994.

Our dash around the German Army took us through such places as Le Mans where we found that shell fire had broken through streets under which we saw old Roman ruins; Orleans with its beautiful cathedral; and Châlons the scene of the famous battle in which Charles Martel had turned back Attila the Hun. At Châlons we had another harsh fight in which "L" Company lost men. Captain Smith, Commander of "L" Company won the Distinguished Service Cross in this action. He personally killed several Germans and in a spirited attack saved a key bridge across the Marne River from being blown. This capture of this vital bridge saved us a great deal of time and made the pursuit of the retreating Germans easier. As usual, I searched the dead Germans in the area and found most of them to be from the engineering unit assigned to destroy the bridge.

Outside of Châlons I had another interesting experience. As I searched a dead German major I looked up and saw a pretty French girl watching me. Of course, I immediately spoke to her in French. As the conversation continued, I finally asked her if I might visit her that evening because we had not received orders to move out and we had a reasonable expectation of the regiment's staying in the assembly area through the night with an early morning departure to continue the pursuit. This pretty young lady demurred for a moment and then told me to ask her father, who drove up on his bike, if I might visit that evening. His reaction dripped with suspicion as he asked me why I wanted to visit his daughter. I told him that I simply wanted to chat with her and to get the reaction of our ally to the events of the day. That evening, when I visited, I don't think I had a

chance to say more than a half a dozen words to this young lady who was quite the prettiest woman I had seen since our arrival in France. Her father talked incessantly, and her mother kept a sharp eye on her daughter. So much for my first and last date during combat.

I remember even now that the family lived at 13 Rue Arquebusque in Châlons. Later, after the war ended and I drove through Châlons, on the way to the disembarkation port I stopped. The grandmother who answered the door told me simply that Marie had married a GI and was on her way to America! I felt no surprise. As I said earlier Marie was quite the prettiest young lady I had seen in France.

We moved out early the following morning and made a dash towards the Meuse River. Now we saw evidence of German cruelty. At Aprémont, a small village a short distance from St. Mihiel (where the 80th had fought in World War I) the Germans had rounded up all the male inhabitants including children and babies and had executed them. When we drove up, the town was burning, and the town square reverberated with the deep sobs of the women of the town. I never could understand why the Germans executed the men. I could understand executing the men who might have sniped at them but to kill the male children of all ages demonstrated barbarism of the worst sort. The men of the village posed no threat to the retreating Germans. Aprémont impressed me, for the first time, with the total senselessness of war. On the other hand, it also impressed me with the ability of the human animal to seek survival. In some mysterious way (there were no telephones working in this part of France at that time) the men of the villages to the east of Aprémont learned of the disaster and they disappeared into the woods where the Germans could not find them.

At Aprémont we ran out of fuel. The advance across France simply outstripped the logistic system which had envisaged and planned for a slower advance. Somehow, we received some gasoline that the history books tell us Patton's supply officer somehow scrounged or hi-jacked from the British or reserve supplies. We soon set out for the Meuse River. At Commercy, we managed to execute a hasty crossing of the Meuse River, but I found myself and the Reconnaissance Platoon in the middle of a fight with German tanks. Our only weapons, machine guns, could hardly even scratch the side of a Panzer and we felt lucky to escape. However, I did find a camera in one of the tanks. The driver had been killed by a shot from one of the 4th Armored Division tanks. The picture of this driver seems still fresh in my mind. An armored piercing shell had hit him in the chest and had, of course, killed him instantly. I found it difficult to search him for his Soldbuch because not much of him remained. However, it turned out that his Soldbuch was in a briefcase in the tank. In that briefcase I found a camera with which I took numerous pictures of the war. Most of them, unfortunately, were destroyed when a shell destroyed my jeep during the Battle of the Bulge.

The Germans tried to establish a defense along the Meuse River, but our rapid advance prevented it. Commercy is the site of Mont Sec, a high prominence which controls the Meuse Valley in the vicinity. In one of the purest examples that the terrain totally influences the course of a battle we found a monument atop Mont Sec dedicated to the 80th Division's participation in the St. Mihiel Campaign of World War I. our artillery, using the monument as cover, spotted German units detrainning near the Meuse and had a turkey shoot. The observers reported hundreds of unsuspecting

Germans began to detrain and form into ranks to march to the Meuse before they came under intense fire from the entire artillery of the 80th Division. Had we been a few hours later the first major combat for the 317th would have started at the Meuse. However, we crossed the Meuse and began a move to the Moselle. Now we really ran out of gasoline and Patton's supply people could not scrounge or steal any. It seemed as if the entire invasion force ran out of gasoline. We became foot infantry once more and began the slow march to the Moselle.

We moved as rapidly as we could towards Pont-à-Mousson, halfway between Metz and Nancy. If we could capture the bridge over the Moselle the next major obstacle would be the Rhine River. Unfortunately, we arrived a day late. German infantry meant for the defense of the Meuse had quickly stopped at the Moselle and established a defensive line. When we arrived around 4 September 1944 this line had become fairly cohesive and engaged our 3rd Battalion in a spirited fire fight during most of the day. I had proceeded the 3rd Battalion with the Reconnaissance Platoon and had been able to warn them that the Germans had established a defense, but I did not know the strength of the forces in front of us. Moreover, the bridge had been blown. After the 3rd Battalion engaged the Germans, the Reconnaissance Platoon moved into the high ground and established a series of observation posts from which we could collect information and form some estimate of the enemy strength. All day long we listened to German artillery and German small arms fire, and we began to get a picture of perhaps a division or more in front of us. The Reconnaissance Platoon had come under some of this fire, so we knew it was not random fire; it was well directed and intense.

I returned to the 317th Infantry Command Post and notified Colonel Cameron of the situation. A short time later Lieutenant General Eddy, the Corps Commander, visited the 317th CP. Naturally, he wanted a rundown on the situation, so I explained to him how we had come under heavy artillery and small arms fire. I further tried to explain to him that the firing came all along the length of the Moselle to the limits of our observational power. He was frankly skeptical, so I offered to take him up to the observation post we had established. He agreed and we set out for the OP. A short time before General Eddy, Colonel Cameron and I reached the OP, the German artillery and small arms fire ceased all along the front. Such lulls in firing, I found out after much bitter experience, occur frequently during a battle and occur for no reason other than sheer coincidence. In this case the cessation of fire turned out to be a disaster for the 317th. As General Eddy looked out from the OP, the Moselle had become as smooth as glass, birds twittered in the trees and the scene became one of idyllic calm. He clearly thought I had exaggerated the intensity of fire. He turned to Colonel Cameron and said something like, "there aren't any Germans out there." He ordered Colonel Cameron to immediately execute a hasty crossing of the Moselle River at Pont-à-Mousson.

A few hours after receiving orders to cross the river, Lt. Colonel Roberts initiated a hasty crossing and immediately came under intense and well directed artillery, mortar and small arms fire. Two companies managed to cross the river and immediately had to fight off a determined German counterattack. Ultimately, the rest of the regiment could not support the force across the river and the 3rd Battalion lost several hundred men in killed, wounded and captured. General Eddy had not heeded one of the first precepts of combat—he underestimated the enemy and the 317th Infantry

suffered severely for that error. The General simply did not want to hear any information that ran counter to his pre-conceived notions and thought that because we had been able to chase the Germans from Falaise to the Moselle that the German Army had been totally defeated. That did not occur until another nine months of hard combat had really destroyed the power of the German Army.

Not content with one mistake in estimating the German strength another hasty crossing of the Moselle was ordered for the following morning despite the heavy losses suffered by the 3rd Battalion and the obvious strength of the German formations defending the Moselle. This time, however, all three battalions had to make individual attempts at the crossing. Whichever crossing succeeded in getting a foothold across the Moselle would be exploited by the others. The 1st Battalion orders directed it to cross at Dieulouard, south of Pont-à-Mousson. The 2nd Battalion would assault the river at Vandières, north of Pont-à-Mousson. Once again, the 3rd Battalion would try at Pont-à-Mousson. Colonel Cameron and I accompanied the 1st Battalion commanded by Lt. Colonel Norman who had taught the subject of river crossings at Fort Benning before he received an assignment to the 317th Infantry. The heady days of the chase across France still filled the minds of the Generals with thoughts of great victories. Soon, however, disaster would strike.

The 1st Battalion had to traverse a wide-open portion of the Moselle Valley at Dieulouard in order to initiate the hasty crossing. The order for the attack specified something like 0600 hours by which time it was daylight. The Germans had control of the heights overlooking the valley, so they observed the entire attack unfolding in each of the battalion areas. In short order, intense artillery and mortar fire saturated the crossing sights. In particular, the 1st Battalion site came under well aimed artillery fire and several of the pontoon boats being carried by the infantrymen were hit killing or wounding all the men carrying them. In less than ten minutes the entire attack stopped in its tracks and each of the battalions retreated to the safety of the woods. The Germans had slaughtered us. We suffered severe casualties during that day.

What happened was a classic example of misplaced optimism on the part of the Corps Commander and his unwillingness to listen to the facts. Moreover, he misinterpreted the heavy losses suffered by the 3rd Battalion the night before, if he even inquired about them at all. In addition, the crossing sites required the infantrymen to traverse wide expanses of the Moselle Valley which had no concealment features once we emerged from the woods. The clumsy assault boats carried by the infantrymen slowed the advance to a snail's pace. The boats and their crews made excellent targets for the German observers on the high ground overlooking our crossing sites and they reveled in the turkey shoot. In addition, the battalion's heavy weapons could not be sighted so as to give overhead and supporting fire to the crossing. These weapons located along the canal where Colonel Cameron and I had established an observation post could not see the Germans and, consequently, the machine guns and mortars remained silent. Finally, I could stand the inaction no longer and began running along the bank of the canal ordering the machine guns to shoot at several sites which seemed to be reasonable locations for German observers. In addition, I located one of our forward observers and had him call for smoke shells to be fired on Mousson, the high hill where

most of the German observers had to be located. The smoke shells had a small effect on the accuracy of the German fire, but they knew our locations and even firing blindly proved to be effective in causing casualties in our ranks.

My efforts, though good for morale, did nothing to help our situation. The Germans had a well-established defensive position and hasty river crossing tactics simply could not work against established defenses. Colonel Cameron was pleased with the initiative I had shown but, as I noted earlier, what I did proved of little use. The 1st Battalion had to retreat under the fierce artillery pounding by the Germans.

Colonel Cameron drew some of the fire onto himself because he insisted on standing during the course of the operation. While his bravery helped morale he also served as an aiming point for the German artillery, and they soon zeroed in on him. German observers also spotted the machine guns near him and began shelling them more vigorously and with greater accuracy. Finally, a direct hit on one of the guns killed the crew and destroyed the weapon. The sound of the shells became ominous: instead of a long whine (so often heard in war movies) they now sounded like an angry hive of giant killer bees. This buzzing sound we all knew meant that the shells had our range and position. The sounds became louder and louder and when the one machine gun received a direct hit, we knew that the others would also soon be hit. The guns had to withdraw along with the rest of the battalion.

We soon received word that the 2nd Battalion attack had also failed and had also suffered heavy casualties in the abortive attempt. The 3rd Battalion attack had also failed. With all this bad news, Colonel Cameron resolved to visit the 2nd Battalion at Vandières.

Colonel Cameron and I started out for the 2nd Battalion located about five miles north of Dieulouard. We arrived in the middle of a fierce artillery and mortar barrage which had just destroyed an ambulance full of wounded, now dead, infantrymen of the 2nd Battalion's "F" Company commanded by Captain Jesse Barton. We quickly dismounted from the Colonel's jeep and set out on foot to find Lt. Colonel Murray. We passed "F" Company which had taken positions behind a canal embankment. Fortunately, we immediately found Captain Barton who told us where we could find Murray. As I looked up and down the "F" Company positions I saw several dead men slumped over the embankment. I noticed one dead soldier who was still sitting upright clutching a candy bar in his hand. The upper half of his head had been blown off at what seemed to be the precise moment that he intended to take a bite out of the candy bar. Incredibly he still retained the candy bar in his hand as if he still wanted to take a bite from it. I've often wondered whether the burial details who picked him up buried the candy bar with him. Perhaps somewhere in Valhalla, if it exists, he completed the meal which death had interrupted.

Colonel Cameron insisted on seeing for himself why the attack had failed. He ordered me to go with him, probably because I had a map of the area and he relied upon me to read it for him. As we both walked out into the wide floor of the valley the German artillery and mortar observers could, or course, see each step that we took. Colonel Cameron insisted on spreading out the map on the ground so I could point out to him where the attack had taken place, where we were, and where the

2nd Battalion had taken defensive positions. We became the target of choice for every observer who could get a battery of artillery or a section of mortars to fire for him. The shells began to fall around us even though German observers probably could not believe their eyes to see somebody of obvious importance exposing himself to the fire which surely would come down. Finally, and probably reacting to my intense concern about the danger in which we found ourselves, the Colonel seemed satisfied and decided to return to the 2nd Battalion positions. None too soon, because the Germans had clearly zeroed in on us and I felt certain we would, at the minimum, be seriously wounded. Nevertheless, the colonel coolly walked back to the 2nd Battalion with me beside him. We were unhurt despite the fact that the Germans fired both mortar and artillery at us, many of the rounds exploding close to us and shook us up but none of them so much as gave either of us a scratch. As I look back on this experience, it must count as a minor miracle. It seemed to indicate that both Colonel Cameron and I would live long lives. Colonel Cameron died in his 90s and as I write this, I am approaching my 80th birthday!

We returned to the Regimental Command Post so that Colonel Cameron could report back to General McBride that the attack had failed and that the east bank of the Moselle seemed heavily fortified. Other units of the 80th to the south of us had similar experiences and the Generals had to conclude that the heady days of the pursuit had ended. We received orders to begin preparation for a full-scale river crossing, the first of many to follow in the ensuing nine months. Somehow or another we always had another river to cross or another hill to take in an endless array of small and large battles. The worst crossing, however, was the crossing of the Moselle which became a legend in its own time, and which is taught to this day at the Infantry School and the Command and General Staff Colleges as part of the Lorraine Campaign. Your father's part is also documented.

That night the 317th underwent intense artillery fire by the Germans and we lost most of our communications. In particular, Colonel Cameron became concerned about the 1st Battalion because we had no reports from them since the early morning when Colonel Cameron had accompanied the hasty crossing. Colonel Cameron ordered me to go down to the 1st Battalion and find out its situation.

The only road to the 1st Battalion ran parallel to the Moselle between Pont-à-Mousson and Dieulouard. German artillery interdicted the road, so we ran a gauntlet of exploding shells at the slow speeds dictated by the need to travel blacked out. We never knew when a shell would hit, and we had no idea how many craters we would encounter in the road. Though we drove only a few miles it seemed like the proverbial eternity. Finally, we found the 1st Battalion, but the entire unit had retreated into an old factory building. No sentries had been posted and it became obvious that leadership was totally lacking.

I finally found Lt. Colonel Norman. He seemed to be in a stupor, incapable of responding to the few questions I asked him about the situation. Finally, I found Major Burnett, the executive officer, who told me that his commander had been incapable of making a decision since early morning. I told Burnett that I had orders from Colonel Cameron to ascertain the situation and I did not like what I saw. I felt it my duty to return immediately to the Regimental CP and appraise

Colonel Cameron of the facts. In the meantime, I suggested to Burnett that he should take over and try to establish a semblance of order. He had become alarmed at Norman's inaction and had begun to set up some security. As I left to return to the regimental command post Curly (obviously he was bald) Burnett set about trying to prepare the battalion to move out if new orders came.

When I arrived back at the CP after running the gauntlet of German artillery fire, I told Colonel Cameron what I had observed. He insisted on visiting Lt. Colonel Norman because I believe he realized that Norman had to be relieved of command. Kentucky and I had to run the gauntlet once again because Colonel Cameron insisted on taking my jeep. When we arrived at the 1st Battalion, the security situation had improved because Curly had posted sentries and had taken steps to deploy two of the companies out of the factory and into defensive positions. Colonel Cameron instantly realized that Norman had lost control of himself and could no longer command the battalion. Therefore, Colonel Cameron relieved him on the spot and made Burnett the battalion commander. This formalized the arrangement I had spelled out earlier and to which Burnett had agreed. Curly and I became fast friends in what little remained of his life. He was killed on 9 November 1944 during an attack to capture a bridge over the Seille River. Later, I'll discuss his death in connection with his premonition that he would be killed in action on 9 November 1944.

The following morning, the regiment moved into defensive positions along the west bank of the Moselle River and began preparations for a deliberate crossing. The only question concerned the crossing site itself. The Germans by now knew that the 80th Division faced them, and that the division had orders to cross the river and continue the advance towards the Rhine.

Chapter 8

The War Years

The Moselle River Crossing

After the failure of the hasty crossing attempts at Pont-à-Mousson and Vandières, the 317th began its preparation for a deliberate crossing of the Moselle River. Unfortunately, the river in the stretch from Vandières to Dieulouard averaged about 100' in width and had a current of perhaps 5 mph. Colonel Cameron hoped to find fords across the river which, of course, would make the crossing much easier. He assigned the mission of finding suitable crossing points to me. My ability to speak French proved invaluable in this task.

I began my search by visiting Limey, a town several miles west of Pont-à-Mousson where several of the resistance fighters told me about a priest who had an interest in local history, particularly the sites used by the Romans when they invaded Gaul. The priest proved easy to find and eagerly seized the opportunity to defeat "*le sale boche*" (dirty Germans). The priest told me the Romans used a ford at Dieulouard to cross the Moselle during their numerous incursions into Gaul. The ford extended across the northern corner of an island in the middle of the Moselle called Île de Scarpone. Moreover, if I travelled to the hill north of Dieulouard and found the statue of La Vierge (the Virgin Mary) and looked to the southeast I could easily see the ford's exact location. He gave me directions for finding the statue and assured me that the ford still existed.

Sergeant Rupert from the Reconnaissance Platoon, Kentucky and I drove to the high ground described by the priest. However, I made a stupid mistake by walking up to the crest of the hill so that every German artillery observer on Mousson could see me. The particular spot where I stood had obviously been a prepared concentration and within seconds, I heard the dangerous high-pitched buzz saw sound of an incoming and very accurately aimed round. We all fell into a ditch bordering the road and several shells struck in the vicinity, one just above me on the lip of the ditch in which I had taken cover. Miraculously, I escaped and immediately got up and ran for an orchard of mirabelles. Kentucky ran back to his jeep and moved it back from the crest into a safer area although he had received a flesh wound on his neck. Sergeant Rupert followed me, and we both took cover in the orchard, hidden by now from the view of the German observers. A few more rounds fell in the orchard but by this time we had once again started to run towards a small forest, Le Prêtre, which covered the top of the hill on which the statue stood.

I later figured out why I had not been killed or wounded by the shell burst on the lip of the ditch in which I had taken cover. The shell fire came from my left, as I lay in the ditch, and at an angle. Thus, when the shell hit, the upper portion and the sides of the shell exploded out and away from the ditch while the bottom portion of the shell exploded down and into the dirt to the left of where I lay. The pattern formed, if the shell exploded on a flat surface, would appear as two leaves with a stem and actually could be used to determine the direction from which the shell came. Enough of these patterns and the counter-battery analysts could locate the firing battery and direct counter-battery fire upon it. Later, on Christmas Day, 1944 our artillery introduced the proximity

fuse which caused a shell to burst in the air and all of the projectiles formed by the burst spewed down to land in a circular pattern over the point where the shell would have hit the ground with a normal fuse. The proximity fuse introduced a tremendous element of surprise and produced numerous casualties upon the Germans before they figured out what had happened. Fortunately for us the Germans did not have a proximity fuse.

We could not see La Vièrge from the woods. However, we could see the Moselle and the possibility of finding at least one crossing site to complement the ford when we found it. With this objective in mind, we went down the eastern sloop of the hill and worked our way towards a house which bordered a canal that ran parallel to the Moselle. Here we found a French family who informed us, in French, that they had seen no Germans in the past few days. Based on this information, we went down to the canal where I had Sgt Rupert cover me with his rifle while I disrobed and swam the river to reconnoiter the east bank of the Moselle. There were no Germans! The Germans had no outposts in this area. In fact, I later determined that by an incredible stroke of luck or coincidence I had located the boundary between two German divisions defending the river. However, neither commander had taken the trouble to defend the area around the boundary. Actually, failure to defend a boundary between two units is a grievous military mistake. The German mistake meant lives saved by the 317th in the later assault of the river. After I had found the first site, Sgt. Rupert and I returned to where we thought Kentucky had taken the jeep. He had waited for us despite his flesh wound. We took a poor dirt road, really a path, which we thought might lead us to the statue. We found it very quickly and located the ford exactly where the priest had said it would be located!

The location of the two sites completed my mission and I returned to the regimental command post to report to Colonel Cameron. He quickly approved the two sites. However, we did not begin further reconnaissance of the sites because by the time I returned to the CP hardly any daylight remained.

The detailed reconnaissance of the crossing sites began in earnest the following day and, surprisingly, drew little or no reaction from the Germans. A few of our people received wounds from sporadic artillery and mortar fire. For instance, Millard Morgan, commander of "G" Company, had to be evacuated because of a leg wound. Fortunately, our personnel concealed themselves well and I believed then, and still do, that the crossing sites came as a surprise to the Germans. In particular, I do not think they even realized that a ford existed across the Moselle at the Île de Scarpone. I often wondered about this during the ensuing battle and finally came to the conclusion that the German Division facing us had not been well trained. The PWs we captured during the crossing told us they were from the 553rd Volks Grenadier Division. "Volk" meant people and these divisions had been hastily formed, hastily trained, and I believe had few good officers. This explained to me at least why they had failed to coordinate the defense of the boundary and why they had failed to reconnoiter the ground to their front.

To make a long story short, we crossed the Moselle River with two battalions abreast on the night of 11-12 September. The 2nd Battalion crossed at the site near the farmhouse while the 3rd

Battalion crossed at the ford on the northern end of the Île de Scarpone. The 1st Battalion followed orders to pass through the 2nd Battalion and seize Landremont. In contrast to the hasty crossings, the deliberate crossings worked smoothly, and the regiment suffered about a dozen casualties during the crossing effort. None of these occurred until after the regiment had crossed the river and began the assault to seize the high ground which overlooked the east bank of the Moselle. By early morning, the assault battalions had seized their objectives to include Bezaumont, St. Geneviève, and La Falaise.

I want to digress briefly. In 1947 I found out why I had located the ford over the Moselle River at the Île de Scarpone. The reasons arise out of General Patton's study of military history. I found this out when in 1947, as aide-de-camp to Lieutenant General Geoffrey Keyes, I was assigned to serve as a battlefield guide for Mrs. Patton and her son George. General Patton had promised his son a tour of the battlefields when the son graduated from West Point in 1947. However, as you know, General Patton died of injuries received in an automobile accident, so Mrs. Patton decided to do the tour with her son. She called on General Keyes, a lifelong friend, to assist her and because I spoke French I received the assignment. Actually, Mrs. Patton spoke French fluently because as a young woman she had been educated in France. During the course of the tour, she told me that when she and then Lieutenant Patton had been married a few years they took a vacation through France. They travelled over the routes used by the Roman Legions because General Patton believed that there would be a second World War and that the Germans would control the continent before America entered the war.

The reason General Patton researched the Roman legion routes is because he knew the Roman Legions always travelled along roads that minimized the effects of weather. Generally speaking, the Romans travelled along ridges and took routes which led them to fords over the major rivers. He also believed that the allies would then have to invade the continent and he planned a campaign which he believed might occur. She showed me the tour book they had used on their trip in 1927 and on the flyleaf of that book Lieutenant Patton had made a sketch of the Cherbourg Peninsula with *the route which the Third Army actually followed in 1944 sketched on it!* General Patton knew from his study of the Roman campaigns that the Roman legions forded the Moselle in the vicinity of the area I knew as Dieulouard. Therefore, he reasoned, if he placed troops in that vicinity some enterprising officer would find the ford! My finding the ford also revealed the wisdom of teaching cadets French although at the time of the decision none of those involved could have foreseen the use to which the language was put at Dieulouard. That decision no doubt saved hundreds of casualties throughout the course of the fighting in France.

The regiment spent the remainder of the 12th consolidating the bridgehead. Tanks and tank destroyers as well as artillery moved across the pontoon bridge and deployed on the east bank in anticipation of a counterattack which we all knew would come. The regimental CP remained on the west bank because it did not have a high priority to cross the pontoon bridge. However, we did receive authorization to cross early on the morning of the 13th but as events developed that became impossible.

The Germans attacked in force at first light on the morning of the 13th and managed to get a small force close enough to place small arms fire on the pontoon bridge. For a while they even threatened to get close enough to capture it but the combined efforts of the combat engineers and the 317th prevented that and most of the Germans were either killed or captured. The 318th had crossed the bridge on the morning of the 13th and had attacked Mousson Hill from which the Germans directed artillery fire at the bridge. Late in the day they did capture the hill and the direct artillery fire ceased although the German artillery continued to fire indirect fire all day long in hopes of destroying the bridge with a lucky hit.

The German barrage preceding their counterattack knocked out our communications. Colonel Cameron decided to go across the river to try to try to contact our battalions and ordered me to go with him. However, when we reached the pontoon bridge, we could not cross. German artillery interdicted the bridge and all of the routes to it. Moreover, some of the pontoons had been damaged and needed replacement. The damage to the bridge and the continued shelling also meant that the regimental headquarters could not get clearance to cross the bridge. In this situation, Colonel Cameron decided to return to the command post and to rely upon the radio net consisting of the regimental and battalion headquarter radios. This means of communication was slow and produced little information.

Frustrated by the lack of communication, Colonel Cameron ordered me to take a patrol consisting of myself, Captain Ford, and Sergeant Downs to go across the river and find out what had happened to our battalions. I led this small patrol down to the pontoon bridge where we dashed across the bridge under German artillery fire and disobeyed the orders of the officer-in-charge of the bridge who said we could not cross. Once on the east side of the river we made a mad dash to get out of the area the Germans were shelling.

The east side of the river was chaotic. Wrecked equipment, dead Germans and GIs, and aid men frantically trying to patch the wounded littered the area. The wounded had been there since early morning and could not be evacuated because ambulances and stretcher bearers could not get across the river to help them. I am sure that many of the wounded who could have survived with prompt assistance died from shock or simply bled to death. Others who had been reached by the aid men lay there in a stupor from the morphine injections given them to ease their pain. We found out also why our communications had not been restored. The sergeant of the Communications Platoon had been seriously wounded in the leg by shell fire and the two crews with him had either been killed or seriously wounded as they attempted to repair the telephone wires. He did tell us, however, where he thought the 2nd Battalion had established its CP. After we ascertained that we could do nothing to help him we continued on our patrol mission.

My small patrol made its way to the bottom of the hill on which Bezaumont and St. Geneviève were located. Here we found ourselves in the middle of a tank fight and had to take cover for a few minutes until I could find a way to continue up the hill. Because I only had a pistol, I picked up a carbine from one of the dead GIs and Captain Ford picked up an M-1. Sergeant Downs already had

a rifle so at least we now had some fire power to protect ourselves in the middle of the fire fight which raged around us.

As we continued forward, we heard the sound of what seemed to be a motor out of control. As I looked up the hill in the direction of the noise, I saw a Sherman tank racing down the hill out of control. Fire poured out of the rear of the tank and a dead GI flopped up and down on the rim of the open turret. He had been killed, no doubt, as he tried to escape from the tank when it had caught on fire. We followed this tank with our eyes as it rolled down the hill until it hit a ditch at the bottom of the hill. The impact threw the GI out of the tank. The tank burned for a few moments more and exploded, sending the turret into the air, and producing a plume of black smoke. Though fascinated by this sight, I quickly urged my patrol onward towards what we thought would be the 2nd Battalion CP.

Once again, we found ourselves in the middle of a tank battle. We took cover behind a small knoll to avoid being seen by several German tanks which had attempted to flank the 2nd Battalion positions. Almost immediately, our anti-tank guns hit one of the German tanks and set it on fire. Only one of the German crew survived. He jumped out of the turret and began to run to avoid being captured. Ford, Downs, and I began to fire at him. Mind you, I am an expert with almost any weapon in the infantry regiment and, in particular, I held the expert's badge for the rifle and carbine. I found to my horror, that my carbine consistently fired to the left (a defect in the carbine was its inability to be zeroed—it simply had a fixed sight for short and longer ranges). Accordingly, I attempted to apply “Kentucky windage” but kept missing the German. Finally, he stopped getting up, so we assumed that we had killed him. By this time the other German tanks had been knocked out, so we began our climb up the hill to find the 2nd Battalion. As we came close to the German crewman, we approached him warily with rifles at the ready. Suddenly, he stood upright with a look of absolute terror in his eyes and surrendered to us! Then he put his index finger to his temple to imitate a pistol and said, “Nix Kaput”. All three of us had heard this expression many times and knew it meant “don't kill me”. We had no intention of doing that and began to lead our prisoner back towards the bridge. As we wended our way through the wounded most of them wanted us to kill the son-of-a-bitch a perfectly natural reaction for someone laying in a pool of blood from a wound quite possibly inflicted by the tank the German had manned. In any case, we finally found some military policemen and turned our prisoner over to them. We resumed our search for the 2nd Battalion.

We began to climb the hill once more and found a path which we thought would lead us to Bezaumont where we thought we might find the 2nd Battalion CP. As we made our way up the hill, we encountered more and more dead and wounded members of the 317th. One of them I remember, particularly. When he had been wounded, he fell into the middle of the path we were using. He had been wounded in both legs, the chest, and several fingers of both hands had been either blown off or horribly mangled. A medic had found him, given him a shot of morphine to kill the pain, and had promised to return with a stretcher party. The wounded man had somehow managed to get a small bible (issued to all the soldiers) out of his pack and was trying to find the

23rd Psalm which begins with the words: "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want." I took the bible from him and tried to find the 23rd Psalm but in a few moments he and my small patrol came under fire from a German tank. The gunner fired several anti-tank rounds which missed us by inches. We dragged the wounded soldier into some cover behind a small knoll and we immediately spread out to take cover ourselves while we determined what the situation really was. Sur, enough a German tank had zeroed in on us and meant to kill us. I decided that our carbine and two M-1 rifles were no match for the tank, so I ordered my patrol to pull back and skirt the tank as we continued our efforts to find the 2nd Battalion CP. I have no idea what happened to the wounded soldier although we later found an aid man and told him where we thought we had left the wounded man.

I felt certain that we were on the road to Bezaumont, so we continued our wary advance. All of a sudden, it seemed like all hell broke loose (sorry for the cliché) and shells and machine gun bullets began popping off all over the place. The source of the fire turned out to be another German tank. The tank crew had been killed and the tank was on fire. Its ammunition was exploding from the heat of the fire and gave us the impression that we were under intense fire. Actually, the ammunition was exploding inside the tank and in the general fire fight taking place all over the hill we found it hard to determine exactly where the fire originated. Once again, we skirted the flank and continued along the reverse slope of the hill. By now we were on the outskirts of Bezaumont with no evidence of the 2nd Battalion CP. Nevertheless, we continued on and in a few minutes, we came onto an organized infantry defensive position: it was Company "E" under the command of my friend Jim Mullen.

Mullen's, "E" Company position had held its position around Bezaumont in the face of an intense German attack. The company had taken severe casualties but so had the Germans. Dead Germans surrounded the "E" Company position. Mullen pointed out the location of the battalion CP and a few minutes later I found Lt. Colonel Murray. He informed me that "G" Company held St. Geneviève, "E" Company held Bezaumont, and that "F" Company held the ground between the two villages. He also told us that he thought that the 1st Battalion had captured Landremont, east of Bezaumont, and that Lt. Colonel Roberts still held La Falaise after beating back a strong German counterattack. We had accomplished our mission, so I ordered my patrol to return to the regimental CP.

As I turned to lead my patrol back to the regimental CP another fight broke out in front of the "E" Company positions. This time, a squadron of P-47 appeared on the scene and began to strafe the German tanks which emerged out of an assembly area. Mullen, in turn, had alerted his troops who prepared to repel any further counterattacks. Fortunately, the p-47s knocked out several of the German tanks and, I suppose, by this time the German commander decided to call off the attack for the day. Suddenly, one of the P-47s appeared to have hit an ammunition dump and a tremendous explosion took place. Unfortunately, something also seemed to hit the P-47 pilot and suddenly the plane went into a high-power climb. I believe the pilot had been severely wounded and, in his agony, simply pulled back on the stick which, of course, sent him into the high climb. He reached the top of his climb and the plane stalled and spun out of control. I watched it through my field glasses as it spun into the ground. The plane exploded and sent a small mushroom cloud into the sky. I saw no

parachute and assumed the pilot died in the crash. His good work, however, saved the lives of many 317th Infantrymen because the German attack stalled, and we had relative calm for the rest of the day.

After I made my report to Colonel Cameron he called the division G-3 to get a priority to cross the river immediately and to locate our regimental CP somewhere near Bezaumont. A few hours later we received authorization to cross. The 318th had apparently enlarged the bridgehead to the north and German fire on the pontoon bridge became sporadic. The regimental CP took over Bezaumont and became part of the front line. "E" Company moved out of Bezaumont and established itself near "F" Company. As soon as I had satisfied myself that what remained of the Reconnaissance Platoon had been deployed to give us early warning of further counterattacks, I fell asleep. I had not slept for almost three days.

I had been asleep for perhaps six hours when somebody prodded me with a toe. It was Colonel Cameron who told me that we were under attack and that German units were dangerously close to the CP. He wanted me to organize the command post personnel into a defensive position immediately and to prepare to repel the Germans. We could hear them shouting all around us but because it was foggy and still slightly dark, we could not see exactly where they were—we could only estimate their location and strength.

We had no time to waste so I gathered up clerks, operations personnel, cooks, drivers, anyone who could fire a weapon and began to set up a perimeter. The Germans continued to mill around in front of us as they tried to move forward through the fog to their objectives. As the shouting grew louder and more distinct, I had my motley crew open fire with their rifles and carbines, we had no machine guns, and ordered them to fire as rapidly as they could. We probably did some damage because we heard some screams and the following day found some dead Germans in front of the position we had held. Whatever, the result it seemed as if the Germans had orders to by-pass any strong resistance and to try to get down to the bridge and destroy it. In fact, a few of their tanks did get to a point from which they could shell the bridge, but our tank destroyer quickly knocked them out.

Fortunately, later in the day the 4th Armored division arrived and began to move across the original pontoon bridge and a second one the engineers had built closer to Pont-à-Mousson. The 4th Armored had complete priority on both bridges and they moved across the bridges with guns blazing. The 4th Armored crossing turned the tide and the German counterattack ended for that day. The bridgehead had been secured and the Germans did not launch a major counterattack designed to destroy the bridgehead. The Germans had to assume the defensive and we had the initiative in that we choose the place and time of the next major attack. Nevertheless, severe fighting raged in the bridgehead through the end of November. Both we and the Germans suffered severe casualties. In particular, the 317th had something on the order of 3000 casualties during the month of September which meant that virtually everyone in the original regiment suffered. I, myself, had four minor wounds during this period and I had bruises from spent bullets which struck me but did not pierce the skin. On many occasions I had shell fragments bounce off my helmet and I felt the

trauma of having men to whom I was speaking killed or wounded during the course of the conversation.

The actual course of the fighting during next several weeks is a jumble of attacks, counterattacks, and near brushes with death. I'll try to describe them as I remember the events although some of the dates and sequence of events may be in error because I did not keep a diary. The days followed each other in a huge rush of events, and I seldom slept for more than a few hours at a time nor, for that matter, did anyone else. The situation continued to be extremely fluid with the Germans infiltrating around us and our infiltrating around them. Sometimes we were surrounded, other times the Germans were surrounded. In the end, however, we broke their defenses and broke into the Alsatian Plain.

The day after the big counterattack we again lost contact with our units. Our biggest worry, the 1st Battalion, had orders to attack and seize Landremont and to continue east. We believed, but did not know for sure, that they had taken a hill to the east of Landremont somewhere in the vicinity of Mont Toulon. Colonel Cameron told me to find Curly and his battalion and find out "what the hell they are doing". Kentucky and I left Bezaumont and started in the direction of Landremont. On the way, I met Brigadier General Sommers, our assistant division commander, and asked him if he had seen the 1st Battalion. He replied affirmatively and told me to follow a fork in road, or more accurately a path, which he pointed out. Kentucky and I pursued this path for perhaps a half a mile when I began to hear suspicious artillery fire whizzing overhead. I knew, or thought I knew, that we had no artillery in the area, so I ordered Kentucky to stop the jeep behind a knoll. I made my way forward using as much cover as I could find and finally crawled to the top of a small crest. To my intense amazement, we had penetrated into the heart of the German artillery! General Sommers had given me direction which took me through a gap in the German lines. As I watched the artillery for a moment, a German ambulance roared out of a small copse a few hundred feet from me and began a pell-mell journey to the German rear. Kentucky had already suspected that something had gone wrong and quickly turned the jeep around. I came running back at full speed and jumped into the jeep as we retreated under full power. By the time the German security spotted us we had gone far enough to be safe from their fire unless, of course, they wanted to waste artillery shells on us. Anyway, it was obvious that General Sommers had directed me down the wrong fork. I went back to the fork in the road, took the correct fork and a few minutes later found Burnett. He had taken his objective and had taken steps to consolidate the position. His communication platoon had started the process of restoring communications.

By this time Colonel Cameron had grave doubts about Lt. Colonel Murray's leadership of the 2nd Battalion. Murray appeared indecisive and slow to follow orders. The 2nd Battalion had advanced a short distance from the positions they had occupied and then it stopped in a completely exposed position. The Germans, no doubt amazed at this stupid decision, shelled the unit furiously. The 2nd Battalion suffered severe casualties including Major Warmbrod, the executive officer, who very nearly lost an arm. He never returned to the regiment. Years later in the early 50s I happened to

meet him in the Pentagon where, I believe, he appeared before a board to determine whether he should be retired for disability. I never saw him again and believe that he did, indeed, retire.

The following morning, my 28th birthday, Colonel Cameron ordered the 2nd Battalion to take Hill 340, just west of a huge forest called Le Fôret de Fâcq. This time, however, he ordered me to accompany the battalion with orders to move them forward if Murray showed signs of faltering as he had on the previous day. By the time I arrived at the battalion, it had moved out and Murray had stopped it in the open while he pattered with his map and tried to make up his mind what to do. He presented an absolutely beautiful target to the German artillery observers who took the occasion to plaster us. I quickly realized that if we did not move quickly, we would all die and tried to get Murray to issue orders to advance. He seemed like a zombie, incapable of getting his brain into gear. In furtherance of Colonel Cameron's orders, I ran to the head of the column where I saw Jesse Barton with his "F" Company. I told him about my orders from Colonel Cameron and ordered "F" Company to move forward. Then I ran back down the line and told the other company commanders what I had done. In effect, I took command of the 2nd Battalion long enough to get it out of danger. Then I went back and got Murray moving with his small command group.

As I watched the battalion now moving forward, I suddenly felt a blow on the calf of my left leg. To my amazement I had been hit by a spent bullet. It hurt like hell and had drawn a little blood but had not penetrated into the calf. Basically, I had not been hurt so I continued on with my mission. The Germans still fired at us but by now the advance had gotten underway and assumed a momentum of its own. The troops swarmed up the sides of Hill 340, as the Germans withdrew, and we all prepared to consolidate the battalion positions. I had returned to "F" Company and went up the hill with the lead elements. On the hill I started to help the company commanders to organize their positions while Murray remained at the bottom of the hill apparently stunned at the rapidity of the attack.

As we organized the position, we knew that the Germans would counter-attack. They always did whenever we captured a key hill. In a matter of a few moments, it seemed, the Germans let loose with a hellish barrage of artillery and mortars, the precursor to the infantry attack. The barrage caught me standing in the open. Moreover, I had given my entrenching tool to one of the GIs who had somehow lost his, so I had no easy way to find cover. In any case, the explosions buffeted me about as if I were a rag doll. In another one of the miraculous things which happened to me, all the men within a radius of about thirty or forty feet were killed or wounded. The GI to whom I had given my entrenching tool had both of his legs blown off and, no doubt, probably died later. I remained untouched! Truthfully, though I seemed to be celebrating my 28th birthday in an odd way, I began to have doubts about celebrating my 29th.

Fortunately, the 313th artillery observer survived the barrage. When the German infantry attacked us from Le Fôret de Fâcq he brought down the fire of most of the division artillery on them. The concentrated fire of the 2nd Battalion plus the artillery fire broke up the German attack and we retained control of the hill. After I had conferred with Murray about his future plans, I decided to return to the regimental CP and inform Colonel Cameron of the situation. I gathered up

some of the walking wounded and returned to the CP to make my report. Later that evening, I found several holes in my clothes where shell fragments had pierced them. All in a day's work for which I got paid \$8.33, the daily pay of a major who worked every day of the month. Of course, I got free food: three "K" rations. I also received a free bed: a sleeping bag in a foxhole. Fifty years later our neighbor's ten-year-old daughter gave me some flowers and a note thanking me for my wartime efforts! That note, so far as I know, is the first acknowledgement that my service had been of some use.

The regiment continued to enlarge the bridgehead for the remainder of the day. The 2nd Battalion continued in the direction of Nomeny-Bratte. However, the Germans had other thoughts and infiltrated around the battalion and essentially cut it off from the rest of the regiment. In the meanwhile, the 1st and 3rd Battalions continued their advance towards the east.

When Colonel Cameron realized that the 2nd Battalion had been cut off, he ordered me to contact the commander of the 702nd tank battalion, in support of the 80th Division, and see if we could get one of its companies to assist in breaking through the German lines. Company "A" of the 702nd was placed under my command and Colonel Cameron ordered me to break through to the 2nd Battalion before the situation became critical. Company "A" had about ten operational tanks. We began the advance towards the Fôret de Fâcq. Fortunately, the Germans had not circled the 2nd Battalion in great strength and after a brief fire fight, we broke through the German lines and restored communications. Colonel Cameron ordered Murray to advance to the edge of the forest to position from which we could see the villages of Sivry and Moivron and a huge hill named Mont St. Jean. Once again, under orders from Colonel Cameron, I led this advance. The Germans offered resistance and killed several of our scouts. We had other casualties which seemed minor in comparison with the huge losses we had suffered in the previous several days of fighting. Sometime in the late afternoon we reached our objectives and consolidated our positions on the edge of the woods.

During the next several days, the intensity of the fighting diminished and, of course, we suffered fewer casualties. The brief lull in the fighting gave us a chance to bring up our replacements in a more orderly manner, replace some of our lost vehicles, and to take a brief rest even though the German artillery fire, as well as our own, never really ceased. This was really the classic case of what the communiqués called and artillery duel: our artillery shot at German infantry and German artillery shot at American infantry.

On 22 September 1944 Colonel Cameron ordered me to take command of the 2nd Battalion. Actually, I had virtually commanded it anyway for about ten days. When I informed Lt. Colonel Murray that I had orders to take command of the 2nd Battalion, he breathed a sigh of relief (no pun intended). He left without a word to me and reported to some sort of replacement depot for reassignment. I never saw him again. I have met many men like him in my lifetime and have constantly marveled that they can fool people the way they do. They have a smoothness and superficial charm about them but when the chips are down, they fail. It is just that in combat events happen faster and phonies cost lives. This man, in my estimation, did not lack physical courage.

Indeed, I have no doubt that he would rather have died in combat than to be relieved. He lacked moral courage and feared failure more than he feared death.

In short order, I found out that the 2nd Battalion had big problems. They had not had a hot meal in two weeks. Their mail had not been delivered for perhaps a week to ten days. In addition, Murray's indecision had filtered down to the individual soldier and morale had hit the proverbial rock bottom. My first order appointed Jim Mullen executive officer of the battalion. I ordered him to bring up a hot meal immediately. During the meal we delivered the mail and at the end of the meal we brought up fresh clothes. At the end of this activity, I appointed Bob Moyer commander of "E" Company and then called all of the officers to my CP for a pep talk.

The Germans, of course, sensed the activity and began to shell us though they could not observe our positions directly. Their fire, though random and generally, inaccurate did hit one of the battalion ammunition trucks which killed and wounded several men.

When the supply officer breathlessly informed me of the destruction, I simply told him to get a new truck and to requisition new ammunition. My calmness in the face of a potential catastrophe set jagged nerves to rest and averted a panic. Leaders must not panic. Kipling expressed it well in the following poem:

If

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew

The Valiant Die Once

To serve you turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friend can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty second's worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man,

Rudyard Kipling

The first orders I issued set the tone and morale began to revive. In particular the men appreciated the hot meal, the receipt of their mail, and the issuance of clean clothes.

The next morning, I sent out patrols in the direction of Moivron and Sivry as well as towards the base of Mont St. Jean. In a curious aside to this activity, the commander of the 313th Artillery Battalion came forward to reconnoiter the area and to try to find new positions for his guns. I told him that I had read about this area a few years earlier in one of my military history classes at the Academy as well as in a book called *Infantry in Action*. The ground we occupied still showed trenches occupied by French troops during World War I and the Germans on Mont St. Jean occupied positions originally occupied by the Kaiser's Army in World War I. I told Colonel Ellery that I remembered that during the first World War French artillery had occupied positions in the vicinity of a saddle to the east of my positions near the town of Bratte. Sure enough, when Ellery went there, he found the old artillery revetments which the French had thrown up to protect their guns. The terrain simply does not change, and it does dictate the options available to a commander.

We had a couple of days of relative inactivity although the 318th and 319th continued to hammer away at Mont St. Jean. I used the time to try to improve the morale of my battalion. One event, in particular, struck me as amusing. I had visited Bob Moye and during the visit the mail carrier delivered his mail. His wife had sent him some Hershey Bars and he offered me one. As we sat on the edge of his fox hole discussing the situation and eating our Hershey Bars a rather sad sack type of individual came strolling (the correct word) along the line, probably looking for a latrine. The sad sack looked down at me, saw my candy bar, reached down and broke off about half of it, and began to calmly munch away at his haul. Moye was incensed and wanted to chew the soldier out, but I calmed him down. Then Moye said to the soldier, "Do you know who we are?". The soldier seemed confused for a moment, then he brightened up and said, "No, but I've seen both of you around". He did not know that Moye was his company commander, and I was his battalion commander. Sad to say he probably did not even know that we were officers!

I cite the previous story only because it demonstrates a problem that all commanders faced. We received individual replacements every few days to replace losses suffered as a result of the combat action of the previous days. These replacements came from the states and generally had thirteen weeks of training. They did not, and could not, approach the degree of training of our original men. In some cases, as in this one, they hardly knew how to fire a rifle or to engage in the simplest of squad maneuvers. Fortunately for some of them, combat teaches quickly. The unfortunate ones who did not learn quickly became casualties.

It had become increasingly obvious to all the regimental and battalion commanders that General McBride did not use the resources available to him in the most efficient manner. The Germans had actually suffered more severely than we had and had greater problems in replacing personnel and equipment. Therefore, if we had launched a coordinated attack with the full power of the division we could have taken Mont St. Jean, the dominant terrain feature in what the French call La Grande Couronne de Nancy (the Great Crown of Nancy). Once that hill fell into our hands the entire Plain of Alsace-Lorraine lay before us. Only the Fortress of Metz lay between us and the Rhine River. The next defensive position for the Germans, not a strong one, was the Seille River and the rather small valley in which it lay.

Instead of ordering a fully coordinated attack with all of our resources General Mc Bride kept sending out single battalions or companies to attack the Germans holding Mont St. Jean who, therefore, could turn their entire defensive resources against it and, in effect, defeat us in detail. This kind of piecemeal attack led to the worst day of my life, 26 September 1944.

General McBride continued his efforts to take Mont St. Jean by a series of battalion sized attacks. His latest attempt, an attack by a 318th Infantry Battalion, resulted in heavy casualties in the vicinity of the towns of Serrières and Sivry. During the afternoon of 25 September 1944 General McBride ordered me to a meeting near the town of Bratte. I received orders to attack the town of Moivron at first light on 26 September. The direction of the attack precluded support by the 80th Division artillery so an artillery General from the 6th Armored Division who attended the meeting told me that artillery support would be provided by the 6th Armored Division and an observer would report to me during the evening.

Remember that I mentioned earlier that Colonel Cameron and General McBride openly disliked each other. In a direct insult to Colonel Cameron, he had been excluded from the meeting. As soon as I arrived at my CP, I called Colonel Cameron and notified him of the orders I had received and that I could not receive support from the 80th Division artillery. Colonel Cameron kept calm, but his anger became apparent as I described the orders I had received. In effect, one-third of the 317th Infantry would attack Mont St. Jean on the following morning and Colonel Cameron had no control over the action and had not even been notified of the event.

The following morning, we began our movement forward under the cover of darkness. We arrived at our line of departure, a railroad track east of Moivron, at the appointed time and awaited our supporting artillery barrage to begin at first light. Then disaster struck: the 6th Armored Division shelled us! The observers had mistaken the 2nd Battalion moving up to the line of departure as

Germans! We lost all elements of surprise and, of course, suffered casualties from the artillery fire. My first attack stalled before it even got started. I damned near choked the artillery observer with me as I tried to get him to get the fire lifted. After a few minutes the 6th Armored realized its mistake and shifted the barrage forward to the German positions but of course it did not have the effect that an unexpected barrage would have had in the first place. In addition, the 2nd Battalion would not have suffered as many casualties as it did. In any case, the battle started.

I had posted my machine guns on the railroad track for supporting fire as companies

“E” and “F” attacked the town of Moivron. Moivron, at the base of Mont St. Jean, could not be by-passed and had to be taken. German small arm and artillery fire intensified and we suffered more casualties. I kept running up and down the line trying to encourage the troops to move but, unfortunately, many of them had only recently joined us as replacements and many of them simply froze in the ditch which borders the railroad tracks. After we crossed the line of departure, the railroad tracks, they simply fell into the ditch and would not move. I ran up and down the line exhorting them to no avail. Then I dashed forward under extremely heavy machine gun and small arms fire to set an example. Still, they froze. I ran back through the rain of fire and exhorted them once again and, once again, dashed forward to set an example. Nothing happened. Now I dashed back in total anger and began to kick them out of the ditch. When I say kick, I mean kick as with the point of my shoe. Now the advance began to go forward because, I suppose, they began to fear me more than they feared the Germans. I must say, this gave me a new outlook on leadership tools when inspiration and example fail!

Another frustrating part of the day came from the attention paid to me by a German sniper. He followed me around all day long because, obviously, I had exposed myself to his fire and had shown him that I led the troops. He actually succeeded in drawing some blood when he barely missed hitting me in the forehead. This near miss occurred when I came out of a culvert in the railroad embankment and used my field glasses to survey the action. The sniper fired at me and had correct elevation but missed his windage by a tad. Instead of hitting me in the head the bullet struck the concrete side of the culvert perhaps an inch or two from my cheek and the concrete fragments cut my cheek. I bled profusely although only superficially wounded. I guess I looked ghastly, but I did not even know I was bleeding until somebody else mentioned it.

Another danger to me and to my battalion came from a German machine gun emplaced somewhere on the railroad tracks. As I moved around trying to get the troops moving, I had to run the gauntlet of the fire which this machine gun kept directing down the railroad embankment. The gunner had a perfect field of fire and used it to good effect. Finally, in sheer desperation I located the machine gun and directed the fire of a tank destroyer cannon on it. That stopped the machine gun and killed the two gunners. I returned to this battlefield after the war and found the grave of these two Germans. They had been buried where they fell, and the grave registration people had not yet moved them into a formal military cemetery. A picture of the two graves is among the photographs I have of the war. These two men were the first men that I consciously killed during

the war. I had then, and still have now, absolutely no regrets and, under the same circumstances, would kill them again.

We had been fighting for several hours and had made only minor progress because of the intensity of the German resistance. I decided to give it another try and began the process of visiting with each of the companies in an effort to get them reorganized. As I ran towards “G” Company, an aid man came running up me and asked me where he could find the aid station. At that moment, a mortar shell exploded behind him and killed him instantly and stunned me. The shell lacerated his body so badly that bits and pieces of it splattered me and his blood splashed onto my field jacket and trousers. I quickly recovered and continued on with my efforts to organize another attack at a meeting I had arranged with the company commanders, the artillery observer, and the commander of tank platoon which had been attached to me. During this meeting Ed Farrell received a wound and I had to appoint a new commander on the spot. Finally, everything seemed to be arranged and we tried another attack, this one led by tanks. This attack failed because the tanks ran into a mine field and could not advance and because the Germans now realized that the 2nd Battalion had no other infantry support. Of course, this demonstrates the fallacy in McBride’s piecemeal attack strategy. The Germans turned all of their resources on a small portion of the 80th Division and could virtually annihilate the unit. The Germans now turned all of their artillery on us and the second battalion which had already suffered heavily lost even more men. At one point they even fired 8” guns at us!

By the time the second attack failed, the sun began to sink, and it became clear to General McBride that we could not take Moivron that day and move up the slopes of Mont St. Jean. Accordingly, I received orders to stop the attack. I found out later from captured German documents that my battalion had attacked positions held by two parachute regiments. Under normal circumstances the attacker should have a superiority of three to one. In my attack on Moivron, the defenders had a superiority of at least three to one—I and my men could not overcome those odds. How often the words, “*Theirs was not to question why, theirs but to do and die*” came to mind concerning the attack on Moivron.

I suppose the only light note in the whole day occurred several hours after the attack began. Jim Mullen came up to the battlefield to see if I had any orders for him. We decided to have a cup of coffee because we saw a destroyed jeep out of which a tiny portable stove had rolled. In a surreal atmosphere we pushed aside what remained of a door of a completely demolished house. The house had no roof and the only wall left standing supported the partially demolished door through which we entered what remained of the house’s main room. Fortunately, the room had a couple of stools or rude chairs in it. Overhead we heard a sound like a bunch of angry bees. A machine gun fired in our direction but did not hit us. We lit the stove, filled one of our canteen cups (they were aluminum at that time) with water and waited for the water to heat. When the water came to a boil, I reached into my pocket and found two packets of powdered coffee from one of the many “K” rations I had eaten during the previous days, I poured the powdered coffee into the hot water, picked up the aluminum cup and shouted over the sound of shells and bullets, “be careful, don’t burn yourself”.

This absurd scene always remained a private joke between Mullen and myself as we often cautioned each other in especially dangerous conditions to be careful of burning ourselves.

I set about reorganizing the battalion and set up defensive positions along the railroad embankment. However, even General McBride came to realize that the German defensive strength simply could not be defeated by a single battalion with minimum artillery support. He ordered me to withdraw and return to my original position.

The following day General McBride came down to chew me out because the attack had failed. Among other things he said that the men of my battalion had not “fought hard”. This remark angered me because of its patent untruth and because of its insensitivity. I told General McBride in direct and clear language that the fault lay with him for ordering piecemeal attacks against strong German defenses. In addition, I asked General McBride why neither he nor any of his staff had appeared to help us if, as he alleged, we had not fought hard. I also asked him how a battalion could suffer so many casualties in the course of a ten-hour battle without having fought in some manner. The General became quite angry with me and withdrew the promotion to Lieutenant Colonel which had been submitted several days before when I assumed command of the battalion. I had to wait for almost another year before he resubmitted the promotion. I had earlier decided that General McBride harbored a vindictive streak, and this proved it. His ego could not allow him to admit to himself that he could make a mistake.

In a curious series of events, General McBride visited the US Army War College in 1957 and specifically asked to see me. To my amazement, he began a long, convoluted explanation of why he had ordered me to attack Moivron. As he continued it became clear to me that though he nearly gagged, he really meant to apologize! He died not long after his visit and my belief is that he probably sensed that he did not have long to live and needed to put his conscience at rest. He had probably finally faced the fact that his inept handling of the fighting for Mont St. Jean resulted in needless casualties to all of the regiments in the division.

Actually, even after Moivron General McBride made several more attempts to capture Mont St. Jean and each time the Germans repulsed the attack with heavy losses for the 80th. Once again, he gave me a direct order and bypassed Colonel Cameron. This time, on 2 October 1944 I received orders to capture the town of Sivry could with a reinforced company. We did capture the town by what I personally consider to be a classic use of information obtained from personal reconnaissance, deduction, and surprise tactics. Note, however, that the use of a single reinforced company reverts to the piecemeal attack formula and violates sound military practice.

When I received the order to attack Sivry, I notified Colonel Cameron and then I went to the forward positions along the edge of the Fôret de Fâcq and visited with some of the soldiers of “G” Company. The company commander, Captain Ted Ellsworth, had transferred to us from the British Army in which he had served since 1939 when the war first started. Ted and several other Americans happened to be in London and enlisted. When America entered the war, they received permission from the British to transfer and Ted ended up in the 317th Infantry. As he and I walked along his forward positions I met an old friend, Pvt Kruzak, who had been an original member of

the platoon I commanded as a 2nd Lieutenant. Kruzak did not have great intelligence, but he was a “salt of the earth” type and a fine human being. We congratulated each other on still being alive. As we chatted and I questioned Kruzak about what had gone on in front of him, he told me that the night before he had heard a squeaking wheel as it progressed apparently east to west along the Bratte-Sivry road which lay at the bottom of Mont St. Jean. On this interesting fact I built the plan of attack which Ted Ellsworth executed flawlessly.

My reasoning went as follows: I knew that the 318th had attacked Sivry several days earlier from the west. This meant, to me, that the town’s defenses faced in that direction. Moreover, the Germans probably had no inkling that the 2nd Battalion had occupied the forward edge of the Forêt de Fâcq in force because I had taken great pains to conceal our movements. We could, therefore, by following the Bratte-Sivry road attack Sivry from the east. I reasoned that the Germans had minimum defense in the direction because the squeaking wheel Kruzak had heard probably carried supplies. Though the German Army’s propaganda described it in mechanized terms, it actually possessed a lot of horse drawn equipment. In particular, company level supply usually came in a panje wagon, adopted from the Russians. The squeak probably resulted from some sad sack German soldier’s neglect of normal maintenance. Given this line of reasoning, the rear of the defensive position at Sivry was in the east and an attack from that direction had a good chance of success.

Ted Ellsworth agreed with the analysis and agreed that a night attack gave us the best chance. Accordingly, he pushed off at about three or four in the morning along the Bratte-Sivry road and by daylight “G” Company had captured Sivry at the cost of six lightly wounded casualties.

The following morning the Germans counter attacked. However, the most we could do was to provide artillery support because I had been forbidden to use more than one company. “G” Company defended itself furiously and I tried to get permission to assist but Colonel Cameron had no power to authorize additional forces because General McBride was personally directing the operations from division headquarters. Finally, I decided to help, regardless of previous orders and ordered Bob Moyer to move out with “E” Company. The 313th provided smoke on Mont St. Jean as Moyer moved his company forward to Sivry. Unfortunately, Moyer received a severe wound which broke his jaw, knocked out several teeth, and severely lacerated the left side of his face.

When I received word of Moyer’s wound I decided to go forward and take command of the action. I started towards the lead elements of “E” Company, now located several hundred yards from Sivry. The attack had stalled and had it not been for the smoke I am sure the company would have suffered grievously. As it was, casualties continued to mount under the indirect artillery and mortar fire which the Germans rained down upon it. Finally, I reached “E” Company and found out the problem: the lieutenant who had taken command from Moyer had done nothing. Instead, he cowered in a foxhole totally frightened by the artillery and mortar fire. I relieved him on the spot and sent him to the rear. Fortunately for him, a shell burst killed him as he returned to the 2nd Battalion positions. Otherwise, I would have court-martialed him for cowardice.

“E” Company had no other officers so finally I found Sgt. Frank, a senior sergeant, about a hundred yards from the outskirts of Sivry and put him in command of the company. As we spoke, a

German machine gun began to fire at us and in short order my command group, Sgt Frank and his squad and other men in the vicinity simply could not move. The classic case of being “pinned down”. Fortunately, the cabbage patch in which we found ourselves offered cover. The patch had deep furrows and gave enough protection from the machine gun fire to prevent getting hit. Finally, in anger and frustration, I stood up and began to fire my sub-machine gun at the machine gun and ultimately threw a hand grenade into it to knock out the gun and crew. I received a Silver Star for Gallantry in Action for this deed, but the important point is that it allowed “E” Company to move forward. We soon came under fire from another machine gun located in the basement of the southernmost house in Sivry. In an eerie turn of events, I recognized the house!

About a year before at Camp Phillips I had a dream in which I saw myself in a fire fight with a machine gun located in the basement of a ruined building! In that dream I saw myself wounded but awoke before I could recognize the extent of the injury. The memory of this dream came back to me, and I knew that I would get hit! I had the eerie feeling that I had no control of events and that I had a role to play in some mysterious scenario. Nevertheless, we had an attack to get underway so Sergeant Frank and I began to rally our men and we crawled forward to a ditch from which we could see the gun and its crew. We engaged the machine gun and I tried to maneuver myself into a position from which I could throw a hand grenade. Before I could position myself properly German artillery fell around us. Fortunately, the ditch provided excellent protection and none of us received any severe wounds. However, when the artillery first began to fall, I had placed my hand on the edge of the ditch so I could pull myself up to see if I had a chance to throw my grenade. When the artillery fell, I received two neat slices on the top of my hand. I bled for a while, but the wounds had not gone deep and seemed superficial at best. Then it dawned on me, I had received a wound! I felt as if the prophecy of my dream came true and that nothing further could happen to me for the rest of the day. Come what may, the Germans could not hurt me for the remainder of the day. Now as I look back upon it, this conclusion bordered on the ludicrous and insane but then combat has its own strange and supernatural ways.

To make a long story short, we finally established contact with “G” Company. Unfortunately, Ellsworth and his command group had been captured in the first German assault. Later that night, General McBride ordered us to withdraw to the Fôret de Fâcq because it became increasingly clear that the Germans would mount a strong counterattack and a reinforced company simply could not defend the town properly.

To digress very briefly. I came to the conclusion very early in combat that we all suffered from some form of insanity. What we did violated all of our teachings such about killing fellow beings. In addition, we rarely slept and when we did, we suffered from nightmares. However, everyone was in the same boat, so the battlefield basically took the shape of a huge insane asylum run by its inmates. Everyone acted insanely so insanity became the norm.

I spent the next several days surveying the German positions and getting acquainted with a 4.2” mortar platoon recently assigned to support the 2nd Battalion. One incident bears description and illustrates how one sad sack and his stupidity can kill an entire unit. I had visited the platoon to meet

its commander and to assess its capabilities to help me. As the commander pointed out the various fields of fire, he could cover I kept observing Mont St. Jean through my field glasses trying to imagine how I could use the platoon if the occasion arose. To my surprise I saw a German helmet outlined against the sky. In violation of all his training a German soldier had stuck his head up over the hill and his head and helmet stood in stark outline against the cloudless sky. As I watched, approximately 60 Germans, a company, came over the skyline and crept along a fence line which led into a copse of woods on the forward slope of Mont St. Jean. They obviously intended to reinforce or perhaps replace the troops already in Sivry. When the 60± Germans had assembled in the copse of woods I ordered the platoon leader to fire white phosphorous shells into the woods. He quickly registered one mortar so as not to arouse German suspicion and then let loose with a barrage of shells perhaps six per mortar. They were all in the air before the first one from each gun hit. Then the shells began to land in the woods, set it on fire, and generally created chaos. Smoke and phosphorus had spewed all over the wood and set parts of it on fire. Finally, when the firing had stopped and the smoke had dissipated somewhat, we saw a German medic run down toward the copse, in a few moments he emerged back from the copse and walked, dejectedly, back to his previous position. We could only infer that all the Germans had been killed by the totally unexpected nature and ferocity of the phosphorous barrage. One stupid soldier forgot his training, made a horrible mistake, and I took advantage of it to kill an entire German infantry company.

I later heard via the rumor mill which circulates over all battlefields that General McBride had been reprimanded by the Corps Commander for wasting resources through his piecemeal attack tactics. Whatever the truth, McBride had learned a lesson. On 9 October 1944 the 80th Division launched a coordinated attack on Mont St. Jean, overwhelmed the German defenders, and captured the hill in a few hours. In another instance of history repeating itself, the 80th Division used the still plain French trenches from World War I as a line of departure. The Germans defended Mont St. Jean from trenches they had dug in World War I. As I've said several times previously, the terrain does not change, and the terrain dictates tactics.

With capture of Mont St. Jean, the 80th Division controlled La Grande Couronne de Nancy and with it, controlled most of the approaches to the Alsace-Lorraine Plain except for the dreaded Fortress of Metz. In all of its existence the Fortress of Metz had never fallen to an assault by an enemy force. We established defensive positions along the west bank of the Seille River. Once again, however, we had outstripped our logistics, and the Third Army could advance no further. We had only enough gasoline and ammunition for a defense but not enough for an offense. Moreover, winter had arrived and with it cold, sometimes freezing, rain. The area turned into a sea of heavy mud which would make the attack on the Metz even more difficult.

During the month extending from the crossing of the Moselle until the capture of Mont St. Jean the 317th Infantry suffered about 3000 casualties. Of these approximately 2800 were enlisted men and about 130 were officers. When you realize that a regiment during World War II had a total strength of about 3300 which included 135 officers it becomes clear that the establishment of the Moselle Bridgehead resulted in the loss of virtually the entire original cadre. The 80th Division

suffered about 15,000 casualties during its entire period in combat so during one month, the 317th incurred about 20% of the total division casualties. For this unswerving devotion to duty and mission the 317th Infantry received the Presidential Citation for Distinguished Unit. However, I never knew of this honor until I received a copy of the history of the division published in 1992. For instance, by the end of October 1944 only Jim Mullen, Ira Miller, and I remained of the original officers of the 2nd Battalion who arrived in France in August and each of us had received numerous wounds although, fortunately, none of a serious nature. The rest of the original officers had become casualties. Many of the GI vehicles carried a sign, "Home Alive in 45" but it seemed to all of us that this became an increasingly remote possibility.

After the attack on Mont St. Jean, the 317th Infantry became the division reserve, and the 2nd Battalion was billeted in a convent in Pont-à-Mousson for a "rest". Actually, we used the time to refit and train because the battalion consisted largely of replacements.

The day we settled into our billets in the convent, the Germans started to shell Pont-à-Mousson with an 11" cannon mounted on a railway car. The shells fell at irregular intervals during the day and usually amounted to one per hour. Under these circumstances, we found it hard to "rest" and it became easier to get out of the city and train.

During the rest period I allowed our chaplain, Captain Graef, to persuade me to hold a memorial service for our dead. We assembled the battalion within the convent's church area, held a non-sectarian service, and began to read the names of those killed-in-action during the preceding months. These included Murzyn, Gladden, Frost, Van Fleet and on and on for perhaps a hundred names. Emotions overcame me and I had to retire to my quarters where I cried like a baby for several hours. I had known many of these men as well as their families. I had agonized with them as their children had been born without the father being able to see them until months later. Others who had died had arrived as replacements one day and became KIAs the next. I resolved after this wrenching emotional experience that I would never again know the details of the lives of any of the men I led into combat—the pain hurt too much when they became casualties. Thereafter I tend to the welfare of my men, as I had always done, but I refused to get to know anything of their lives and families. To this day, whenever I meet a new person, I have difficulty in remembering names because of the resistance I built up after the emotional turmoil following Graef's memorial service.

As it turned out, we had a week to rest and refit. The division received orders to occupy new defensive positions while the Third Army replenished its stocks of gasoline and ammunition. In the new positions, we received a strict ration of ammunition for daily use unless, of course, the Germans attacked us in force.

The 2nd Battalion received orders to take over a sector held by the 26th Division (about which I will have more to say later) on the west bank of the Seille River extending from Éply on the right for about 6000 yards to the left. The extent of the defensive sector totally exceeded the ability of the battalion to mount a credible defense if attacked. However, it seemed that nothing went by the book in combat so we did the best we could with the resources available to us.

We hunkered down for the cold, miserable and wet winter of 1944. We dug underground shelters or dugouts, we conducted training as best we could, and we patrolled in our sector. Several events during this dismal period stick in my mind as interludes in the sheer boredom which comprises a large part of war. Of course, artillery duels and sporadic firefights between rival patrols broke the silence and the boredom. As I mentioned before, artillery duels consist of the German artillery firing at US infantry and US artillery firing at German infantry. The infantrymen on both sides simple dig deeper foxholes and pray that they will survive.

Military history rarely describes winter campaigns for the simple reason that most armies virtually suspend operations during the winter months because of the toll such campaigns impose on one's forces. However, the Germans had lost the initiative and General Eisenhower decided that we should keep attacking as soon as supply level became adequate for an offensive. By early November we had replenished our supplies and we received orders to attack the Fortress of Metz.

Chapter 9

The War Years

The Winter of 1944 and the Battle for Metz

When the 80th captured Mont St. Jean, the 317th assumed defensive positions north of the hill. When we went into reserve a new division, the 26th (the Yankee Divisions) relieved us. This was their first combat related action.

I felt rather sad, in a way, to see this new division move into the line. They had not lost any men to enemy fire, and they emanated excitement and what we veterans called maneuver courage (everybody could be a hero because all casualties came back to life the next day).

As I turned over command of my sector to the battalion commander relieving me, I tried to explain the German patterns of artillery fire, the patrolling patterns, and the type of harassing fires. The 26th Division battalion commander clearly did not care to listen to what I had to say. Instead, he acted in a condescending and arrogant manner towards me. I guess he thought himself superior to the rather bedraggled and obviously tired individual who kept saying things he did not want to hear. Mind you, we had been in combat continuously for almost four months and had suffered severe casualties. We respected the fighting prowess of the German Army and, therefore, we took no unnecessary chances. We preferred caution and reserved our bravery for those occasions when we needed it. We tried to camouflage our positions and we did nothing to provoke the German artillery into firing unless we had a good reason.

I grew increasingly irritated at this arrogant commander but all that ceased when a young captain, flushed with excitement burst into the CP. The captain loudly proclaimed that they had tried to provoke the Germans “in order to draw their fire”. Once again, I tried to advise the battalion commander that this pointless procedure only created unnecessary casualties because he exposed his positions. This arrogant man sort of sneered at me as if to imply that I had no courage. I could see that nothing I said influenced him, so I told him that I stood relieved and left to join my battalion.

A week or so later, the 26th tried its first offensive action. I heard that the Germans had creamed them. Throughout the remainder of the war the record of the 26th seemed mediocre—no surprise to me because they apparently came to France with an exaggerated notion of their own worth and a deflated notion of how hard the German Army fought.

After we had “rested” the 317th relieved part of the 5th Division and assumed defensive positions in a wooded area which bordered the Seille River. We began preparations for the winter. I had a sector about 6000 feet long. A sector of this length cannot really be defended by a battalion but nothing in combat really follows the book so I did the best I could with the resources given to me. I anchored my right flank on a bridge opposite the town of Éply, but my left simply hung in mid-air in the woods. The nearest unit was a battalion of the 5th Division. The commander was apparently a heavy drinker because one of his officers with whom I served in the Pentagon after the war told me that his nickname was “boozy”. The officer also told me that “Boozy” had stepped on a

mine and had received severe wounds to include partial loss of his penis. This particular wound was one we all feared because the Germans strewed “shoe” or “castrating” mines all over the area. However, he was the only man I ever heard of who received such a wound and survived.

We now entered into a boring period of defense that resembled, in part, the trench warfare of World War I although General Patton forbade us to dig trenches because he did not want us to get a defensive attitude. However, the men dug deep foxholes both to protect themselves from German fire and to give themselves whatever meager comfort they could get from the elements. Some of them even connected their foxholes with crude and shallow trenches.

My command post was in Le Fôret de Fâcq about a hundred yards off the road which led to the village of Atton. Two bizarre features stick in my mind. For the first week or so that we occupied the CP our guide, so to speak, was a German soldier who had been killed just prior to our occupation of the position. Somehow or another when the artillery burst killed him, it also snapped a nearby tree, and he was thrown into the broken part of the trunk which promptly impaled him to the ground. The burial details had no tools to cut down the tree and get him out, so he remained there until the stench of death became obnoxious and unhealthy. Finally, I got the engineers to gut down the tree and the burial details came for him.

The other feature which sticks in my mind concerned a French leader. One afternoon my adjutant informed me that a French “official” wished to see me. The Frenchman turned out to be an imposing man with a huge black moustache and a most ferocious smile. He had armed himself to the teeth. Several German potato mashers (grenades) stuck in his belt, a bandoleer of ammunition hung over each of his shoulders, and he carried a Schmeiser automatic pistol (called a burp gun by the GIs) in his hand.

He could not speak English, so we spoke in French. He proudly announced (as he pounded on his chest) that he was Le Chef des Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (French forces of the interior or the resistance). He had come to establish a liaison and to assure me that he would help me in any way possible. We chatted amiably about *le sale boche* and the depredations the Germans had imposed on the French people. Finally, we got down to brass tacks and I told him that I had a long defensive sector which I had difficulty in defending. I, personally, would appreciate any help he could give me. He expressed his willingness to help. I sent for a map and indicated to him a bridge over the Seille River which still remained intact. It joined the east and west banks of the river at Éply, and the Germans kept trying to blow it. We had fire fights at the bridge every few days. He, le Chef, could assist me greatly by taking over the defense of the bridge.

When I asked that he defend the bridge, le Chef, suddenly recalled that most of his men were farmers and their sheep needed herding together for the winter. He, himself, had other liaison duties to perform and he had to attend to them immediately. As he rose to leave, he asked if we might give him an M-1. Mullen gave him his rifle and le Chef bade us adieu and left us even more armed to the teeth than when he arrived. We never saw him again.

I know that people and certainly nations do not fit stereotypes. However, the action of this one man seemed to me to stereotype the French in World War II. They put on great parades, sang a completely spell binding and blood warming national anthem, and dressed in colorful uniforms but they fell short on performance. Of course, the Free French fielded several divisions who fought valiantly under De Gaulle. Even so, the majority of the French people seemed incapable of arousing themselves to action until the final days of the war when the Germans were on the run in all theaters.

Defense bored everyone so we utilized the time to train ourselves for the coming offensive. By this time, the 317th was really a regiment of replacements, although enough old timers remained alive or had returned from the hospital to keep the regiment together. What we lacked was the fine sense of camaraderie which the regiment had built at Camp Forrest and during the various maneuvers. We tried to design the training to recapture some of that camaraderie and also to teach the new recruits how to survive in combat. During this period of training several other events occurred, one of which disturbed me, one placed me in the history books, and one created a lot of ghoulish glee in the battalion. Among the many ideas I had during combat this latter led Jim Mullen to dub me the cruelest soldier he ever knew.

The action that Jim Mullen liked centered around some 115mm mortars we had captured along with a plentiful supply of ammunition. Of course, we had no data as to how to set the fuses or the elevation of the mortars for any given range, so we had to experiment. However, we had an opportunity to use these mortars if we could solve the fuse and elevation problem so we experimented and finally arrived at some empirical data that would permit us to shell the town of Éply. This data gave us the opportunity to expend a lot of the ammunition and to kill a lot of Germans with their own ammunition.

Our outposts heard noises in Éply that sounded like the Germans bringing forward the evening ration. On my orders the S-2 (intelligence officer) kept a record of the times the noise occurred. The noise came at approximately the same time each evening. I felt certain that the German commander sent food forward to the defenders of Éply at the time we heard the noises. Accordingly, I determined to use the 115mm mortars and ammunition in a barrage which I hoped would kill a sizeable portion of the German garrison which we estimated at about 200 men. In all probability, these men were fed in shifts of about 30 men at a time.

The 2nd Battalion mortar section set up the German mortars at a location in Le Fôret de Fâcq at a safe distance from any of the troops of the 2nd Battalion. They spent a day or so experimenting with zeroing in the mortars on the town square of Éply. They did this very carefully so as not to arouse German suspicions. In all it took several days to set the trap. In the meanwhile, all other activity along the battalion front progressed normally. In fact, this meant hardly any shooting because General Patton had issued strict orders to ration ammunition so that we would have adequate supplies for the coming offensive on Metz. Finally, the mortar section announced that it could hit the town square of Éply whenever I gave the order to do so.

The actual firing was simplicity itself. We established a telephone line between the mortar section and the outposts near the Éply Bridge. One evening when the Germans began their feeding, the outpost notified the mortar section which then quickly fired about ten rounds from each of the six mortars we had captured. Because of the high and slow trajectory of the mortar rounds the last round had been fired before the first round struck the ground. When the last round had been fired the mortar section withdrew from the area. Thus, about sixty rounds landed on the town square of Éply within the space of approximately a minute. The effect devastated the Germans because mortar shells, unlike artillery, are almost silent as they travel over their trajectory. So far as we could tell by the screams of men and horses heard by our outposts our “joke” exceeded our expectations. The joke was a huge success, and the 2nd Battalion had a big laugh —macabre when you think about it a bit, but that’s war! We had an even bigger laugh the next day.

Part of our joke was to mount some dummies of straw stuffed into US fatigues at the edge of the wooded area from which we had fired the German mortars. We rigged the dummies with American helmets and some empty grenade cans tied to what would normal be the face area. This gave the appearance of observers looking through field glasses because we camouflaged the dummies so that only a bit of them were visible to any German observer. Late in the day following the shelling, the German artillery heavily shelled these bogus positions and wasted a great deal of ammunition. The wasted ammunition made the joke even more hilarious. The 2nd battalion had a subject for several days of conversation and laughter. We had killed a lot of Germans with their own ammunition and then had tricked them into wasting more ammunition in retaliation.

The defense of the Seille produced an unpleasant side-effect. We had no prisoners and, therefore, no knowledge of what the enemy might contemplate. Only patrol action took place and the patrols found it difficult to cross the Seille so we had no knowledge of what the German order of battle might be and, of course, I guess they had the same problem.

The intelligence situation became so critical that General McBride finally offered a case of Irish Whiskey to any unit that could capture a prisoner. I resolved to win the case of whiskey for my battalion. The solution proved to be relatively easy though not without risk.

The key to the problem was an old mill located several hundred yards north of Éply and on the Seille. From the mill our outposts could see the German defenses for several hundred yards on each side of it. Our outposts located several German foxholes and relayed that information back to my headquarters. I decided to see for myself just exactly the risks involved in trying to cross the river, capture a German, and return safely with that prisoner. My reconnaissance involved a rather risky trip of about two miles along an exposed section of road. However, Kentucky with his usual skill literally flew the jeep between headquarters and the mill and we arrived safely. In short order, I determined that our outpost had indeed located a German in a foxhole situated about 75 feet from the west bank of the Seille. This foxhole became the basis for my plan.

When I first assumed command of the 2nd Battalion, I created a special patrol of approximately ten men to carry our special missions for me. The men lived in the rear area but had agreed that they would undertake special ranger-like training and would undertake the missions I assigned to them.

They knew that the missions would always carry great risks. This particular mission promised to be extremely dangerous because they would go into the heart of the German defenses and extract one prisoner. Planning and careful execution of details would determine the success or failure of the mission and the presence or absence of a case of Irish Whiskey.

The plan, though simple, required careful execution. These were the elements: the 313th Field Artillery would place a box barrage around the intended prisoner's foxhole so as to isolate him. As soon as the barrage began, my patrol would cross the river in assault boats and go directly to the chosen foxhole. The patrol leader would place a barbed wire necklace over the prisoners' neck and simply pull him back to the assault boat. The patrol would cross back across the river and make its way to the battalion CP by a previously reconnoitered route.

The plan worked smoothly, and the prisoner came docilely. The whole operation lasted less than ten minutes and we had our prisoner. More importantly to those who participated in the capture, we had a case of whiskey. I gave the whiskey to the patrol, the outpost in the mill, the communicators, some of the staff, and the artillery observer. I myself had none because I did not drink. Much of what we used in the successful action came from the reading I had done as a cadet about World War I and successful prisoner captures during trench warfare.

Shortly after our successful raid, a major from the Third Army Inspector General visited me. His investigation centered around a disturbing incident during the first major German counterattack. A barn in St. Geneviève contained many dead German prisoners who had obviously been executed rather than being sent to the rear. The investigator wanted to know if I knew anything about the incident. I had to reply in the negative because at the time I did not command the battalion. Moreover, as a member of the regimental staff I had heard nothing. I knew, of course, that the fighting for St. Geneviève had been fierce and that "G" Company had lost the town several times but recovered it by counterattacks. In the long run, St. Geneviève remained in "G" Company hands so quite probably whoever had executed these Germans served in that unit. Beyond that I could say no more. The investigator left. Several months later, a plausible explanation came to me although I had no way of proving or disproving it.

As I saw the situation, it centered around a conversation I had with one of my soldiers on Christmas Eve, 1942. I had assumed command of "G" Company a few weeks earlier and had designated myself duty officer on Christmas Eve so that my only other officer at that time could spend the evening with his wife. Early in the evening one of the soldiers from the platoon which I had commanded requested to see me. This particular soldier was a German Jew who had enlisted in the infantry. He told me what seemed to be an almost unbelievable story.

The soldier told me that he had been an inmate in a German concentration camp (a new term to me). He described mass killings, masturbation squads, starvation and, finally, that he had escaped with the help of an underground. He made his way to England and, ultimately to the United States. When we declared war on Germany and Japan, he enlisted to seek revenge for what he and his family had suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

I sent this soldier to talk to the division's assistant G-2, himself a Jew. I never heard anything further. My supposition is that I filed the incident in my mind but really did not think about it anymore. When the investigator from the Inspector General questioned me, I made no connection between this particular soldier, his story, and the massacre of the German prisoners. However, it suddenly flashed through my mind many weeks later and everything came together. During the fighting this soldier "volunteered" to take the prisoners back to the PW collecting point. However, they never arrived because he stopped off at the barn and executed them. This particular soldier was killed in action, but I am sure he exacted a terrible revenge for what had happened to him. The massacre was no doubt hideous but later as we began to liberate concentration camps, I felt that in some macabre way the soldier simply exacted a delayed justice.

A few days after the visit by the IG, a young lieutenant from the Office of the Army Historian visited me. He had been given my name and had heard of my part in the Moselle Crossing and the early days of the establishment of the bridgehead. He interviewed me at great length. I thought nothing of these interviews until many years later when Jimmy told me that I had a few pages in one of the textbooks used at the Command and General Staff College to teach the Lorraine Campaign.

During our rest, training, and refitting we received new replacements. I remember two of them. One, Captain Landis, was a tall, handsome man perhaps twenty-five years of age. He had been a star football player in college and absolutely looked the part of an All American. The other, a captain whose name I forget, was the exact opposite of Landis. He was in his early forties—old for combat at the company level. True to my bitter lesson learned from the memorial service, I found out very little about either man. They were both killed in action on 9 November 1944 on the first day of the offensive to capture Metz. Captain Landis died trying to capture Éply while the older captain died during a German counterattack.

I also had another big fight with General McBride. I received a group of replacements, all of whom were in their mid-forties. I recoiled at the thought of putting these men into battle because my previous experience indicated that they lacked stamina and invariably got killed or severely wounded. These men had been culled from the rear areas. Most had been orderlies, others were the dregs of their units, all of them lacked simple infantry skills, and without fail they were all scared.

I sent all of these men, about thirty±, back to the division replacement depot. Then I called the division adjutant and told him I would rather have no replacements than these broken-down men. General McBride was furious and sent the division Chaplain (a lieutenant colonel) to, I suppose, shame me into taking these men. The chaplain also threatened me, in a way, by pointing out that I might be ruining my career. Instead of listening to him at length, I threw the chaplain out of my headquarters and told him he was a poor representative of Christ by advocating that I accept men whom I knew would either die or be seriously wounded in their first day of the next attack. The Chaplain left crestfallen. Moon Mullen was so impressed by my moral courage in this action that he gave me a huge bear hug that almost broke my ribs. He knew, of course, that I was right because as a company commander he had witnessed, at first hand, the ineffectiveness of the kind of

replacement I had refused to accept. Some other commander accepted these very replacements but at least I did not send them to their deaths.

Soon signs of an impending offensive replaced the dullness of the defense. We all knew the signs by now: artillery moving into forward positions, ammo dumps moving forward, mobile hospitals moving into the front-line areas, and rumors. This big push according to the rumors would end the war. In the meantime, however, another problem came to plague us.

The rainy season burst from the skies and drenched the Alsatian Plain. Now the clay turned into a light brown mud that clogged everything. The mud stuck to vehicles, to rifles, and made the maintenance of our mortars and machine guns a continuous chore. Most troublesome was the mud caked around our boots and made them seem like a ton of dead weight. The rain filled the foxholes and the GIs had to stand in a constant pool of water. The men's feet remained constantly soaked.

Fortunately for my battalion, I knew from my military history reading the medical consequences of continually wet feet. The medics of World War I called it trench foot and, if not treated, the condition led to poor circulation, gangrene, and ultimately required amputation. On the other hand, the treatment was simple enough: keep the feet dry. The battalion surgeon had not heard of the disease. Nothing surprising here because a year and a half earlier he had graduated from medical school. Now he found himself in the middle of combat with what appeared to be a big problem. The treatment for trench foot required nothing more than keeping the feet dry. Logical when you stop to think about it.

Under my orders each squad, platoon and company commander had to inspect his troops each day to ensure that they changed socks and shoes. In order to dry the socks, the GIs simply placed them in their shirts next to their stomach and the heat of the body did the rest. We issued each man several pairs of socks and made sure that each of them had two pairs of combat boots. We came up with a simple drill: the squad leader oversaw the changing of the socks, the soldier rang them out as best he could and placed them next to his stomach, later the platoon and company commanders made spot checks. This simple program worked so well that the 2nd Battalion had hardly any men with trench foot while other units of the regiment had many.

I passed the information on to Lieutenant Colonel Fisher, now the acting regimental commander, and he had the program adopted throughout the regiment. It depresses me to have to say it but some of the GIs and officers quickly found out the debilitating effects of trench foot and deliberately kept their feet wet. They knew that the disease could get them out of combat, and they did not hesitate to hurt themselves. Some of them also resorted to self-inflicted wounds. The typical self-inflicted wounded was easy to recognize because it always involved shooting the area between the big toe and the rest of the foot. Many of these who resorted to this type of action did not realize that they often maimed themselves for life because the power of the M-1 rifle simply tore a huge hole in the foot and destroyed bones as well as flesh. I suppose, in hindsight, that the horror of combat and the almost unbearable mental stress of constant fear made the self-inflicted wound the lesser of two evils.

The previous few paragraphs simply illustrate once again the old adage that those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it. Fortunately for the 2nd Battalion I read military history avidly and tried, to the best of my ability, to heed its lessons. As the winter wore on trench foot became an army-wide problem and all sorts of directives came down as to how to treat it. All the directives simply directed one or another type of program that the 2nd Battalion had initiated at the beginning of the crisis.

I should add, parenthetically, that General McBride relieved Colonel Cameron of command sometime in mid-October after another fight over the general's ordering another battalion to attack without consulting the colonel. The relief came as no surprise, but it saddened me that Colonel Cameron had to leave. I had witnessed several arguments between the general and the colonel and knew that sooner or later one of them had to go. Lieutenant Colonel Fisher assumed temporary command of the regiment.

Colonel Fisher was the only other West Pointer in the regiment and he, like Colonel Cameron, had served with General McBride in the peacetime army. He, like Colonel Cameron, had several fights with General McBride. When Fisher finally assumed command of the 317th in late November 1944 after a full colonel had assumed command of the regiment and proved ineffective, General McBride refused to promote Fisher to the rank of full colonel. Colonel Fisher commanded the regiment until the end of the war, but he never received a promotion. This, I felt, was a despicable act because he did an admirable job in commanding the regiment. I never liked General McBride because he was arrogant, not a good division commander, and mean spirited. The cruel punishment he reserved for Lieutenant Colonel Fisher only increased my dislike.

Sometime during the day of 7 November 1944, we received orders to cross the Seille River on 9 November and attack Metz. That night our new colonel, whose name I have forgotten, called a meeting of the regimental staff and the battalion commanders. The headquarters was in the convent and was a rather solemn occasion. We all knew that an attack in the middle of winter ran contrary to most military principles. Moreover, we did not have proper winter clothing or shoes. Generally, armies went into winter quarters to rest and refit and make plans for the summer offensives when the ground firmed. Here, in November 1944, the Alsatian Plain resembled a quagmire of sticky, clayey, light brown mud. The roads were almost impassable and weather reports predicted sleet and snow and, of course, more rain. Nevertheless, General Eisenhower had decided not to give the German Army a moment of respite from the pounding we had given them over the past four months.

The plan for crossing the Seille River came right out of the textbooks. We would cross the Seille in assault boats with two battalions abreast: the 1st Battalion on the left and the 3rd Battalion on the right. My battalion, the 2nd, would cross behind the 1st and become regimental reserve with the mission of protecting the left flank of the regiment. This left flank was also the left flank of the XX Corps. As a final bit of information, I learned that a German Armored Division could be expected to launch a counterattack. The division reportedly had several hundred tanks, but I could expect no tank support until the bridgehead had been consolidated and a pontoon bridge built! The German

division had about 11,000 men while I had slightly more than 800! Once again, I thought of the Light Brigade, "*Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die. Into the valley of death rode the six hundred.*"

We attacked on 9 November at about 0400 hours. This timing allowed us about two hours of darkness to cross the river, seize objectives, and be prepared by first light at about 0600 to repel counterattacks. The 1st and 3rd Battalions seized their objectives and continued the attack towards the east. In so doing they had to cross another small river east of the Seille over which a bridge still remained. The 1st Battalion tried to seize the bridge by a frontal assault and Curly Burnett received a mortal wound from which he died the following day. His death came as a blow to me because we had become good friends. The news of his death reminded me of a prediction he had made as we left the regimental meeting after receiving our attack orders.

After we had received our attack orders and began to leave the meeting with our regimental commander, Curly said to me, "So long Jim, I won't be seeing you again. I'll be killed tomorrow." I tried to cheer him up by noting that all of us usually felt that we would get hit during an attack. He persisted and told me that this was different—he knew he would die! No amount of talking served to assuage his deep depression and we parted with his reiteration of impending death. In fact, he received his mortal wound on the day he predicted but did not die until the following day because a MASH had moved into the area close behind us and the medics evacuated Curly to it with great haste. He died of the wounds he received in the chest and abdomen from several 20mm exploding rounds fired from a quad 20 anti-aircraft gun. I lost a treasured friend who died a hero's death. He received the Distinguished Service Cross posthumously for outstanding bravery in lead the assault on a key bridge over the Nied River at the town of Han-sur-Nied.

The Seille River had been swollen by the heavy rains of the preceding month. In addition, the Germans blew an upriver dam which flooded the entire valley. By the time I led my battalion to the crossing site the Seille was unfordable and a small foot bridge which the engineers had built was in the middle of what appeared to be a river that was several hundred feet wide. In order to get to the foot bridge, we would have to wade through the flooded valley in freezing water about waist high. The prospect, to say the least, promised to be extremely unpleasant and uncomfortable.

I had an important decision to make in choosing a route to move my battalion forward to the river crossing site. The elements of the decision quickly fell into place. First, when the assault battalions captured their objectives, they deprived the German artillery of the ability to shoot observed fire on the crossing sites. Second, the Germans would think it stupid for anyone to use the roads to march to the crossing sites because such roads would be under harassing artillery fire. I became convinced of the correctness of my analysis because I noticed that the Germans were shelling the approaches to the river on either side of the road, but few shells fell on the road itself. Accordingly, I decided to march my battalion as quickly as possible down the road and to get as close to the crossing site as I could. Thereafter, we would deploy into the field and cross. This way I subjected my troops to the harassing fire for the minimum of time and this, I reasoned, would hold down the casualties. I gave the order, and we moved down the road at a rapid clip and in a column of twos. We suffered only a few casualties in this march, but a greater danger awaited us. We had to

cross the flooded valley in freezing, waist deep water to reach the foot bridge then we had to reenter the flooded valley and wade to the slopes on the other side. Those slopes had been heavily mined by the Germans.

Remember, my battalion by this time had lost most of its original members and the new replacement had not yet had a lot of combat experience. I realized that I had to show strong leadership, so I took the lead and plunged into the freezing waters. The men followed and we began to wade through the flooded valley towards the footbridge that would get us across the swollen, and by now deep, Seille River.

I had advanced a few hundred feet into the flooded plain when suddenly three Messerschmidt 109s appeared flying down the valley less than a hundred feet above the surface of the river. They strafed us immediately and the watery surface splashed and erupted into columns of water. Several of my men were instantly killed, a few others drowned as they sank beneath the water from wounds they received. Others, though hit, were helped by the unwounded. I instantly ordered the battalion to fire at the planes and set an example by firing my sub-machine gun at a point where I thought the planes would have to run through my fire. Almost simultaneously, the quad 50 anti-aircraft guns stationed on the west shore opened fire. One of the planes received a hit and began to belch smoke. He veered to the east while the others continued down the river to continue their strafing mission.

I do not know whether my battalion hit any of the planes. In retrospect, we directed extremely heavy fire on them so we must have done something, but I'll never know for sure. The planes never returned for a second pass. We finally reached the footbridge, crossed the Seille River and continued through the flood to the eastern shore.

Disaster struck again. The Germans had emplaced hundreds of shoe-mines—a small wooden box containing about a quarter of a pound of explosive set off by a small but extremely sensitive fuse. The diabolic effect of these mines created a lot of problems. When a soldier stepped on one of these mines it amputated the lower part of his leg. When the soldier fell, the mine pattern assured that the soldier's upper body would detonate another mine. Invariably, the explosion blew off the soldier's head. Several such bodies covered the hill side and several of my men joined that gruesome display. The bodies, of course, would lay there for several days because only the engineers could clear a path through the minefield. Clearance would take several days and would have lower priority than building pontoon bridges. Thus, the burial details could not collect the bodies. The priority, after all, went to the living. Dead soldiers are of no use in combat.

In this case the dead from the 1st Battalion helped to a degree. By carefully following the paths taken by the dead men we could, in effect, follow a cleared route through the minefield and thus minimize our own casualties. Even so, as I indicated above, we did lose some men including some of our few remaining original NCOs because, of course, they had to lead their squads through the mine field.

We finally reached the top of the valley and "E" Company under Captain Landis veered off to the south to capture Éply. "F" Company veered off to the left to take up positions on the extreme

left flank and “G” Company went straight forward to establish defensive positions against the expected counterattack. We spent the rest of the morning preparing our positions. About noon, I received word that Captain Landis had been killed in the assault on Éply, but the town and its defenders had been captured. We sent the prisoners to the rear and established the battalion CP in a basement on the northern outskirts of the town.

During the afternoon, the weather turned bad, and snow and sleet began to fall. The ground became even mushier. Our boots became huge clumps of clay and walking became extremely difficult. I checked my positions, ordered the companies to stand to at first light, and returned to the CP. I was extremely tired because, unbeknownst to me, I had pneumonia. Moreover, I had not slept for two days. Moon, fortunately, had managed to get some sleeping bags forward and I slept fitfully that evening dreaming of the counterattack that I knew would surely come on the following morning.

The following morning, I left the CP before first light and started to a forward observation post we had established the prior day. I had my radio operator, Kentucky, as a runner, and an artillery observer named Moss with me.

On the way to the observation post, we ran into a squad of soldiers from, I believe, “E” Company. The sergeant told me in a rather disrespectful manner that he had decided that his men needed a rest. He was taking them to Éply to find a house where they could rest. I ordered him to return to his company. He refused in a surly and totally disrespectful manner. I took my 45 out of its holster and informed the sergeant that I considered him guilty of mutiny. Then I told him that he would either take his squad back to their defensive positions (remember we were expecting a counterattack) or I would shoot him. The wild look in my eyes from the pneumonia I supposed convinced him that I meant business. After a moment’s reflection, he turned and ordered his squad to follow him. Whether I would have shot him I do not know. One of us had to give in and I was not about to surrender my command authority to a mutinous sergeant.

As my command group continued forward the sky began to clear, and the sun appeared from behind the clouds. Soon we heard a loud drone in the sky. When we looked up into the heaven, we saw hundreds of B-17s flying eastward towards Faulquemont, the division objective. As they flew steadily eastward, they released chaff to fool the German radar. The chaff reflected the sun and gave us a light show that raised our spirits and made us proud to be members of the greatest army in the world. You remember, of course, that in 1944 the United States Army Air Force still remained part of the army.

The hill that the 2nd Battalion had to defend had absolutely no concealment. We were completely exposed to enemy observation and could protect ourselves only by digging foxholes. Fortunately, we had several hours of relative quiet, and everyone had dug in except my little command group. Suddenly artillery began to fall everywhere: the German prelude to the counterattack. Kentucky drove the jeep back to a safe place as the artillery fire increased in intensity. One of the mortar squads of “G” Company suffered a direct hit and literally disappeared in smoke.

All of its crew were killed, and the mortar destroyed. Other parts of the “G” Company weapons platoon suffered from fire and several other weapons received direct hits.

Moss, the artillery observer, had removed his radio from the jeep and contacted the 313th Field Artillery, our direct support battalion. Given that we were in the open and not dug in, Moss’ radio was like a beacon to the Germans and soon the command group came under fire. Unfortunately, we had no place to hide, nor could we find any suitable cover. Soon German shells began to fall around us. Finally, several of them came close enough to wound Moss in the chest and to kill the runner. Another shell exploded nearby, and a piece of shell fragment stuck in my temple and caused me to bleed rather profusely but the wound was minor. However, the explosion stunned me and left me reeling.

Despite our problems, I tried to get Moss back to a safer location. I had become disoriented by the force of the explosion, Moss could barely walk, and we wandered into a minefield. Suddenly, Jim Mullen appeared. He put one arm around Moss, the other arm around me and literally lifted both of us off the ground as he carried us into safe territory. His action saved us both from at a minimum serious injury and in all probability death. By this time, we realized that Moss’ chest wound was serious. Somehow, we found a MASH medical jeep which hauled Moss off to the hospital. He never returned to the 80th although we heard that he survived his wound.

When we left Moss, I suddenly realized that I was bleeding profusely from what appeared to be the top of my head. I reached up and found a long sliver of steel, almost like a dart, imbedded in my forehead. I bled profusely but the wound was actually superficial because my skull did the job nature intended for it. This was the fourth time I had been hit by the Germans. Each of the wounds, thankfully, was superficial but each had bled freely.

I quickly recovered and told Mullen that I had to get back to “G” Company and establish a new OP. Mullen went back to get some communications forward and to ask the 313th Field Artillery to send me a new observer. He also sent me a new runner to assist in getting messages back and forth while communications were being reestablished. Fortunately, the forward observer with “G” Company had not been hit and he called for artillery on the counter-attacking Germans. The combination of fire from the artillery and the 2nd Battalion beat off the counterattack. We later found out that the dreaded armored division never materialized, and the counterattack had been by other units.

As I remember it, the counterattack actually lasted for most of the day. That evening we received orders to advance eastward and seize St. Jure. That evening, I came down with a high fever and became so weak that I could not lead the attack the next day. Mullen sent me back to the aid station and assumed command of the battalion. Our surgeon quickly diagnosed pneumonia and sent me back to the collecting company which in turn evacuated me to the General Hospital in Nancy.

The trip from the division collecting company to Nancy seemed surreal. I occupied an upper stretcher on one side of the ambulance and a soldier who had lost a leg occupied the lower stretcher. Several other severely wounded men occupied the other stretchers. The soldier who had lost his leg

and I were both in semi-dazed conditions. He had been heavily sedated, and I had the raging fever which at time, I suppose, made me babble incoherently. At any rate, we had this surreal conversation in which we both rambled on in an incoherent manner until we finally arrived in Nancy. He went to surgery immediately while I went to a ward somewhere in the hospital. I have often wondered what happened to the man. I hope he survived.

The big plus going for men who lost limbs or were severely wounded was our possession of sulfa drugs. Each soldier had a packet of sulfa in the first aid pouch carried on his web belt. Our training taught us to immediately apply sulfa if wounded because the medicine quickly minimized the chance of infection. The Germans did not have sulfa drugs although all their soldiers knew about their effects. I remember vividly a German soldier we found during the fighting around Sivry. He had been lying in a field for perhaps two days without food or water. His first request was that we sprinkle sulfa on his wounds!

I stayed in the hospital for about a week. My fever broke and I was sent to a convalescent hospital at St. Mihiel where I met Paul Roberts, commander of the 1st Battalion. He had been wounded in the arm and, like myself, was convalescing. All three of the battalion commanders who had launched the attack had been wounded. Curly died of his wounds, Paul recovered, my wound was slight, but the pneumonia incapacitated me. Throughout the war the 317th used up 15 battalion commanders—a casualty rate of 500%! It could hardly be classified as a safe job.

The stay in the convalescent hospital filled me with anxiety and guilt. The anxiety came from a fear that I would be placed into the replacement system and not be reassigned to our regiment. The guilt, of course, came from a feeling that I should be fighting. Paul and I were weak, but we saw no reason why we could not recover our strength back at the 317th. In any case, Paul left before I did and had a jeep waiting to take him back to the 317th. I made him promise that he would send a jeep back for me and, if necessary, I would leave the hospital and let our personnel officer straighten out the paperwork. Several days later, sometime around the 10th of December 1944 Chaplain Graef came to take me back to the regiment. Technically I was AWOL, but our personnel officer straightened out whatever irregularities existed, and I was back on the regimental roster.

A week before Paul Roberts left the hospital, he and I tried to persuade our doctor to give us a three-day pass to Paris. He lacked the power to grant such a pass, but he did give us a pass to St. Mihiel *and vicinity*. We reasoned that Paris was in the vicinity of St. Mihiel, so we set off for the City of Lights.

Our first problem was transportation. Fortunately, we found a rather suave lieutenant who had a pass to Paris. In addition, he had appropriated a civilian sedan by methods both mysterious but effective. Moreover, he had a “friend” in Paris who provided him with room and board. She, no doubt, provided other services but about these he remained silent. He invited us to drive with him and gave us his authorization for a room in an obscure hotel where US personnel on leave billeted. IN due course, we arrived in Paris, found our room, and set out to explore Paris.

Everyone in the American Army knew about Place Pigalle and its numerous nightclubs and racy shows. We travelled to Place Pigalle via the metro and began our exploration. We decided to eat in a small cafe where we ate a modest meal and drank some champagne at an enormous cost. We also watched the floor show which consisted of a band, some jugglers, and singers all of whom were, it seems, Chinese. By the time we had finished eating and watching the show we were extremely tired, his wounds and my illness had taken their toll, so we returned to our room.

The next day we took in all the sights: the Arc de Triomphe, Nôtre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, and the left bank of the Seine. That afternoon we went into a cafe to get a cup of coffee. Two French couples adopted us immediately.

We had no doubt that these two couples had lots of money. The men dressed expensively, and the women were beautifully dressed and impeccably groomed. The men could speak English, but the women could not. Paul ended up discussing the war and France's role in it with the men. I ended up speaking to the two women who were obviously delighted with my ability to speak French and of the fact that I was a true combat soldier. Finally, they invited Paul and me to dinner and drove us to a posh French restaurant in their rather luxurious sedan. The men probably engaged in the black market although they told us over dinner that they were on vacation to Paris from Lille where they owned a huge textile factory. Whatever the facts, we spent several hours with them and enjoyed a truly delightful French meal. Paul thoroughly relished the food. I enjoyed the food, but I think I enjoyed speaking with the women more. I was charmed by the beauty of the women and their fastidious grooming and expensive perfume. They, as I said earlier, were charmed by a combat soldier from the American Army who spoke almost perfect French.

After the meal, our hosts bade us farewell. Paul and I found the metro and went to Place Pigalle where we found the premier night club in all of France. Le Bal Tabarin was a huge place, very expensive, and the possessor of Paris' number one star: Gisa Varga. We ordered champagne at \$25 per bottle and sat down to watch the show. As the curtain rose, I noticed that the stage appeared to be a huge lyre. The sides of the lyre I immediately saw was decorated with nude women. Suddenly, the club went dark. A spotlight appeared in the center of the club and a huge stage began to rise from a lower floor. In the center of the floor, on a horse, emulating Lady Godiva was Gisa Varga. She was completely nude.

Paul and I watched this display and probably appeared a bit awed by it. Of course, there was nothing like this in the United States. I suppose as we watched our eyes appeared to pop out of our head and a Frenchman sitting beside us remarked that he found it strange that we exhibited the same reaction as the Germans had to the show and the open display of nudity.

After the show, we returned to our rooms knowing that early the following morning the kindly lieutenant would drive us back to St. Mihiel. The day after we returned to the hospital Paul returned to the 317th and a day or two later so did I.

When I reported for duty, Lt. Colonel Henry Fisher (Hammering Hank) now commanded the regiment. He made me executive officer and Paul returned to command the 3rd Battalion. The

317th was in the process of clearing St. Avold which had fallen the day before. That night a series of huge explosions rocked the city. The Germans had planted delayed action bombs in many of the buildings which might be used as billets and these bombs now began to explode. No one knew how many bombs the Germans had planted or when the bombs would explode. Apprehension gripped all units.

The 80th lost about fifty men in these explosions. We immediately relocated troops to buildings still occupied by French inhabitants. St. Avold was in Alsace-Lorraine and at least half of the population owed allegiance to Germany. We no longer had the luxury of a sympathetic population. For instance, we moved the regimental CP into a large home whose owner complained that we were subjecting her and her family to hardship. She explained to me that her husband was in the Army. It took a lot of questioning from me to find out that her husband was in the German Army and not in the French Army as she would have us believe.

When we moved in with the inhabitants, our losses from the explosions ceased. However, something bigger intervened: on 16 December 1944 the Battle of the Bulge began.

Chapter 10

The War Years

The Battle of the Bulge

During the afternoon of 15 December 1944, the 317th Infantry received orders to move to Altviller, a town about 100 kilometers south of Saint Avold, and make plans to attack the West Wall. The West Wall was Germany's equivalent of the Maginot Line and the coming battle promised to be difficult and bloody.

On the morning of 16 December 1944 our convoy moved out of St. Avold. The air crackled and snapped as though electricity was passing through it. This snapping of the air is a phenomenon I noticed many times during my lifetime. It is as if whenever a really big event is occurring human beings become super charged with excitement and emit electric waves as if the body had become an electric generator. If one is observant, for instance, the snapping can be felt at huge sporting events like football games where a stadium holds fifty or sixty thousand excited fans. I read a book in 1939 written by a surgeon who served in World War I. He conducted a series of experiments on the organs and skin of soldiers who had died during surgery and proved to his satisfaction that different organs carried different electric potential. The electric potential decayed at different rates as the body died implying, among other things, that the body did act in some ways like a generator.

As my jeep approached the town square of St. Avold, Major Coe Kerr our assistant G-2 was directing traffic. I asked him what was happening, and he answered something to the effect, "The Krauts have attacked the 28th Division in the Ardennes but everything's under control." I thought nothing further about

We arrived in Altviller without incident, billeted our troops, and began planning for the offensive to break through the West Wall. We had exquisitely detailed maps to a scale of 1/1250. Pillboxes, barbed wire, and natural features were shown in great detail. The attack never took place.

Sometime around 0200 on 17 December the phone in our operations room rang. I answered the phone. Colonel Max Johnson, the division chief of staff, was on the other end. He had been my military history instructor during my senior year at the Academy and I admired him for his intelligence, and he reciprocated. He wanted to know how many trucks it would take to move the 317th. I told him we needed about 27 trucks per battalion and could probably load the entire regiment in about 90 trucks. He told me that the trucks would arrive shortly and that the regiment had orders to move north on route N-1 towards the Luxembourg border. Someone from the Army staff would meet us en route and give us further orders. He knew nothing more other than to say that there had been a big German attack in the Ardennes. I awoke Colonel Fisher and told him of the orders I had received. Then I awoke the regimental S-3 and directed him to alert the regiment and to prepare a movement order.

The trucks arrived at about 0500 and by 0600 the regiment moved north on route N-1, the main north and south road between Metz and the small Duchy of Luxembourg. We did not know

our destination other than to move north until we received further orders. It became extremely cold, and we had not been supplied with proper winter gear despite the disastrous experience with trench foot during the attack on Metz. My feet and hands were like blocks of ice, as were Kentucky's. We had to share the driving chores to permit us to warm ourselves.

We continued the march for most of the day with my jeep in the lead. Colonel Fisher had gone to division headquarters to try to find out how the situation was developing. He finally caught up with us as we reached the Luxembourg border where route N-1 came to a dead end and another road ran east and west. To the west was Belgium while to the east was Luxembourg city. Now we ran into a major snafu. We were contacted by a General from General Bradley's 1st Army Group. The General gave us orders to disembark and billet our troops while we waited for further orders. As I struggled to get the word out to the battalions, the regimental staff was able to find billets for the lead battalion who dismounted and began to bed down for some much-needed rest. As we searched for billets for the remaining battalions, General Sommers, our assistant division commander appeared. He gave us new orders to continue eastward to the town of Junglister, a few miles east of Luxembourg city. Colonel Fisher rejoined us at about this time and took over the task of getting the regiment moving to Junglister. As it turned out we simply had the battalion which was second in the column to make a right turn and go to Junglister. Then we roused the battalion that had dismounted, and it became the last battalion in the column. Finally, sometime late in the morning we arrived at Junglister behind the 4th Infantry Division. The 4th Division had held but the Germans had destroyed the 28th and 106th Divisions and had broken through on a broad front. Literally nothing stood between them and Antwerp, a major supply port.

During the evening of the 17th, we were ordered to take defensive position in rear of the 4th Infantry Division. We remained in these positions for a day or so but fortunately the 4th Division held.

The situation became chaotic. Rumors abounded. We heard that Germans dressed as GIs were misdirecting traffic. Assassination squads, supposedly, were trying to kill General Eisenhower. Our losses, we heard, had been staggering (as indeed they were). No one knew what to believe and everywhere one went questions like "who won the World Series" had to be answered or you were in deep trouble.

We now received orders to seize Diekirch, the summer residence of the Duchess of Luxembourg. We no longer had trucks, so we walked. The town was unoccupied, so we did not have to fight for it. We spent a day or so there—I don't really remember the entire sequence of events because I had no sleep for several days and the days simply merged into each other. Finally, however, when we reached Diekirch I did get some sleep: I fell asleep in the Duchess' bed (without the Duchess, of course)!

The next morning, we received orders to simply move north until we contacted the Germans! No one knew what the situation was in the Bulge, and we could not get information from our aircraft because of the weather.

Hitler's attack had surprised the US High Command who had complacently believed that Hitler could no longer mount a major offensive. Now the American Army had to fight for its life. The orders given to the 317th were a far cry from the carefully considered five-paragraph field order taught at Fort Benning or Fort Leavenworth. We had no time for detailed planning, and we had to fight back in order to survive. The only way to defeat the Germans was to strike at the two flanks of the salient before the Germans could consolidate their gains. The Germans intended to reach the Meuse River and from there to strike for the channel ports. If they seized the channel ports, the allied armies were in danger of being cut off from their supplies.

As I mentioned earlier, we took Diekirch. When we left Diekirch at first light we continued to march northward toward the town of Ettelbruck. This was the start of the attack to relieve Bastogne. The plight of the 101st in Bastogne was, by now, known by the whole division. We willingly entered into the attack to relieve the 101st which had become a symbol of the American will to resist. The other divisions in the attack were the 26th, the 5th, and the 4th Armored. The 80th marched north in a column of regiments with the 318th in the lead. When the lead elements of the 318th reach the high ground north of Ettelbruck the lead scouts were amazed to see an entire German division marching westward in a column of twos. The speed with which the Third Army had moved from the south took the German High Command by surprise. As a consequence, this particular German division did not know the 80th Division was in the area until the entire 80th Division Artillery began to fire at them. The surprise was so complete that the German Division broke and ran. We continued our march. The 318th now veered to the left and the 317th came abreast of them. Both regiments continued marching to the north.

During the day and evening of the 23rd of December we marched through a rather dense woods between Ettelbruck and the towns of Niederfeulen and Kehmen. As dawn broke on Christmas Eve morning we emerged from the woods. I was with the lead elements and saw before me a beautiful, idyllic valley scene worthy of any Christmas card. The twin towns of Oberfeulen and Niederfeulen lay below us. These towns lie at the base of the opposite side of the valley. The hills covered with a dense growth of pine trees and snow rose sharply from the valley floor. Now, in hindsight, I know that as we snaked down to the valley floor, we were under continual observation by German artillery observers.

Fortunately, the 317th was in an approach march formation because after the sharp action at Ettelbruck, contact with the Germans had been broken but we supposed that the division would reorganize and take up defensive positions in front of us. At Colonel's Fisher's orders I was with the advance guard which was an element of the 2nd Battalion now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Bill Boydston. He had taken command shortly after I had gone to the hospital. When I returned, I visited him and had formed one of those quick friendships which can only happen in combat. We instantly liked and admired each other. He was a good commander, and he knew I was a good commander. The bonding was instantaneous.

As I marched with the lead elements I had a small group of runners with me. I hoped to expedite the flow of information back to Colonel Fisher as soon as we made contact. That information would help him to make his estimate of the situation and issue his orders.

About an hour after we had emerged from the woods our lead elements marched into Niederfeulen. As we reached the northern end of the village, the road came to a dead end. To the left the road led to Kehmen; to the right the road led up the hill towards another heavily wooded area. My small party had stopped for a moment at the dead end of the road when suddenly a German spotter plane flew overhead. Almost instantly, German artillery began to burst around us. We had finally contacted the Germans and they were not in a holiday mood.

The artillery and mortar fire intensified. Twenty or thirty men were killed or wounded almost instantly. Our situation worsened because the Germans shelled the road leading into and out of Niederfeulen. Consequently, we were unable to get the medical jeeps into the town to carry the wounded to the regimental aid station which quickly established itself at the end of our column. In this circumstance, the regimental surgeon, Dr. Carey, came forward to Niederfeulen and with the 2nd Battalion surgeon opened a make-shift aid station in a house off the town square. They began to treat the wounded as best they could.

My runner, a GI nicknamed Froggy because of his raspy voice, and I took shelter behind what we thought was a pile of hay. It was actually a huge pile of manure, saved by the farmers for fertilizer. We later found out that the larger the pile of manure in front of the farmhouse, the greater (supposedly) the wealth of the farmer. I was oblivious to this nuance in the Luxembourg culture. However, my nose told me that I had made a **BIG** mistake.

In a few moments, several shells hit the pile of manure. Had the phrase existed at the time, I would have to have said that this was the mother of all proverbial piles of manure being hit by the proverbial blivits. Froggy and I were splattered by the farmer's wealth much against our will. We sprang up and dashed to what we thought was a safer ditch on the other side of the road only to find it full of cow urine which seeped out of a barn situated on a small knoll above us.

Then, in the midst of death we witnessed an occurrence of the beginning of life. A cow in the barn began to give birth to a calf. A GI came running out of the barn where he had tried to find cover from the artillery. He shouted out for anyone who might have been a farmer to assist him in helping the cow. Of course, several GIs responded because our division was composed of men from the farmlands of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Right there in the middle of all of this shelling, the GIs completely oblivious of their own safety ran in the barn to help the cow and her calf. The barn received no hits so presumably the cow and her calf lived happily ever after.

I got up and ran to the edge of the town to find Boydston and to ascertain that the advance still continued. To my horror, the advance party had broken in panic and was streaming down the hill in total and unreasoning terror. We had a major panic on our hands in addition to the chaos created by the artillery and mortar fire. We did not even know if Germans meant to counterattack.

Fortunately, most of the officers and non-commissioned officers in the town square could realize what had happened. Heedless of their own safety, we all began a desperate effort to stop the panic. Two immediate problems faced us: insulate the troops in the rear so the panic did not spread; stop and reorganize the troops who were running down the hill in terror. I knew from military history that panic soon spreads like a contagion unless it is stopped immediately. I sent Froggy back to Colonel Fisher to explain what had happened. Then, I joined the group trying to bring the panic under control.

We gathered the frightened soldiers into small groups and placed them under the command of someone who still had control of himself. Those troops we managed to control in this way we sent to one side of the town. It is easier to say this than it was to execute at the time. The artillery fire continued as did casualties. However, because only about 200 troops had actually panicked, we had most of them under control in about half an hour. In the meantime, the forward advance of the remainder of the regiment was halted by Colonel Fisher.

I vividly remember one soldier with wide eyes and froth around his lips. I grabbed him and shook him. He looked at me with blank, unseeing eyes and said something like, "everybody's been killed but me; the Krauts are killing everybody." I shook him again and then said, very authoritatively, "Go back and tell the Krauts to stop it." This simple command and the authoritarian tone seemed to snap him out of his terror, and he said something like, "Yes sir, yes sir." Similar conversations were probably occurring along the entire line we had established to try to control the panic.

We gradually found the genesis of the panic. Apparently, the lead scout passed over a small knoll and, temporarily, lost contact with the advance party. Because none of us had much sleep for several days, the lead scout probably hallucinated and believed that everyone had been killed. He dropped his rifle, ran to the rear, and told everyone he met that the Krauts were killing everybody. This is the chicken little syndrome: "sky is falling." Whomever the scout met believed his story and, in turn, began to run down the hill. Thus, the panic gathered steam. Fortunately, by isolating it at the outskirts of Niederfeulen, we prevented the panic from spreading to the entire regiment. It turned out to be a minor and momentary halt in our advance and never occurred again.

Years later as Chief of the Doctrine Publication Office at Fort Benning, the memory of the particular event led me to do some research into the causes of panics. Mind your there have been many of them: the Old Guard at Waterloo, the panic of the Italian Army at the Piave, the Russians at Tannenberg, and numerous small panics which never made the pages of military history. I searched in vain for patterns which might be used to predict when a panic would occur. The research led nowhere as to the establishment of patterns. However, the research did reveal that no army is immune to panic. Each panic is separate until itself. Most panics begin for trivial reasons. Finally, if not brought under control quickly even the smallest panic spreads and can infect an entire army. Most recently, a panic gripped the South Vietnamese army in 1975 and caused the entire collapse of a nation. My own estimate of this panic is that the irresponsible actions of the American Congress destroyed nation. Unfortunately, we will never know the real reason for the panic.

Colonel Fisher came forward and made the decision to establish the regimental CP in Niederfeulen. At the same time, he ordered the next battalion in line to continue the advance to the north while the 2nd Battalion reorganized itself. I believe, although I do not remember precisely, that the 3rd Battalion continued the advance. As it turned out, there were relatively few Germans on the high ground outside the town and we managed to secure the hill later in the afternoon. This did not stop the shelling because the German artillery was well zeroed in on Niederfeulen. They could not see specific targets, but they could do a lot of damage simply by increasing the volume of fire on the town.

We had to use Niederfeulen as a base of operations because of the weather. The deadly cold reduced our extremities to numbness and our lip muscles seemed like slabs of wood. Articulation of words became extremely difficult, and conversation became a real test of endurance. The cold seemed even more extreme because we had no proper winter gear, in contrast to the Germans who did have.

The only source of heat was in the houses of Niederfeulen that had not been destroyed by the German artillery. Most of the homes had huge Nuremburg stoves heated by coal briquettes. Fortunately, most of the homes also had abundant supplies of coal briquettes. To keep our troops warm, each battalion created a heating facility. A squad at a time would go to one of the homes where the stove had been lit and stay for perhaps a half hour. Squads rotated through the facility. Despite all of our efforts, we had a large number of frostbite cases although our heating facilities minimized the number.

As regimental executive officer, I had to keep the logistics working properly. I dashed around the town trying to do just that although the artillery fire made it quite difficult. I had a really bad turn when I visited the Regimental Aid Station. Mullen, my best friend, had been wounded. Major Carey had no idea how badly Moon had been injured but he was bleeding from his nose, was unconscious, and had probably suffered internal injuries. There was no way I could speak to Mullen because he was unconscious. Later that evening, we were able to get some ambulances through the German artillery fire and he was evacuated. The word that the Germans were shelling our ambulances spread quickly through the regiment and everyone knew that such shelling was in violation of the Geneva Conventions. However, war is war and as the word spread throughout the regiment the number of German prisoners taken decreased while the number of dead Germans in front of us increased. It is very easy to play the cruelty game in war and nobody really can win it.

I finally got back to the regimental CP sometime that evening after the situation seemed to have stabilized. The dashing around and the cold had exhausted me, so I tried to get some rest by laying down on a sofa opposite the stove. As circulation returned to my hands, feet and lips I felt as if nails were being driven into my body. Fortunately, I did not have any frostbite. The luxury of the heat quickly put me to sleep.

I don't know how long I slept but a tremendous explosion awakened me. The side of the house against which the sofa rested had been blown in by a shell. The sofa flew across the room, rolled, and I fell onto the floor. Fortunately, for you, the sofa was of the overstuffed type. The huge

cotton filling had stopped the shell fragments, otherwise I would have been killed. The entire wall had been destroyed and the rear of the sofa had been ripped apart. I was stunned but after I checked myself all I had was some minor scratches and bruises. Actually, several shells had hit our CP and several of our enlisted staff had been wounded although Colonel Fisher had escaped with minor bruises. The house was on fire so we evacuated it while Captain Pheiffer, our adjutant, set out to find another house in which we could establish a new CP.

We suffered a lot of other damage. The regimental kitchen truck received a direct hit and burned. My jeep and all my belongings including my exposed films were destroyed by a direct hit. Fortunately, I had changed clothes—an absolute necessity after the hit on the manure pile. However, I lost my change of clothes and extra boots. I was very fortunate in that I had kept my overcoat and gloves with me so at least I didn't freeze as we searched for a new CP.

We established the new CP in short order although we functioned at about 50% efficiency. It took longer to get communications re-established because many of our phones and our regimental radio had been destroyed. Nevertheless, by the time the next day came we had become functional.

The real irony of the situation turned out to be the mail. Actually, the regimental post office finally managed to get the mail forward through the German artillery fire. That evening they delivered several days' worth of mail. The mail, naturally, had a low priority in the chaotic events of the past several days so we were all glad to get our letters. That evening, Christmas Eve, we opened our Christmas cards from home wishing us a *Merry Xmas, Happy New Year, and Good Will to Men*.

The next morning, Christmas Day, Colonel Fisher called a meeting of the battalion commanders to issue orders to continue the attack northward. We arranged ourselves around the situation map. Suddenly, the Germans launched another artillery barrage on Niederfeulen. The fire increased in intensity and several shells hit around the new CP. One shell hit outside a corridor which led from the wall on which we had the situation map into a courtyard. The door disappeared in the explosion. A second shell hit almost immediately, and its fragments filled the room and hallway. Incredibly, none of us were hurt. However, the handle of Captain Martinez' entrenching tool had been severed at the blade; I had several holes in my overcoat; and several other officers were stunned. We simply stood there waiting for the shelling to stop because we had nowhere to go. Finally, the shelling stopped, and Colonel Fisher continued with the meeting and completed the issuance of the attack order.

The attack which followed was part of a larger action designed to liberate Bastogne. The 317th was on the right, the 318th was on the left of this attack. The 4th Armored Division with a battalion of 318th attached (under Glenn Gardner) was the main effort towards Bastogne. The attack continued for several days. The ultimate outcome was the liberation of Bastogne and the 317th, in the process, liberated the villages of Bourschied, Heiderscheid, Heidersheiderung, and Kehmen. We suffered many casualties in this assault both from the Germans and from the cold.

One of the highlights for the GIs during this attack was the introduction of the proximity fuse by our artillery. This revolutionary concept embodied a small transceiver in the fuse which could be

set to burst above the ground. This new ability overcame one of the chief limitations of artillery in that the full effect of an exploding shell could now be directed **into** German foxholes. With the older shell some of the effect was lost because the shell's explosive effect was partially absorbed by the ground. Thus, a foxhole was almost always virtually complete protection unless, of course, the shell struck into the foxhole.

The odds of a shell striking directly into a foxhole were remote although as I wrote earlier, I had seen that happen when one of the "G" Company mortars had been destroyed during the attack on Metz. In any case, when our "Christmas Present" to the Germans hit them Christmas night, the proximity fuses exploded above the ground sending shell fragments into the German foxholes. They suffered unusually high casualties (according to captured documents) but moved swiftly to find countermeasures. Of course, the Germans quickly realized that all they had to do was to make a cover for the foxhole thus immediately nullifying much of the effect of the proximity fuse. However, the proximity fuse still retained its lethal sting in those cases where the German infantry counter-attacked and had, perforce, to expose themselves to our artillery fire.

After Christmas Day, the regiment received several new lieutenant colonels as replacements. Colonel Black assumed command of the 1st Battalion, someone else whose name I never knew took over the 3rd Battalion and Paul Roberts became the regimental executive officer. I was still a major because my promotion had not yet been processed. My promotion was delayed once more, and I became the regimental operations officer or the S-3.

A day or two after Christmas it snowed heavily and the suffering of the 317th (as well as the other regiments) increased dramatically. Our heating centers now became central to the well-being of our men. More ominously, the snow also created problems for our wounded. Now when a man received a wound he might be covered with snow. Thus, he might freeze to death and almost certainly would go into shock. We now found that while the normal ratio of dead to wounded was, say, 1 dead to 3 wounded, the new ratio became 3 dead to 1 wounded. We could not continue with such losses because our casualty rate was anywhere from a hundred to two hundred men per day.

I suffered another personal loss and witness, again, an example of ESP. We received orders to attack Kehmen, the last of the small towns held by the Germans to our front. In order to make a plan, I flew over the area in an artillery observation plane to get a better idea of the terrain. This was both necessary and dangerous. It was necessary because the maps of the Ardennes were inaccurate; it was dangerous because the Germans had lots of quad 20mm anti-aircraft guns which they used in a dual anti-infantry and anti-air role and observation planes were really easy targets. The saving grace, in this situation, was that we had such overwhelming strength in artillery and artillery spotting techniques that the Germans rarely fired at single observation planes. Nevertheless, I did have a classmate killed in just such a plane and by the quad 20s. On the other hand, the risk was well worth taking because I found out that I could get a unique conception of the opportunities in the terrain for cover and concealment. As long as I remained regimental S-3 I used this type of reconnaissance for all our attacks. I am convinced that, in the long run, I made better plans, utilized the terrain extremely effectively, and saved the lives of 317th Infantry soldiers.

The ESP incident came after I had made my plan. As usual Colonel Fisher called a meeting of battalion commanders and issued his orders. I noticed that Bill Boydston, a usually happy and upbeat sort, seemed glum and morose. When I asked whether he was sick he told me that he was not but that he had a bad feeling about the coming attack. The following morning, he was killed in action when a mortar round exploded, and he received multiple wounds in the chest. We captured Kehmen after suffering heavy casualties. I, of course, lost another friend. In fact, I actually lost two friends that day. Ira Miller, the last of the battalion officers who had been at Camp Forrest received severe wounds during the attack. He died several days later from complications following surgery. Except for myself, all the original officers who had been at Camp Forrest had become casualties and were no longer with the 317th. I am sorry to say that I no longer grieved for my lost friends. The death of Boydston and the wounding of Miller were noted in passing. My duties as operations officer kept me too busy which, I suppose, acted in a therapeutic manner. Life, after all, had to go on and combat was a jealous mistress.

The following day, the Germans withdrew across the river north of Kehmen and established new defensive positions along the river. The engineers could now clear the roads leading into the many small villages we had liberated. In the clearing process many of the men we carried as missing in action (MIA) had their status changed to killed in action (KIA). The snow covered these men where they had fallen so they simply disappeared from view. When the engineer bulldozers cleared the roads, the scoops simply turned over the dead men who had either died of shock or had frozen to death. The bulldozer exposed them in gruesome and grotesque postures but like everything else we veterans hardly noticed them. Dead men are of no use in battle.

I should add an aside here. Several months after the war ended, Colonel Fisher gave me several weeks of R&R (rest and recuperation). I could have gone, for instance, to the Riviera. Instead, I elected to return to the battlefields in Luxembourg and France to assure myself that I had made the best decisions I could, given the information available to me at the time. I retraced the regimental route all the way from the Moselle to the Moselle and other areas where we had battles. Actually, around Kehmen I found several bodies (I took pictures of them, and they are in my wartime albums). The bodies had decomposed badly and were mostly skeletons in GI clothes. Someone had stolen their boots and their heavy winter clothing but had not buried the bodies. I notified the Graves Registration units of the location of the bodies and the names and serial numbers of the men involved (taken from their name tags).

This trip was a great catharsis for me. Whether it was self-delusion to preserve my own sanity, I do not know but I became convinced that I had done the best I could do with the information available at the time. Mistakes had, of course, been made. I might have prevented the capture of Ted Ellsworth and his command group if I had disobeyed orders earlier and attacked with "E" Company. I'll never know. However, during the various battles' information was always poor and incomplete and the information drove the decisions which I made. In the final analysis, I exposed myself to the same dangers as my men. Sometimes I exposed myself to greater dangers. That I had not been killed amazed me and made no real sense except to accept the fact that my time had not

come. Finally, I had lived up to my own expectations for courage and decision making. I had lived through the horrible crucible of combat, and I knew myself. I had walked through the valley of death on a daily basis for almost ten months and knew that life was an inescapable end to life. I agreed with Shakespeare's Julius Caesar:

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant taste of death but once.

Years later one of my sergeants wrote to me to say that I was the bravest and most compassionate commander he had ever seen. This was high praise from a man who had been recommended for a Congressional Medal of Honor and who had risen through the ranks from private to colonel. He even knew I had cried like a baby after Chaplain Graef's memorial service!

After New Years we continued our attack northward. The Germans fought tenaciously although they must have realized that the offensive into the Ardennes had failed miserably. However, they had to hold the south flank of the bulge in order to extricate their forces. The fighting was methodical, slow and deadly. Our casualties continued to mount and so did theirs. We recaptured Wiltz, Wilwerwiltz, and several other towns. Finally, on the 26th of January we received orders to attack Pinsche. In pure military terms, once Pinsche fell the main line of resistance which existed at the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge would be restored and the battle would be ended.

As we prepared for the battle to recapture Pinsche I encountered one of the vignettes that sticks most vividly in my mind. Kentucky and I were on reconnaissance, and I wanted to get from one of our battalion CPs to another. This meant across the front drive over terrain which had not necessarily been traversed by either battalion. An element of risk certainly existed so we proceeded very, very carefully along the road between what I thought was the location of the two battalion CPs. Suddenly, we rounded a bend in the road, and I froze. My immediate reaction was that we were dead because directly in front of me was a German 88. This was an all-purpose cannon which the Germans used for ground, air, or anti-tank fire. The cannon had been emplaced in the usual German manner which meant that the muzzle of the gun was only a foot or less above the ground and it covered the road. Anyone who turned the bend in the road in a vehicle would receive almost point-blank fire. Death was almost a certainty.

As I stared at the gun, I suddenly realized that the crew was dead and draped over the gun in various ludicrous poses. One man was draped over the barrel, another man still appeared to be looking through the sight, and another man had fallen beside the pile of shells which the gun had been firing. As I breathed a sigh of relief, a poster on a building on the opposite side of the road from the gun caught my eye. A beautiful girl in the Varga fashion (a famous artist of the day) stared at me. She held a can of coca cola in her hand and the sign carried the bold inscription, "Buvez Coca Cola" (Drink Coca Cola). Whenever I think of this particular vignette I am struck by the incongruousness and bizarre setting.

We had a stroke of luck in our attack on Pinsche. We achieved total surprise and captured many Germans still asleep in their foxholes. We captured the town easily but there were still a lot of

German units in the area trying to return to escape our net. Colonel Fisher proceeded with a great deal of care and paid a great deal of attention to our flanks. That evening, I learned a big lesson about how the necessity to accept responsibility for one's own decisions contributes to the degree of risk one is willing to accept. The lesson developed rather mundanely.

During the attack to capture Pinsche, General Sommers visited our command post. Presumably he meant to give us inspiration and moral support. He was not in command of the operation. Colonel Fisher commanded the operation and General Sommers was simply an observer. If anything went wrong, therefore, Colonel Fisher bore the responsibility and not the General. Thus, devoid of responsibility, General Sommers kept exhorting Fisher to push forward rapidly. Colonel Fisher kept explaining, very patiently, that he would move as fast as the situation permitted and that he wanted to avoid a flank attack by German units trying to escape to the east. The General, on the other hand, kept saying things like, "The hell with the flanks—the Krauts can't hurt you. They're trying to escape." This kind of conversation in several different forms kept up all evening and into the early morning hours. Finally, at about 0300 in the morning of the 27th, General McBride called and wanted to speak to General Sommers. I gave the phone to General Sommers and could hear General McBride say something like, "Sommers you're in command of Combat Team 317 (the 317th plus its attachments). Get the operation over with and rejoin the division as quickly as possible." General Sommers replaced the phone and I saw him blanch. You could literally see his thought processes: he now had the responsibility. If anything went wrong, he shouldered the blame. His career was at risk. *His flanks were exposed!* He picked up the phone again, range the division G-3 and shouted a sentence which I will never forget, "Elegar, what the hell are you doing about **MY FLANKS!**"

The following day, 28 January 1945, the mopping up operation ended. The 17th Airborne Division relieved the 317th Infantry. CT 317 returned to the command of Colonel Fisher, and we moved by truck to an assembly area around the town of Dillingen, near Echternach, and began preparations for an assault on the West Wall. The Battle of the Bulge had ended and the 317th had suffered another 1500 casualties including about 300 KIA. I remembered a training session at Camp Forrest given by Ira Miller. When asked a question about risks he had answered, prophetically as it turned out, "Well somebody's going to get hurt."

Chapter 11

The War Years

The Race to the Rhine River

During the first week of February 1945 the 317th Infantry did not engage in combat. We rested and refitted from the severe battles around the Moselle and the Battle of the Bulge. Our severe casualties made us a regiment of replacements. The camaraderie built up during the training at Camp Forrest, Camp Phillips, the Tennessee Maneuvers, and the desert had now disappeared. Most of our men had arrived in the middle of the night. They had been met by a stranger who announced himself as their squad leader and who had then promptly thrust them into a foxhole. In many cases, they did not see their platoon leader for several days and many of them did not know either their company commander or battalion commander. Few, if any, knew that Colonel Fisher commanded the regiment. We set about rebuilding the old spirit of camaraderie as well as educating them about the regimental accomplishments. Equally importantly, we trained them to survive on the battlefield.

The 80th received orders to cross the Sauer River on 6 February and attack into Germany. The 318th and 319th crossed the river as assault elements. The 317th remained in division reserve. Unfortunately, the river had a swift current and the assault units suffered severe casualties. The terrain on the opposite side rose almost vertically from the river edge and the German gunners could shoot down on the crossing troops. Fortunately, the terrain was not heavily fortified because, I suppose, the German planners of the West Wall thought no one would be crazy enough to assault a sheer cliff. They failed to reckon that one day General Patton would command the assaulting troops and his trademark was a surprise. This was exactly the kind of terrain to give him the element of surprise.

Once on the other side of the river, assault units moved rapidly. The German defenders surrendered or retreated. By the second day of the crossing, the 317th received orders to cross the river at Dillingen where the engineers had built a bridge. The regiment moved to the vicinity of Bollendorf, still in reserve, and prepared to attack towards the east. The movement proceeded routinely except for some exceptionally heavy artillery fire on the regimental CP and a particularly sad and grisly incident in Bollendorf.

During the initial crossing the German possession of the heights on the east bank gave them excellent observation into most of the positions held by the 317th. We had actually been ordered to move into forward assembly areas and though we tried to camouflage ourselves we could not achieve total success. Consequently, the Germans subjected us to intense artillery fire, and we suffered heavy casualties. In particular, they had spotted the area in which we had located the regimental CP and maintained heavy fire on us for three days, almost without cessation. Though the regimental CP was in the basement of a house. In most cases, the basements of the houses in this area amounted to bomb shelters because the area had served as an invasion route for both the French and the Germans at least since the Napoleonic Era. We felt rather safe in the basement, but the ordeal was far from pleasant, and we welcomed the order to cross the river. Our new assembly

area was in Bollendorf a few miles inside Germany. It had taken seven months of intense fighting and thousands of casualties, but we now stood on German soil. We 317th veterans (and there weren't many of us left) knew that heavy fighting still remained ahead of us. However, we knew for certainty that we would win the war in Europe. The big question for the remaining veterans: can we beat the odds?

Captain Pheiffer chose a large house on the outskirts of Bollendorf as our CP. The men began to set up the facilities to control the regiments. In the process, a small detail led by the communications officer began to set up the CP sign by the side of road. The sign consisted of a piece of cloth with a blue "CP 317" printed on it. On either end of the cloth a sleeve held an iron rod which could be driven into the ground to anchor the sign. One of the enlisted men struck one of the spikes with a sledgehammer and a tremendous explosion took place. The communications officer, who held the rod, lost an arm, an eye, and suffered body wounds. The enlisted man wielding the sledgehammer and another man standing beside him died instantly. The man with the hammer was blown in half. The upper half of his body disintegrated into a puff of red smoke while the lower half was blown about twenty feet off the road and came to rest on a bush. It lay there steaming in the cold February air.

I had been sitting on the second floor, eating a K-ration, and saw the entire incident. The windows in the house on the side towards the road shattered and sprayed me with fragments of glass. None of the cuts I received were of any consequence but once again the Germans had drawn my blood. The other members of the headquarters immediately ran for shelter, thinking that we were under shell fire.

The twin brother of the man who had been blown in half had been on the other side of the house. When he came forward and learned what had happened to his brother, he went berserk. Several men seized him to keep him under control until an aid man came to give him a sedative.

When I saw what happened, I grabbed a tarpaulin and dashed across the road to cover the still steaming body. Though other mines might be in the area, I believed the sight of the body was so unnerving to the GIs that it had to be covered until the burial details could collect it. The war, as always, had to continue. Fortunately, we found no other mines in the area, but this gruesome incident proved that death never went into reserve. The business of war was killing and both we and the Germans had become experts.

That evening we received orders to join the advance. The next three weeks became a jumble of attacks and counterattacks. Only once incident sticks in my mind.

As the explosion at the CP demonstrated, the Germans tried all their tricks to hold up our advance. One of their most effective and insidious ploys was the mine. They put mines everywhere and used all sorts of tricks to lull us into a sense of security. For instance, they would blow up a bridge and mine the fording site. This tactic served them well. It involved burying several mines deep enough that several vehicles had to pass over the mines to compact the earth to the degree that

a vehicle could exert enough pressure to detonate the mine. They used this precise tactic outside of Bollendorf.

The CP moved out of Bollendorf headed for our new location. We had to ford a creek where the Germans had blown a bridge. Several jeeps, including mine, cleared the ford when a terrible explosion rocked the area. The jeep behind me had detonated a mine, actually several mines connected together, and had been blown into the air killing both of the occupants. Both men died instantly, and their badly mangled bodies fell onto the bank of the stream. Years later, I learned that the dead men were our aid men. The column stopped; the engineers came forward, but there were no other mines. In some ways, mine warfare was more nerve wracking than artillery and small arms fire. At least with artillery we could judge where it was coming from and where it was going to land and with small arms fire we could tell where it had originated and could fire back. The mine gave no warning; it simply killed.

We had now entered the border region between Germany and Luxembourg and the full extent of the German preoccupation with things military struck home. The road system was atrocious. The roads were narrow, poorly maintained, and clearly designed to impede an attacker. We had noticed the same thing on the Luxembourg side, and I came to the conclusion that this deliberate policy of neglect was part of the national strategy for the defense of the country. The nations of Europe, clearly, suffered from a huge paranoia about each other's intentions.

The regiment moved in the direction of Freilinghof-Nusbaum. Our objective was Nusbaum. By this time, the German Army showed the effects of the ill-conceived Ardennes Offensive, and they were trying to get back to suitable defensive positions along the Rhein. Rear guards put up a determined resistance and kept inflicting casualties upon us.

Our casualty rates had fallen since I had become regimental S-3 and Colonel Fisher was kind enough to tell me that this was because of my excellent planning and the degree to which I coordinated the actions of all of our units. His praise pleased me because I really tried to utilize every weapon in our arsenal. To the best of my ability, I had every available weapon firing during an attack. As a mathematician I knew that for every "x" round of ammunition fired at the Germans there would be "y" German casualties. I didn't know the precise ratio, but I did know that firepower produced casualties. In addition to utilizing our weapons, I made sure that I made a careful reconnaissance before each attack. As I noted earlier, I frequently used an artillery spotter plane to assist in this reconnaissance despite the fact that such planes were sitting ducks to German anti-aircraft guns. All of these measures were simply applications of the principles of war: mass, movement, offensive, objective, surprise, security, simplicity, cooperation and economy of force. Of course, much of the credit must go to Colonel Fisher. I simply made plans; he had to approve them and bear responsibility for them. He told me after the war ended when he finally got me promoted to Lieutenant Colonel that we were an excellent team. We remained friends until his death in the 1980s.

We captured Nusbaum. A few days later we liberated Bollendorf and Mettendorf and stopped our forward advance. Sometime around the 7th or 8th of March we received orders to relieve

elements of the 94th Division in the vicinity of Greimerath, in the Saar-Palatinate Region of Germany. General Patton planned to attack on the 13th of March and go straight to the Rhine River.

Colonel Fisher ordered me to contact the 94th Division to coordinate the 317th's taking over a portion of their sector. I had a pleasant surprise to find out that Sam Hays, a West Point classmate, was the coordinator for the 94th. Sam and I were good friends. We frequently received each other's mail and laundry because our names were so similar. After a brief visit I went to the forward regiment to arrange for the transfer on the following day. The transfer placed two divisions where only one had been. Simply put, we placed the mass of our force at the critical point of the impending attack.

The attack into the Saar-Palatinate began at 0400 on the 13th of March 1945. The regimental CP had moved into Oberzerf during the evening, so we became a part of the line of departure. The attack stalled before the assault battalions could capture the high ground east of Oberzerf. Therefore, the entire regiment including the CP sat like sitting ducks and the Germans took full advantage of the situation by shelling us mercilessly.

The CP came under greater danger because of a stupid mistake by the engineer officer whose company supported us. He came into the CP, stood looking out of a window, and allowed the sun to glint off the plastic of his map case. A German tank quickly spotted our location and promptly fired several shells at us. Soon shells of all calibers from tank shells to artillery of several calibers, and huge screaming meemies (a 30-inch rocket with little pinpoint accuracy but accurate enough to hit a town or a given portion of a town) rained down upon Greimerath and the CP.

Colonel Fisher decided to move the CP but left me with a small group to conduct operations until communications could be shifted to the new location. Suddenly, the entire house disintegrated around me (it was only a small peasant homemade of stone). I stood there in the open holding a phone. It might have been like a funny skit dreamed up for a later war movie. However, nothing funny passed through my mind because my little party of perhaps six had all been killed but I remained unscathed. I did, of course, receive bruises about my shoulders and arms from the flying stones and the roofing tiles. I raced to where Kentucky had our jeep and drove to our new CP where I notified the medics of the tragedy.

Despite the change in locations, the CP remained under intense fire as did the entire town of Oberzerf. The artillery fire destroyed communications and we did not know whether our battalions were still trying to move forward or whether they had met such intense resistance that forward progress was impossible. Colonel Fisher was frustrated and feared a German counterattack. I volunteered to try to find our forward units and to try to find out their situation.

During what I hoped was a lull in the shelling, I ran out of the basement in which we had located the new CP and headed for the town square. From there I could get onto the main road leading out of town and towards our assault units. I reached the town square on a dead run and started to turn onto the main road. At that precise moment, a salvo of screaming meemies hit the

town square and buffeted me about like a rag doll. I fell flat on my face, stunned. In a few moments I recovered and dashed into the doorway of a two-story stone house. No sooner had I entered than a shell hit the house and it crashed down around me. Once more, I received no injuries but the bed of an old German woman, obviously bed-ridden, crashed through the ceiling. She was obviously dead at the hands of her own army. Once more I started to run down the main street. About a quarter to half a mile down the road I found a radio jeep of one of the assault battalions. He had taken refuge from the intense fire in a narrow street against a building. He had, of course, lost communication with the regimental radio but at least he knew, or thought he knew, where his own CP was located. Finally, following his directions, I found it about a quarter of a mile further on down the road in one of the houses almost on the outskirts of the village. The battalion had lost contact with its forward companies and had sent runners out to locate them and to find out why the attack had stalled. The battalion commander, I believe it was Black, and his staff seemed to know less about the situation than I did and were not of a mind to leave the relative safety of their basement to try educating themselves.

I did not like Colonel Black because, in my opinion, he did not know what he was doing. In this situation, I became rather angry and let him know of my anger and that I intended to report what I felt was a dereliction of duty to Colonel Fisher. I left the CP and ran to the forward edge of the town where, after taking cover behind a small hillock, I found the forward elements of the battalion through my field glasses. The companies had been unable to advance because of the heavy fire from the Germans and had dug in for the day. By moving several hundred yards to my right I also saw the lead companies of the other assault battalion and determined that they, too, could not move and had dug in for the day. The Germans gave no indications of launching a counterattack. I had accomplished my mission and now had to run back through the German artillery fire. Naturally, I went at a dead run and finally reached the regimental CP. However, I had a sore back because of the battering I had taken when the screaming meemies had thrown me like a limp rag doll around the town square. The injuries I suffered that day began the back problem that has bothered me, intermittently, to this day.

As daylight disappeared, we set about making plans to resume the attack on the following morning. The command post personnel remained in an agitated state because the artillery barrages had been the most intense we had experienced thus far. If someone moved a chair across the floor or made any unusual noise, we froze in anticipation of more incoming fire. In the early morning hours, an amazing thing happened.

A few hours after midnight, we suddenly experienced an eerie silence. The artillery, mortar, and screaming meemies fire ceased abruptly. The silence was so intense that I felt an ache in my neck as I strained to hear any hint of what might occur. Suddenly, the entire town erupted, the only word for it, in an intense burst of artillery, mortar, and screaming meemies fire. The barrage lasted for what seemed to be several hours but probably was less than that. As suddenly as it had started, the barrage stopped. The eerie silence returned. You could sense that the entire regiment craned its collective neck to hear anything which might tell us what was going to happen next. Nothing did.

The next morning the forward companies resumed their attack and found that the German resistance had evaporated. The Germans had obviously decided to retreat across the Rhine and had fired off their ammunition so that it would not fall into our hands. They had apparently fired it all in the barrage which had lasted several hours. As we moved forward, we encountered, naturally, the rear guards but they had no stomach for prolonged resistance. As soon as they engaged us and we deployed, they retreated to the next defensive position—classic rear-guard tactics. Each time, of course, our advance slowed and we were forced to deploy and advance across country. Finally, Colonel Fisher ordered the regiment onto the road and to advance as rapidly as possible. He sent me to the forward battalion to ensure that his orders were understood, and the Black would implement those orders vigorously. For once, Black seemed to be doing his job well and I found him with some of the forward elements. Fortunately, he had a communications team following him with a roll of wire and a field phone. I contacted Colonel Fisher and informed him that we seemed to have the situation under control.

A few minutes after I had called Colonel Fisher we came under fire from several German machine guns. We took cover in a ditch along the road until the machine guns could be located. The resulting fire fight raged around us. In the middle of the firing the field phone rang. It was General McBride at the 317th CP and he wanted to talk to me. I tried to explain that we had been halted, momentarily, by the German rear guard and that machine gun fire was the primary problem.

General McBride became furious and began to shout that the entire front had collapsed, and the Germans were in full retreat. This was a classic case of a commander in the rear not realizing what was happening at the front. Maybe the front had collapsed but certainly not in front of me. Men were being killed and wounded around me and we simply could not march down the road in a column of twos.

Of course, we finally drove the guns away. They, after all, had orders to fight a rear-guard action which meant that they inflicted as many casualties as they could, forced us into deploying, and then the rear guard could retreat. After the advance resumed, I returned to the CP to devise a plan to keep the pursuit going night and day. The German rear guard was finding it increasingly difficult to deal with our advance and the pace of that advance quickened at a faster pace than the Germans could retreat and establish new rear guard positions. The German army in front of us bordered on a state of panic. By the following morning our advance units were reporting rapidly decreasing resistance or no resistance at all.

Combat Team 317 received orders to follow the 10th Armored Division's Task Force Cherry. We had enough trucks to move two battalions at a time. Therefore, at any given time our plan called for one battalion to be resting, one battalion to be marching on foot, and one battalion to be supporting TF Cherry. We kept rotating the battalions with the trucks we had and managed to keep the pursuit going for several days although all of us were soon exhausted. I don't think I slept for at least three days. Years later I happened to serve with Cherry in the Pentagon, but he was suffering from terminal cancer and died a young man.

We followed TF Cherry across the Palatinate region. The pursuit continued at high speed and our mission was to mop up any resistance that Cherry bypassed. German communications were totally disrupted, and the retreat rapidly turned into a rout. The action slowed when we finally met the rear of the retreating Fifteenth German Army. Now we saw scenes reminiscent of the carnage around Argentan. Here, near Bad Durkheim, the slaughter was, it seemed, worse. First, however, there was a rather amusing incident at Kaiserslautern which revealed an insight into the German character at this time in their history.

TF Cherry had passed through Kaiserslautern. We entered the town to mop up whatever resistance remained. There was none because the remaining Germans simply threw away their weapons and surrendered. I was with the advance party which was preceded by the recon platoon. When I drove into the town square, I found Sergeant Rupert of the Recon Platoon (he was one of the few remaining original members who had not been killed, wounded, or captured). Rupert had with him a man whom he thought was at least a Field Marshal. The man was absolutely resplendent in his multi-colored uniform. His chest was covered with ribbons, and he wore a cap we normally associated with general officers. However, the man seemed to lack the arrogance of a high ranking general and seemed, instead, to be a bit sheepish in his attitude. After I questioned him for a few moments in German, he told me, "*Ich bin Bahnhofmeister*". He was the railroad station master. A crestfallen and disappointed Rupert let his prize go free. Hitler, of course, used fancy uniforms and all sorts of medal to keep the loyalty of those he appointed. Small cogs in a huge suppressive machine, these people were given a sense of power and prestige which they exercised with a single-minded ruthlessness. Now their world had crashed around them and the perks they had meant nothing. Indeed, in some cases they became pariahs in their own community.

Kaiserslautern is at the western end of a long gorge through a densely forested and mountainous region which extends for several miles eastward to the city of Bad Durkheim. Only one east-west road traverses the gorge. The sides of the gorge rise steeply from the road which in some places is almost cliff-like in character. Into this gorge, the fifteenth German Army poured in order to reach Bad Durkheim and the rather extensive road net which led to the Rhine and the several bridges leading across it. Disaster struck before they could execute their plan of retreat.

The Air Force bombed Bad Durkheim. The debris from the demolished houses and the cratered roads created a huge obstacle and effectively prevented the German Army from exiting the gorge. The Fifteenth German Army had nowhere to move its vehicles laterally and the pressure of the units moving in from the rear simply clogged the road even more. It seemed to me that twenty miles of men, horse, wagons, trucks, and artillery were trapped in a huge jar into which an immovable cork had been plugged. They couldn't get out through the sides, and they couldn't dislodge the cork.

The slaughter was awesome and, in some ways, worse than Argentan. Ammunition in the burning vehicles exploded. The cries of the wounded men and horses filled the air. Chunks of bodies littered the area and survivors begged to be captured and taken to places of safety. The German Army thought only of escape and offered no resistance. The 317th advanced elements with

whom I rode had no time to collect prisoners and that process was left to the reserve elements when they moved forward.

I suppose the worst part of this Dantean Inferno was the change in myself. Whereas at Argentan I felt some pity for the Germans, here at the Kaiserslautern-Bad Durkheim rout I felt exultation. They were the enemy who had killed or wounded all my friends. To hell with them, they deserved this disaster.

The next few days are impossible for me to sort out properly because I did not keep a diary. German resistance simply collapsed and the 317th pushed the pursuit to the limit of its endurance. We hardly slept except in catnaps. Casualties dropped, morale increased, and we rejoiced when the news reached us that the Remagen Bridge across the Rhine had been captured in usable condition. Unfortunately, the 317th could not use the bridge and we knew we would have to cross the Rhine in assault boats. By 25 March 1945 we received warning orders to be prepared to cross the Rhine River in the vicinity of Mainz. The assault would be supported by US Navy units equipped with landing craft.

In anticipation of the crossing, Kentucky and I drove to Mainz. By this time, it was clear that no German units remained west of the Rhine. What remained of the German Army was setting up a defense of the east bank although stragglers and snipers still presented a threat on the west bank. I had received information that elements of the 3rd Cavalry had established outposts along the west bank of the Rhine in the vicinity of Mainz. Though there was a big risk, I decided on reconnaissance.

Kentucky and I drove into Mainz on the afternoon of the 25th and drove through the great square past the beautiful cathedral. The city was absolutely silent. In an eerie drive through the city, we neither saw nor heard any inhabitants and, fortunately, encountered no resistance. My guess is that Kentucky and I were the first American soldiers in this part of the city because we saw nothing of the 3rd Cavalry. Kentucky parked his jeep about a half mile from the Rhine. I left him and cautiously made my way through the rubble to a partially destroyed apartment building which stood on the bank of the river and from which I could observe the east bank. I followed the book on how to observe the outside of a building by standing several feet away from the windows. On my left I saw an island designated on my map as St. Peter Aue. As I surveyed the riverbanks with my field glasses, I saw some German civilians come down to the river, probably to get some water. In what appeared to me to be a mindless act of barbarism the German soldiers on the east bank shot their own citizens on the west bank. This revealing incident had the merit of demonstrating to my satisfaction that the defenders were jittery and poorly trained. I guessed that they were home defense troops who had no prior combat experience.

My reconnaissance convinced me that the best place to cross the river was between St. Peter's Aue and the confluence of the Rhine and Main Rivers to the south. The Rhine at this point appeared to be about a mile wide with a strong current that would have made crossing in engineer assault boats a virtual impossibility. I could understand why the Navy had to assist us in the crossing and why the landing craft had to be used. I also became convinced that a strong artillery

barrage might create enough problems for what I perceived to be untrained German defense forces that the crossing would be easier than it might appear at first glance. I returned to the 317th CP and briefed Colonel Fisher on my estimate of the situation. He, in turn, passed my estimate on to General McBride. The next day we received orders to proceed to Mainz and to cross the Rhine River at 0100 hours on 28 March 1945 (I may be a bit fuzzy about dates here, but the sequence of the operation is correct).

When we received the division operations order, I found to my intense horror that the standard artillery barrage had been omitted in order to achieve “surprise”. I called Colonel Elegar, the division G-3, to plead for the barrage. I told him of my reconnaissance, my impressions of the caliber of the defending Germans, and the fact that we would have a full moon. There was, I reiterated, no way we could set out to cross the Rhine without being detected. We simply could not achieve a surprise. At best an artillery barrage would cause the defenders to run, at worst it would destroy some of their machine guns and artillery. Colonel Elegar was sympathetic but General McBride would not change his mind.

An integral part of the regimental plan was the dispatch of a platoon to seize St. Peter’s Aue during the late evening of 27 March. We had received information that several anti-aircraft guns were located on the island. If operational, they could deliver devastating enfilade fire on the assault wave and cause the entire operation to fail. The platoon seized the island without incident and reported finding abandoned anti-aircraft revetments but no guns. Though the assault on the island went smoothly and without casualties, my worst fears about the absence of an artillery barrage came true.

Before we could get the landing craft into the several huge drydocks which lined the east bank of the Rhine, the German artillery discovered our operation and zeroed in on the launching site. In fact, the first casualties of the crossing were a navy lieutenant and several of his men as they prepared to launch the landing craft. His death occurred as I arrived at the crossing site to discuss the crossing with Lieutenant Colonel Sam Williams who now commanded the 2nd Battalion. Williams was extremely shaken by the shelling and the losses he suffered. He could not understand why our artillery was not firing. It was small solace to him that General McBride wanted to “surprise” the Germans. After an hour or so, I returned to the regimental CP to report the situation to Colonel Fisher who then decided to go down to the 2nd Battalion CP and keep abreast of the assault from that location.

The assault battalions finally began their movement across the Rhine. German artillery and small arms fire increased in intensity. The moonlight made our landing craft sitting ducks and, of course, the lack of our artillery gave the Germans an opportunity for amounted to a turkey shoot. I was particularly saddened when I received word that Lieutenant Frank had been killed. He had been a member of the platoon I had commanded when I first reported to the 80th and joined “G” Company in 1942. He had quickly impressed me with his ability, and I promoted him above the other men in my platoon, so he quickly rose to the rank of staff sergeant. He had been wounded during the Battle of the Bulge and had returned to the regiment a short time before the

breakthrough at Greimerath. As a result of his outstanding service, he had received a battlefield promotion to lieutenant and now commanded the platoon which I had first commanded. This death seemed to me to be a direct result of the stupid decision not to use an artillery barrage. Had General McBride or any of his staff taken the trouble to make the kind of reconnaissance I had made of the crossing site, they would have realized that our troops would become sitting ducks, particularly since there was a full moon. I found it extremely difficult to have any respect for General McBride as a division commander.

The case for the artillery barrage strengthened, in my view, when we landed on the east bank of the Rhine. The battle on the east bank lasted no more than fifteen or twenty minutes and then the Germans began to surrender in mass, proving in my mind that they had little previous combat experience. By the time the second wave, which included the regimental CP landed, all resistance had ceased and the road to Wiesbaden was clear. We suffered somewhere between 150 to 300 casualties that evening, many during the actual crossing when the most intense German fire fell upon us. Some of these men drowned in the Rhine when the landing craft received direct hits and sank. No doubt some of these bodies were never recovered and the men are still carried as missing in action. To this day, I remain convinced that many of these losses could have been prevented had we launched our usual pre-attack artillery barrage.

Once we landed, the capture of Wiesbaden gave us no difficulty. In fact, the word soon spread throughout the regiment that we had liberated a champagne factory located on the outskirts of the town. In what followed, every GI who could get near the factory liberated several bottles of champagne for his own reserve. It seemed, although it is probably apocryphal, the fighting for the next several days was marked by a devil-may-care abandonment which proved the wisdom of the British policy of giving their soldiers grog before a battle.

Unbeknownst to me, Kentucky appropriated a case of bubbly for me and one for himself and had them sent to the regimental supply trains. He never told me what he had done, but he disappeared from time to time to visit a friend in supply. I did not find out about my case of champagne until I returned from R&R in December 1945 and was assigned to Third Army Headquarters. The case of champagne arrived as part of my personal belongings which had been placed in storage for me. Later, your mother and I used this case of champagne to serve the guests at our wedding in 1947. It must be considered as a miracle that this particular case of champagne survived two transfers of unit before, I joined the 10th Constabulary Squadron in Kitzingen where your mother and I met in 1946.

The war at this point became extremely confusing. The German Army began to disintegrate rapidly. Communication between their units deteriorated and organized resistance became almost an impossibility. This is not to say that they did not resist because they did. However, the resistance came from isolated German units who often put up fierce and fanatical resistance to our advance. Nevertheless, the backbone of the German Army broke, and the month of April became a pursuit operation. As with other pursuits we pushed ourselves to the limit of our endurance. We slept very little and never for very long. We moved constantly and pursued the disorganized Germans

relentlessly. In return for our exhaustion our casualty rates decreased except on the few occasions when we fought pitched battles with large German formation still in control of some of the larger cities.

One thing became absolutely clear to us. We had won the war, and the real question was when the German Army would surrender. We knew, of course, that Hitler had issued orders to fight to the death. For veterans like myself, the question really became one of when the laws of probability would catch up with us. So far as I could tell, only about half a dozen of the original group of officers remained in the regiment and a couple of them were chaplains or medics. Only I and Paul Roberts had actually been battlefield commanders. He and I discussed this situation and wondered whether we would see the end of the war or whether a particular bullet would have our number on it.

In the meantime, as always, the war continued. Paul and I did our duty.

Chapter 12

The War Years

Concentration Camps and War's End

After we crossed the Rhine, the war turned into a series of road marches punctuated by many relatively short but deadly battles. The first of these battles was for Kassel, a city of perhaps a hundred thousand people in 1945.

The morning after we captured Wiesbaden, we received orders to move north on the autobahn out of Frankfurt. In one of the more amazing actions of the war, we were on the autobahn with at least two other divisions. All of us moved north at about 30 mph, the normal speed for a large convoy. Note, however, that the front of the Third Army was only as wide as the autobahn! This violated every military dictum taught in the staff colleges about security, flanks, and simple good sense. However, it worked!

As this imposing force, preceded by armored cavalry regiments, raced northward we occasionally saw small units of Germans. In turn, when these units saw us, they offered no resistance. They simply shrugged and threw their weapons away and evaporated into the countryside. We made no attempt to capture them because that would have slowed the advance which continued at a rapid pace. That evening, we received orders to attack and capture the city of Kassel. In preparation for that assault, the 317th went into assembly areas south of the city and the 318th went into positions to our left. The 319th remained in division reserve.

The fight lasted for about a week. The strangest part of the fighting was a Phoenix-like regeneration of the tanks opposing us. No sooner had we knocked out several tanks than others would appear to take their place. We solved the mystery several days later when the city finally surrendered. The Germans had built an underground factory in the hills surrounding Kassel and had established a tank school at Eisenach, about fifty miles east of Kassel. The tank crew came from the school and picked up tanks off the assembly line and moved up to the front to join in the defense. The effect was to create a seemingly endless supply of tanks.

When the city finally surrendered, several thousand Germans poured out of underground bunkers and tunnels where they had taken refuge. The units were a motley hodge-podge of stragglers, bonafide units, and whatever the local commander could throw together for the defense. However, they fought bravely and the 317th continued to suffer casualties at a time when logic told us the German Army should surrender. In hindsight, we know that Hitler bordered on insanity during this period and placed his hopes on mysterious "secret weapons" which never materialized.

On the last day of the battle, I had a grim experience. Kentucky and I were on reconnaissance to get our attack order ready for the next day when I passed a group of people standing on the patio entrance to a large building. The group consisted of both men and women dressed in black and white striped clothing which we now associate with concentration camp members. I stopped my jeep to investigate and mounted the steps with my tommy gun at the ready. At the top of the steps, I

saw what appeared to be a German officer dressed in an immaculate black uniform, often worn by the SS. He offered no resistance, appeared unarmed, but he sweated profusely despite the fact that in late March it is cold in Germany. He tried to shake hands, but I refused.

I walked into the building and the stench of death hit me with unexpected force. The building contained several rooms and each of them had tiers of wooden bunks along the walls. The tiers were four or five bunks high and most of them had an emaciated human being in them. These starving people were in every stage of dead, dying, and some were even beginning to decay. Most of those still alive could barely sit on the edge of their bunks. A few shuffled around on spindly legs whose muscles had seemingly wasted away to nothingness. Some of them were naked and totally disoriented. Others had defecated or urinated onto the filthy floor. A few who still remained healthy or were clearly newcomers to the facility showed the deep emotion of being freed.

I regret to say that I accepted this sight without emotion. It merely reminded me that this war knew no civility and daily, produced new examples of man's cruelty. However, I did feel anger and loathing towards the German who seemed to be in charge. I now realize that he was an SS official. As I walked out the door, I met perhaps a dozen or so able-bodied men who were obviously newcomers. They had not been in the facility long enough to have suffered the full effects of the starvation and deprivation so clearly evident in the other inmates.

As I walked out of the building, the German clicked his heels, bowed and offered to shake my hand. I was really on the verge of executing him on the spot because of the disgust I felt for him. Instead, I made a sign to the able-bodied men to indicate that they could have him. Then I turned on my heels and went to my jeep without looking back. I could hear commotion behind me and realized that I had accomplished my purpose. The able-bodied inmates were in the process of beating this bastard to death and I applauded their action. I called the regimental CP and told Major Carey, the regimental surgeon, of the medical problem I had just uncovered. Major Carey later told me that there were about three or four hundred people in the building, many of them dead or incapable of surviving through the day.

I had just liberated the first concentration camp encountered by the 317th Infantry. It was not to be the last. Though I had acted as both judge and jury for the SS man, I felt no remorse over having caused his death. If I had to do the act all over again knowing what I now know, I think I might have shot him as I had originally intended.

After the fall of Kassel, CT 317 turned eastward and moved along the general line Gotha-Erfurt. Nothing of consequence occurred at Gotha except for the capture of an airfield with several Messerschmidts on it. We also observed a fight between several Messerschmidts and some P-47s. As I observed the fight through my field glasses one of the Messerschmidts was shot down and the pilot seemed to fall out of the cockpit. As he continued to fall through the air, he appeared as a small black dot, but the saving parachute never opened, and he plunged into the ground. We learned later from one of our reconnaissance units that they found the dead pilot in a plowed field. His body had plunged from a height of perhaps two miles and had hit the earth with such force that it made a hole about three feet deep.

Erfurt presented another defensive obstacle. A German general had gathered a motley crew of miscellaneous units into some sort of a defensive force complete with some artillery. By now I had learned that firepower saved the lives of our soldiers, so we called for a TOT (time on target) of 17 battalions of artillery. This amounted to about 200 cannons which fired in a sequencing order that ensured that all the shells would explode over the target at the same instant. The effect was so overwhelming at the point we had chosen for the TOT that we easily breached the German defensive position, and the Germans surrendered the city. We had relatively few casualties in this assault and simply convinced me, once again, of the wisdom of using our firepower to save lives. The 317th advanced towards Weimar, the 318th advanced south of us and on a parallel route. The 319th remained in division reserve.

We resumed our attack eastward. Our next objective, Weimar, had once been the capital of Germany during the short-lived Weimar Republic. Before we reached Weimar, however, we received news that the 318th had liberated a concentration camp called Ohrdruf. Unfortunately, the 318th arrived too late because the Germans executed the inmates before they could be liberated. This camp, unlike the one I had liberated, was an extermination camp. The 318th found huge piles of partially burnt bodies as well as the standard fare: lamp shades made from tattooed skin from inmates who probably had been killed because someone admired the tattooing and wanted a lamp shade made from it.

We reached Weimar on 12 April 1945. We knew that some sort of camp existed in the vicinity and as regimental S-3 I had issued orders to investigate with patrols. That afternoon a patrol led by Sergeant Dick Rennie of "A" Company of the 317th was sent out from the 1st Battalion and "liberated" Buchenwald. Actually, the camp had liberated itself the day before although they had also been visited, briefly, by a patrol from the 6th Armored Division to our north. Nevertheless, the first attempt to ascertain the extent of the problem came from the patrol led by Sergeant Rennie. We saw, of course, acres of corpses and the usual despicable acts of cruelty. However, we were pursuing the German Army and had no time to investigate the true conditions at Buchenwald. The support and medical units following us came in to provide the care needed to try to rescue the unfortunate inmates of this infamous camp. We, on the other, hand left early that morning and continued our pursuit of the fleeing German Army.

Unfortunately, during the evening we received word that President Roosevelt died the previous day from a massive stroke. To most of us this was sad news of the worst sort. This great President had led the country since 1932. His strength and leadership saved us from anarchy and civil war during the Great Depression. In addition, his foresight and courage in pushing for the rebuilding and revitalization of our armed forces played a major role in the victory which we knew was only a few weeks away.

After the war I revisited Buchenwald as aide-de-camp to the 7th Army Commander and saw the full extent of the horrors perpetrated on the inmates. I saw soap made from human body oils, gloves made from the skin of inmates, lamp shades made from tattooed portions of human skin, and pictures of baskets of heads. Finally, I saw a human head which had been neatly mounted in a glass

box. As one looked at one side of the box one saw the profile of the head; the view from the reverse side of the box showed all of the cavities of the human head because the head had been neatly sawn in two. Later when I visited the Nürnberg Trials I saw this severed head in the glass box displayed as evidence of the atrocities committed by the Germans who ran the concentration camps.

The advance continued toward Jena, the scene of one of Napoleon's great victories. I entered the city with a portion of the I&R Platoon because I wanted to speed up the advance of the regiment through the city so that we could quickly resume the advance the following morning. The city teemed with displaced persons and some inmates from nearby camps who still retained their health and had the strength to walk.

As I entered the town square of Jena I could see a riot in progress. A large group of displaced persons were looting food stores and breaking into other shops to take anything they could wear or eat. The few German policemen who had tried to stop the riot were being beaten mercilessly and, no doubt, some of them had already been killed by the maddened mob. I had nothing against this kind of activity and even saw it as sort of justice in the raw. However, this mob clogged the roads and threatened to prevent our freedom of action. There was an easy way to stop all of this, and I did it. I simply began to fire my tommy gun over the head of the rioting mob. As the bullets began to strike the walls on the opposite side of the center, the mob quickly dispersed. No one was hurt, except of course the policemen who had been beaten. We could now continue our advance through the city provided nothing else occurred to block the roads.

As I continued my reconnaissance, I came upon a warehouse full of used clothing. A crowd of displaced persons, some dressed in concentration camp clothing had broken into the warehouse and were looting. Again, I fired my tommy gun over the head of the crowd which dispersed. However, inside the warehouse some determined women insisted on looting the clothing. I pointed to a sign on the wall which said, "*Wer Plundert wilt erschiessen*" which translates into "whoever plunders will be shot." The women shrugged and continued with the looting frenzy. Finally, I calmed the one who appeared to be a leader and we agreed in our broken German that the women would leave with whatever clothing they were wearing. The imprecision of the language left large loopholes for these sly women and they immediately disrobed and started to put on multiple layers of clothing. The agreement, after all, said that they could take whatever they could wear. There was, I must add, nothing very sexy in seeing perhaps a dozen naked women in front of me. These sad creatures had lost all their sex appeal months ago under the tortures imposed upon them in the camps. Moreover, the situation in which we all found ourselves did not really suggest soft lights, romantic music, and sexually arousing perfume.

Once the problem of the looting had been resolved and that road opened for travel, I continued on towards the eastern edge of Jena. Of course, another problem presented itself. I encountered a huge wine cellar where the overlying building had been destroyed by the bombing. As a result, the kegs of wine were visible to anyone on the streets and a huge crowd of displaced persons and former concentration camp inmates had begun a frenzied drinking bout. The leader I soon found out appeared to be a Frenchman. I asked him to move the crowd and he simply became

defiant. Finally, in an icy sort of way, I informed him “*Je vous tirera après que je comptera jusque trois*” (I will shoot you after I count to three). He gave me a drunken smirk and defied me. The crowd, naturally, realized that some sort of confrontation had taken place and some of them could understand French. Suddenly, a massive silence fell over the scene, and I began to intone numbers in French, “un, deux”, and still nothing happened. In fact, the Frenchmen said to me, “*Je suis votre allié*” (I am your ally). When I finally reached three, I fired two rounds at his feet, missing him by inches. Then I raised the tommy gun and pointed it at his stomach and started to count again. He turned and ran. His actions, duly noted by the crowd, served as the universal warning of an angry man and they all retreated and dispersed. I, after all, had a gun; they did not. The road had been opened and I sent a messenger back to notify Colonel Fisher.

My final impressions of Jena are poignant ones. Kentucky and I had stopped for a few moments (we were now back in the town square) to observe the movement of the regiment through Jena. We found ourselves surrounded by a group of displaced persons who had apparently had enough strength to move away from a concentration camp located nearby. One man stood out from the crowd. He was huge, perhaps, six feet and a half, and appeared to be either a Pole or Russian. He had a long white beard and white hair and looked like a clone of Santa Claus, that is, if Santa Claus were dressed in a black and white striped suit. The man had not eaten, obviously, because he kept saying, over and over again, “*essen, essen, essen*” which is the German verb for to eat. He pleaded so poignantly with his eyes that finally I reached behind me and picked up several K-rations from a box which Kentucky always kept well stocked. I gave the K-rations to Santa Claus and showed him how to open the box and the can of meat and how to mix the powdered beverage. To my amazement this huge bear of a man fell to his knees, grasped my hand and began to kiss it! The food I had given him would sustain him, no doubt, for several days and represented a treasure to be guarded with his life.

My other memory of Jena also involves food but for a hungry German. As Kentucky and I left the town square to follow the regiment we passed through a square on the eastern end of the town. Here, a German artillery unit had been caught and strafed. Dead soldiers and dead horses littered the square. Over one of the horses a man hovered with a knife. He had dressed immaculately in spats and formal clothes. However, he wielded a butcher’s knife and sliced huge steaks from the flank of the horse. The scene seemed totally incongruous. When you think about it, the elements become clear: he probably had not eaten in several days, but he was probably either a doctor or a lawyer and still had to feed his family. The entire German transportation system had broken down and food distribution from the countryside into the city had simply stopped. After work, this individual happened to see the dead horse; he realized that the horses were a source of food; somehow or another procured the knife and proceeded to slice the steaks that would feed his family. As I’ve said several times before, war has a curious logic of its own.

That evening, the regimental CP set up in a town named Gispersleben-Kiliani. Fortunately, our supporting tanks billeted with us as well as one of our battalions. Early in the morning, before first light, a German infantry unit supported by a few tanks blundered into the town. As they moved

through the streets one of the German tanks bumped into one of our tanks whose cannon pointed directly at the turret of the German tank. Fortunately, the American gunner was alert, fired his cannon, destroyed the German tank and set off a general alert. The fight lasted throughout the rest of the night, but the outcome was never in doubt and we either killed or captured most of the Germans. Gispersleben-Kiliani was the last big fire fight in which I participated. I believe it was also the last big fight for the regiment. We had many other small skirmishes but nothing which could be labelled a major fire fight.

Our advance continued eastward and, by now, we were virtually unopposed. A day or so later we were within striking distance of Chemnitz. The autobahn north out of Chemnitz led to Berlin and I feel absolutely certain that had we continued we could have captured Berlin before the Russians. In addition, the way to Dresden was clear. In fact, I had taken Kentucky and we drove down the autobahn to see how far we could go. In a short while we could see the spires of a huge cathedral in what I thought was Dresden. Someone fired at us as we sped down the autobahn, but Kentucky was literally flying and whoever had fired the mortar or grenade missed us by a wide margin. The way to Berlin was open. However, I had nothing to say about either the political or military decision which had been made and we never received orders to continue eastward

Earlier that day, we had encountered a brutal massacre along the autobahn. The German units we were pursuing seemed to adopt a policy of systematically trying to kill all the refugees they met. Many of these people, of course, were still dressed in the striped uniform that immediately identified them as concentration camp inmates. The German units mercilessly machine gunned these people. These unfortunate people travelled the autobahns along the center dividers and formed two large groups of refugees. One group tried to get to their homes in eastern Europe, the other group tried to get to their homes in western Europe. The Germans treated both groups the same. Both groups were machine gunned mercilessly and their bodies filled the center dividers on most of the autobahns along which the Germans were retreating. I thought this to be a particularly senseless act because the war was really over, and the Germans could gain nothing by killing these people. The refugees neither added to nor detracted from the situation of the German military units. In fact, the very act of machine gunning the refugees indicated to me that the German officers in command as well as many of the men in the ranks knew who they had massacred. They knew that Jews had been herded into the extermination camps and they knew that millions of those Jews had gone to the gas chambers. Almost all the autobahns we travelled during the closing days of the war gave evidence of the same kind of massacre.

I have never been a religious individual. My experiences in Sunday School and church as a child had failed to convince me that I had to believe, in faith, everything that the ministers and my parents told me. A lot of the tenets of religion struck me as being self-serving for the clergy. I could not, for instance, see why Christianity was necessarily the best religion and why others had to be considered as heathens. There were, after all, scores of other religions and the truth was that there were probably more heathens than there were Christians. The war added more doubts.

Each side of this conflict called on the same God to help them. Each side did its duty in his name. Each side lost thousands of its best people to the firepower of the other side and both were, presumably, helped by the same God to whom they prayed. Finally, an atheistic state, Russia, in conjunction with a group of Christian states was beating up on a supposedly Christian state, Germany. Now, I was seeing thousands of innocent people being killed for no other reason than they were not Germans. The whole thing made little sense to me and could not stand up logically.

I resolved to question the regimental chaplains on this issue to see if they had an explanation. The bottom line was that they had no explanation for the carnage and the massacres we witnessed on a daily basis. I came away from these meetings with our chaplains with almost no respect for their platitudes. In fact, so far as I could see organized religion and its clergy were self-serving. So far as I could see, one had to adopt one's own religion and that did not involve worshipping a God who permitted such atrocities to occur. My religion, therefore, became simply that I acknowledged that some greater power had created us but whatever that power, it deserved little adoration in the sense that organized religion prescribed. One led one's life as well as one could, and one tried to live by the golden rule which made sense to me. One also adopted some of the commandments which also made sense to me. In the end one would find out if there was a heaven or a hell or nothing at all. I must add, parenthetically, that my experience with one of my brothers-in-law has done nothing to increase my regard for organized religion. I've digressed so let me get back to the main narrative.

A rather amusing incident occurred near Chemnitz. We stopped for the night in a small town named Oberlaimback (which the GIs quickly dubbed O-my-lame-back. The regiment led the division, and we were all conscious of the fact that we also were the lead units of the Third Army except for the normal cavalry scouts to our front. The following morning Kentucky and I drove out to our outposts and then about a half-mile beyond where I took a picture. This picture is in my wartime album labelled to indicate that so far as I knew I was farther east than any other infantryman in the Army.

On the way back from taking this picture I stopped at the outpost to chat with a soldier named Kremposky. He had been in my platoon when I was a second lieutenant. A measure of his will to survive but not of his ability to be promoted was that he was the lead scout of "G" Company and still a private. I asked him how he felt. He asked me if I had seen *The Stars and Stripes* the previous day. When I told him I had, he asked me if I had seen the large arrow that showed the route of advance of the Third Army. When I told him I had, he said, "Well, Major that arrow was goosing me." Kremposky made it through the war, I am happy to say, and I hope that he was promoted to at least corporal although I never knew for sure.

Before we could move out towards Chemnitz, the division received orders to withdraw from what later became East Germany and to move to Nürnberg to relieve the 3rd Division. We backtracked perhaps 75 miles, turned south and moved through Bamberg to Nürnberg. I need not tell you that the orders to give up East Germany grew out of the Yalta agreements between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin. This grievous political mistake spawned the Cold War. We know now that Roosevelt was a dying man at the Yalta Conference and quite possibly believed our own

propaganda about “Uncle Joe”. We also know that Churchill did not trust the Russians, but he could not convince Roosevelt and the mistake was made.

Before we could continue eastward towards Chemnitz we received new orders. We had orders to move to Nürnberg and to relieve the 3rd Division which was now attempting to capture the city.

On the way to Nürnberg we had a chilling encounter with the future. We were perhaps a day’s march away from Nürnberg in what turned out to be a slow march because the Germans destroyed all the autobahn bridges and we had to build detours. As we marched southward, we were suddenly strafed by an aircraft which was new to us. Moreover, it was travelling at a rather remarkable rate of speed. I later learned that it was a Messerschmidt 262, the first operational German jet. Fortunately, it did no damage to our column because the pilot had not properly bore-sighted his guns. He made his first pass which caused us to stop the convoy and dismount to take cover. Then he turned to make a second strafing run when a flight of P-47s jumped him. That’s when we saw the future! The German pilot applied full throttle and made the P-47s appear to stand still!

The implications of this plane were immediately obvious: it signaled the end of the propeller driven plane because they would be out maneuvered and easy targets. The following day we captured several of these aircraft. less their engines which the Germans had dismounted and hauled away. The planes had used the autobahn as a runway and the forest on either side of the autobahn served as hiding places. How fortunate for us that these aircraft did not enter the war until a few weeks before the end. They had no opportunity to influence the air war nor the outcome of the ground war.

Several hours after this strafing we arrived in Nürnberg, and I went ahead to the 3rd Division Headquarters to make arrangements to relieve one of their regiments. My guide turned out to be Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier in the Army at that time. He had just been promoted to 1st Lieutenant and had recently received the Congressional Medal of Honor. His division commander had taken him out of the combat unit and assigned him to division headquarters preparatory to sending him back to Washington to receive his medal from President Truman. The city was relatively safe although as we toured the city sporadic fighting still continued. When the 317th took over from, I believe, the 15th Infantry Regiment we still had to clean out a lot of snipers and die-hards who refused to surrender. Curiously, German civilians had resumed some of their daily routines oblivious, apparently, that small battles still raged throughout the city.

We spent, I believe, the better part of two days cleaning up the city and then received orders to continue south. Ultimately, we reached the Danube River at Braunau with orders to cross into Austria. I remember, at the time, that the Danube was not blue and not beautiful. I suppose the general filthiness of war and the total disregard for all sorts of maintenance had taken its toll. In any case, we fortunately found that the bridge at Braunau had not been blown so we simply continued our road march into Austria with a warning order that we could meet the Russians at any time.

The people of Austria greeted us as liberators. I suppose, by now, they realized that Nazism had destroyed them. Hitler’s policies had resulted in defeat and now intense hardships. Nevertheless, I

was struck by the generally upbeat appearance of the people in contrast with the Germans. Specifically, I noticed the younger women. As we passed through Germany during the preceding month, the women all appeared dowdy, without makeup, and not at all well-groomed. Many factors entered into this not the least of which was the Hitlerian concept of the perfect Aryan Frau as well as the general shortage of all types of goods in Germany. I supposed one simply could not buy cosmetics because they ranked at the end of the priorities for German factories. In addition to the lack of cosmetics, the German women wore drab looking clothes and somber coloring predominated. In Austria, on the contrary, the women wore colorful dresses. Many of the women still had cosmetics and those who didn't had taken pains to see that they were well groomed. They looked clean, perky, and all of them seemed to smile. Part of the difference, I suppose also stemmed from the fact that Austria was relatively free of the kind of massive damage that the air war had inflicted on German cities. In any event, all these pretty young women were a welcome sight to us and the march into Austria began to assume a gala atmosphere as the inhabitants rushed to give us flowers and waved as we passed them. Despite the apparent gaiety, I kept my tommy gun at the ready. I could not help but feel that some of this was strange behavior for the families of soldiers we had recently been killing.

Despite our welcome and the initial impressions of an undamaged Austria, we did encounter damage. The city of Vocklabruck had been a rail hub. In early May 1945, the city and its rail yards had been bombed into virtual extinction. The rail yard was a tangled mass of twisted rails which had been lifted skyward by the force of tremendous explosions. Locomotives had been flipped on their side and the twisted rails had pierced the boilers so that the locomotive and rails became inextricably bound together into one massive piece of surrealistic art. Railroad ties had been thrown about as if some playful giant had opened a box of oversized match sticks and threw them about the rail yard. Splinters of wood and steel were everywhere and created a horrendous problem for our convoy because of the numerous flats we had to repair. The city had no inhabitants and had probably been abandoned long ago.

Once we cleared Vocklabruck we began to encounter German stragglers from the armies retreating before the Russians. We also began to meet a different kind of displaced person: eastern Europeans fleeing before the Russians. Many of the Russian divisions, we learned a few weeks later, contained huge numbers of central Asians who for the want of a better term at the time we thought to be Mongolians. These troops, the displaced persons told us, raped and looted wantonly and seemingly with the tacit approval of the Russians who officered the divisions. The tales of cruelty matched those we had received from the displaced persons fleeing the Germans. None of this made much sense except to make it increasingly clear that war had its own logic. What is more, we all began to realize that we were allied with the Russians only because of the old saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend."

One rather remarkable event did occur but at the time I thought it relatively mundane and all in the day's work kind of activity. Later in life, I realized that I had missed a colossal chance to aggrandize myself had I been so inclined. Actually, I always considered it to be a rather amusing

example which I could tell my children and grandchildren when asked about my role in the war. It all happened quite suddenly and quite by accident.

Kentucky and I were, as usual, on reconnaissance in front of the regiment but this time we had none of the I&R platoon with us. As we approached the edge of a huge, wooded area, a resplendent figure suddenly stepped out of the woods and waved at us to stop. I kept my tommy gun at the ready but had no need for it because the man wanted to surrender. He turned out to be a Hungarian colonel who had obviously prepared himself for this occasion by putting on his best uniform and his best pair of highly polished black boots, all topped by a fancy cap sporting a bright feather. He saluted, I saluted, then he announced in perfect English that he was "Colonel Podrofsky, commanding the 25th and 26th Hungarian Divisions." He then formally surrendered his pistol, a P-38 Walther. I took the pistol and accepted his surrender. Just like that, I had captured something on the order of thirty to forty thousand Hungarians!

Instead of making a big deal of this surrender, I told the Colonel that I would notify the proper authorities of his surrender and they would be along to give him further orders. To my mind, a bizarre part of this story is that the surrender was, in a way, invalid because unbeknownst to Colonel Podrofsky he was an ally! The facts were that a few days earlier the Hungarian Government had surrendered to the Russians who promptly replaced the government with a communist government and had it declared war on Germany. Thus, at the moment that I had taken Podrofsky's surrender, he was actually supposed to be fighting on our side against the Germans! The incongruousness of this war grew by leaps and bounds. Soon you would have to get a scorecard to know the players.

We continued south and a day or two later, now sometime about 7May, we established the CP in the town of Kirchdorf. The assault battalions were south of the town in the foothills of the Austrian Alps. The fighting ahead promised great difficulty because we had absolutely no experience in mountain fighting. I made my reconnaissance to prepare my plans for the attack order which we knew we would receive from division. It became clear to me that large numbers of Germans were guarding the few passes which led into the Alps and that we would suffer extremely heavy losses in the forthcoming attack. I conveyed my concerns to Colonel Fisher but both he and I agreed that there was little we could do. The war would continue. That night as I worked on the operations order for the forthcoming attack, I received a call from Colonel Johnson, the division Chief of Staff. You recall that he had been my military history instructor in my last year at West Point. I found it difficult to believe what he was saying, "Jim, the Germans have surrendered." He then told me to hold our present positions and that the attack had been postponed.

We remained on full alert for the rest of the evening. The following day the German Sixth Army formally surrendered to General McBride. That army, we soon learned, numbered almost 200,000 and it defended the area into which the 317th would attack. Had not the Germans surrendered, I am sure our losses would have exceeded those we suffered in the Moselle Bridgehead and during the Battle of the Bulge. The terrain was tortuous, easy to defend, and required the special skills of mountain divisions. All of these factors would have resulted in a disaster for the 317th.

On the brighter side, my friend Mullen returned from the hospital a few days earlier and had been assigned as my assistant S-3. He, Paul Roberts and I were the only combat officers of the original 317th still on duty with the regiment. Perhaps another half dozen of the service officers, to include surgeons, chaplains, and administrators were also still on duty. As Ira Miller had told us back in Camp Forrest, "Somebody is going to get hurt."

The following day the surrender was formalized and the war in Europe had formally ended. It looked now like the GI slogan, "Home Alive in 45" might come true.

Chapter 13

Between Wars

The First Months of Peace in Europe

Peace came to Europe on 9 May 1945, now known as V-E Day. However, that evening the 317th remained on alert. The following day we began to see positive signs that peace had, indeed, arrived. We began to supervise the movement of the Sixth German Army to PW enclosures and to collect their weapons for destruction.

As I sat in the CP and watched the movement of the German Sixth Army, a German General Staff Officer asked to see me because he had a message of great importance. This man seemed like a caricature of what the US had come to expect of a typical Prussian staff officer. He wore a monocle, conducted himself in a stiff and formal manner, wore riding breeches with the thick red stripe of the German General Staff, and he clicked the heels of his high polished and immaculate boots as he saluted. I returned his salute and carefully observed him to see if he still carried weapons and nodded to him to begin. He recited his orders, in German, in a rapid-fire manner and his eyes gleamed maniacally. It became clear to me that I had an insane individual on my hands and began to try to get him to calm down. I succeeded, partially, and we began a conversation in German since he spoke no English. My German was fluent enough to get the gist of what he was trying to say. He had an amazing story. He had, he said several times, orders for General Vlassov, a renegade Cossack general who led about 100,000 Russian deserters. The orders to General Vlassov, according to the major, directed that the renegade Frei Legion (Free Legion) join up with the Americans and immediately attack the Russians in Austria!

My answer to the major was that the war was over, and the Russians were our allies, and we had no intention of attacking them. The major insisted and pointed out to me, in another glimpse of the future, that sooner or later we would have to face the Russians. Moreover, he implied, there was no better time than now when they would not be expecting an attack. This bizarre conversation continued for about fifteen minutes until I told the major to follow the signs we had posted for the movement of the Sixth Army. When he arrived at the destination to which the signs led, he would find the proper authorities for his message. The signs, of course, ended at a PW enclosure and he probably ended up in the PW camp and possibly a psychiatric ward. Even though the major seemed insane he had at least one clear insight into the world ahead of us: we and the Russians would be enemies.

I have often wondered what kind of world would have resulted had we attacked the Russians. As I write this, the Cold War is over, and the USSR is no more. What we might have done in 1945 in a year or two ended 45 years later. We might have suffered casualties in 1945 but would they have been equal to, greater than, or less than the casualties we suffered in Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, and even the Gulf War? We will never know, and the truth is, the world was sick of war in 1945 and none of us could contemplate another several years of fighting.

I should add that General Vlassov and his followers were turned over to the Soviets. We heard later that most of them had been executed as traitors, as indeed they were. On the other hand, I guess one could say that Vlassov and his followers were the first to realize the evilness of Stalin and the Soviet Union he was about to create. One man's traitor is another man's hero. There are very few absolutes in war except death.

The next day, after we had cleared the area of any lingering stragglers or deserters from the Sixth German Army, it began to sink into our consciousness that the war in Europe had really ended. We had not celebrated the news of the German surrender in the manner that New York, London and Paris as well as other cities had celebrated the news. We had no champagne, no pretty girls to kiss, and no way to express our joy. In fact, we still lost several men in the following week to accidents, the odd sniper who had not gotten the news, and accidental shootings by our own people. Our celebration finally amounted to turning on the lights! We had lived under blackout conditions for almost a year so when we finally realized that peace had come, we took the blackout curtains off the CP windows! Kentucky and I took a drive down the road with the jeep lights fully lit! As the popular song of the day implied, the lights went on all over the world.

The night after the surrender, Major Walker our S-2, arranged for some entertainment. He had found a small orchestra among the refugees and several entertainers to include a singer and some jugglers. I remember the singer. She was a young girl, dressed in a stunning aqua evening gown. She was graceful, beautiful, and she sang "Vienna, City of my Dreams" as she danced around the impromptu stage. The voluminous folds of her aqua gown created a pattern of harmony and grace as she did a Viennese Waltz. Ever since that night I associate "Vienna, City of my Dreams" with the end of the war and it has become one of my favorite waltzes. The entertainers toured our units during the following days and were, I am sure, well rewarded with food—a scarce commodity among the civilian population and particularly among the refugees.

We stayed in Austria for about two weeks. During that time, we re-established relations with the Hungarians, now our allies. Colonel Podrofsky invited our regimental staff to dinner. When we arrived, we learned the Hungarians had begun their retreat in Budapest and had brought their families with them because they did not want their wives and daughters to fall into the hands of the Russians. They, like all the other refugees we met recited a litany of atrocities and rapes committed by the Soviet troops.

To my amazement, I also found out from Colonel Podrofsky that his units had carried with them the assets of the Hungarian National Bank and the Crown of St. Stefan. They were in the process of turning these assets over to the US authorities. Later, I realized how naive I was about public relations. Years later the Crown and the assets became an issue in the press and other media. Had I been astute enough, at the time, would have made a big deal of this whole matter and made a hero of myself for the role I played in "capturing" the Hungarians and their assets. As it is, I am content to let you know how these assets fell into US hands and the part your father played in the drama.

The meal the Hungarians prepared for us was a feast. Colonel Podrofsky had shot an Ibex, a mountain goat, and the Hungarian women had prepared it superbly. I guess all of us realized that this was the best meal we had in over a year. After the meal, the younger Hungarian women sang and danced folk dances for us. As I look back on it now, it was a constant parade of Za ZA and Eva Gabor-like beauties. Withal, however, the mothers kept a watchful chaperon's eye upon their daughters. Whatever thoughts we may have had that evening of romantic alliances went for naught. In passing, I noticed that Colonel Fisher and several of the division staff officers had managed to find Hungarian mistresses who stayed with the division when it moved from Austria.

I spent the evening seated between Colonel Podrofsky and another Hungarian colonel who could not speak English but did speak French. During the course of the meal, he drank wine freely and became tipsy. Towards the end of the evening, he had relaxed considerably, and he turned to me and said, "You know, Major, you Americans are nice chaps. You are not the dogs the Germans said you are." I took this as a compliment, though inelegantly phrased. He was in my opinion by now well enough into his cups to speak only the truth. This meal established a good relationship between the Hungarians and the 317th. Over the course of the next two weeks, they made baseball bats for us, held concerts for our soldiers, and no doubt provided feminine companionship for some of our more romantically inclined young men.

We also meet the Russians in Austria and had some interesting experiences with them. The boundary between the two armies was the Enns River. As the snow thawed in the Alps the Enns had turned into a swiftly flowing river interspersed with numerous rapids. The Germans on the Russian side of the river kept trying to cross the Enns to escape the Russians and to surrender to us. Unfortunately, the swift current and the rapids caused many deaths by drowning. In addition, for perhaps a week we kept hearing shots being fired throughout the day and evening. There is no doubt in my mind that the Russians were simply executing any actual or suspected German stragglers they found. During the next week our patrols found corpses along the banks of the Enns, many of whom had bullet wounds.

General McBride wanted to have a ceremony with the Russians, so I was sent across the river at Kirchdorf to try to contact the Russian divisional commander. I took with me a GI who spoke some Russian because his parents had been immigrants from Russia. I finally made contact with the division commander and a ceremony was arranged in Kirchdorf. We had a small review by honor guards from each division and General McBride and the Russian commander exchanged medals followed by friendship speeches.

After the ceremony, we all went to the Gasthaus in Kirchdorf. Both sides proposed and drank numerous toasts until most of the attendees (except me because I did not drink) were totally smashed. Now that I think about it, neither General McBride nor the Russian commander was about to let the other outdrink him. In any event, after each toast the Russians would smash their glasses—the first time I had met this custom—and kept demanding new glasses. The distraught owner of the Gasthaus began to remonstrate with the Russians who quickly lost their tempers. Finally, several of them picked up the owner and began to chant something that sounded like the

Song of the Volga Boatmen. As they chanted their song, they rocked, the owner went back and forth several times and threw him out the window! His body smashed the windowpane, and he landed several feet below on the sidewalk. Everyone thought this was great fun and the innkeeper's sudden departure caused much laughter and mirth. Naturally, glasses kept reappearing as demanded. The party ended when General McBride drank the Russian commander under the table. His aide, who was his son, and several staff members collected the Russian general and took him out to his car. This ended the party.

My experience during the party was, in a way, rather startling. The Russian officers insisted on exchanging insignia, so we all ended up stripped of our insignia of rank and branch. I came over to get something to eat and Colonel Fisher and General McBride both insisted that I sit between two Russian female officers (there are pictures of them among my wartime albums). One of these women, the interpreter explained, was the division surgeon or doctor. When the music began, Colonel Fisher insisted that I dance with her because she had obviously taken a liking to me. She was at least a head taller than I and certainly outweighed me. The Russian band played a wild sounding polka like piece. The next thing I knew I had been clasped into two strong arms, swept off the floor, and was being whirled around the dance floor as if I were a doll. I never even touched the floor which was just as well. As you all know, I have little sense of rhythm and would not have known how to dance to the music anyway. Fortunately, the party ended soon after the dance. Had I been forced to dance many of these wild polkas the female Hercules would certainly have crushed my ribs. At the time I weighed less than 130 pounds.

A few nights later I had another interesting insight into the Russian character. I was regimental duty officer when about 0200 hours the guards told me that a Russian officer had appeared and demanded to see General McBride. This man stood more than six feet tall, had no hat or, for that matter, hair because he had shaved his head. He was also totally drunk. We finally convinced him that there was no way that he could see General McBride that evening. He calmed down and we offered him a sleeping bag so that he could spend the night with us. Mind you, we were in the Alps in early May. Snow was still on the ground, the evenings were cold, and we had no central heating. The Russian officer, a Lieutenant Colonel, pounded his chest and informed us that he was a Cossack and accustomed to sleeping on the steppes. To hell with the blankets seemed to be his _____ (brave) message to us. My reaction was well, the hell with you, too. You can sleep anywhere and anyway you please.

The following morning, we had pancakes for breakfast. Even though the Russian had a hangover he was obviously hungry. The room we were using as a mess hall was redolent with the smell of coffee, syrup and newly made pancakes. The Russian was obviously in an unfamiliar setting and amid new aromas, so I had the interpreter explain to him what was on the table and how we ate pancakes. He ignored this explanation and picked up a fork. He held the fork with his little finger out in an exaggerated gesture, or rather caricature, of good taste. Then, through the interpreter, he explained to me how daintily the Russians ate. The little finger, of course, was the symbol of that daintiness. With his fork held in this dainty manner, he very gently broke off a small piece of the

pancake and nibbled it delicately as if to emphasize how cultured he was. “Aha”, said he, “_____” (piroshki). Then he grabbed the fork in his whole hand as if it were a shovel, speared the pancake and placed the whole thing into his mouth! “_____” (good), he said, and then proceeded to devour the entire stack on his plate after smothering them with more syrup. He and his driver left us shortly thereafter and we never saw him again. To say the least he was a boor.

On every occasion that we meet Russians they all went to great pains to assure us that they were cultured. The word in Russian is _____ (kyltyrni). Years later, I learned from the Russian experts at RAND that one the worst insults you could utter to a Russian is _____ (ne kyltyrnaya) or “that’s not cultured). Somewhere in the lingering psyche of most Russians is this feeling that the rest of the world sees them as a bunch of boorish peasants. Certainly, when Krushev did his shoe banging trick at the United Nations he demonstrated to the world the Russians were, indeed, devoid of some of the common courtesy needed to make the world a little more bearable.

Another manifestation of the Russian inner feeling of insecurity came a week or so later. By now I had been placed in command of the 1st Battalion by Colonel Fisher and he would shunt Russian visitors down to me to get them out of his hair. Several Russian officers had visited the 317th CP and Colonel Fisher sent them to me. I showed them through the battalion and included a display of some of our weapons for them to see. When they saw the 81mm mortars they told me through the interpreter that they hoped we liked the mortars they were making for us! The fact was, of course, that the 81mm mortar was a weapon we supplied to the Russians through Lend Lease. We also supplied them with most of their trucks and other rolling stock. Despite the fact that the rest of the world, including the Germans, knew of the Lend Lease Program the Soviet Government lied to its people and led them to believe that all of their war goods were made in Soviet factories.

My final insight into the Russian character came when I met the Soviet battalion commander who held the sector on the south bank of the Enns River opposite my sector. He had control of the southern end of a bridge over the river and I controlled the northern end. When we mounted our flag on our side of the river to match the Soviet flag, this man the staff of his flag made higher than ours! I thought this was pretty childish sort of stuff and paid no attention to it. It meant nothing to me, or my soldiers, and I certainly don’t think the refugees in the area paid any attention to the silliness. My own observation, now that I am almost 80 years old, is that the most unsure people of the world have to display symbols to try to convince themselves that they are indeed worthy of respect. Those who do have the respect of their fellow men have no need of petty symbols of grandeur or status. Remember the fairy tale about the king who had no clothes.

I, of course, maintained my contact with the Russian. However, as the refugee problem increased in intensity, it became clear to me that we had to have some means of communication to coordinate the flow of these people who were clogging the roads and who were responsible, moreover, for a lot of the petty crime occurring in the area. Given the increasing numbers of refugees, I suggested to the Russian commander that we establish communications between our two headquarters. He agreed so I had my communication platoon run a line to his switchboard and gave him the procedure for contacting me including my divisional code name, Headache White Six. I had

failed to realize the degree of centralization of command in the Soviet Army. I never received any method for calling him. I found out later, from Lieutenant Pesochinsky, an interpreter with whom we became rather friendly, that the Soviet commander had to get permission from Moscow to be allowed to give me his code name. As it turned out, my telephone line was connected to an essentially dead switchboard. The Soviet battalion commander never answered any of my calls.

A week or so later the 80th Division received orders to move to Czechoslovakia to a location near Pilsen. My battalion ended up in a town named Rokicani which the GIs promptly dubbed Rockcandy. Our stay in Czechoslovakia was brief and we were ordered to Garmisch, Germany for occupation duty. We also received orders to train our troops for possible service in the Asiatic Theater. Our withdrawal from Czechoslovakia was in accordance with the Yalta Agreement which, in effect, gave Austria and Czechoslovakia to the Soviets. History shows that we acted extremely naively and were well on the way to losing the peace.

When the 317th Infantry arrived in Garmisch each of the companies was billeted in one of the luxury hotels throughout the city. These hotels had served as billets for Nazi Party members on R&R. Compared to what we had seen in Czechoslovakia and what we had been through in combat this kind of duty was the infantry's version of Valhalla with a small caveat. We still had to guard a series of POW camps. These POW compounds were largely occupied by former SS. The 317th Infantrymen were in no mood to show any leniency to what we considered the thugs of the German Army.

Each of the camps was surrounded by a double barbed wire fence. Between the two fences was a forbidden area perhaps 20 feet in width. At each corner of the camp, we had machine gun towers which commanded the open space between the fences. Armed jeeps patrolled the outer perimeter. I issued strict orders to shoot anyone who ventured into the forbidden space. Several of the SS disobeyed the orders and were promptly shot. After we had killed several of them, they finally realized that they were dealing with experienced combat veterans. They also realized that the commander of those troops intended to have his rules enforced. The incursions into the forbidden zone decreased as did the shootings. The POWs displayed some semblance of accepting their situation.

The battalion headquarters was located in the home of Opel, the German equivalent of Henry Ford. This house was huge and had enough bedrooms and bathrooms to comfortably billet the entire battalion headquarters company as well as the battalion CP. My own quarters consisted of a bedroom, sitting room and a huge bath. My quarters had a balcony and from it I could see the Zugspitze, one of the Alps in Germany which is famous for its cable car to the top. While the headquarters was in this location, I had one of the most touching encounters of the entire war.

One afternoon, the adjutant told me that an elderly woman had asked to see me. He ushered in a courtly old lady dressed in what can only be described as lavender and lace. Clearly, she had dressed in her best clothes and had taken great pains with her grooming. I guessed that she was in her mid-sixties. It was also evident that in her youth she must have been quite beautiful. She spoke no English but spoke flawless French. She informed me that she and her brother were émigrés from

the Russian revolution. She had been a Countess and her brother had been a General in the Czar's Army and had been, as she said, "*Votre allié*" (your ally). Now they were starving, and she had come to plead for food. Anything, she told me, would be accepted even if it was only the potato peelings from our garbage. As a last resort she pleaded to be allowed to rummage in our garbage pails. Her brother, she informed me, was sick and infirm and she feared he would die if he did not get food quickly.

My heart went out to this courageous woman. There could be no doubt about the great courage she displayed because all sorts of false rumors floated about Garmisch about the ruthless American GIs. The rumors had us spitting babies on our bayonets, raping, pillaging and other heinous crimes. These rumors were, of course, untrue but she had no way of knowing whether they were true or not. Nevertheless, she had taken her case to the monster himself, the dreaded American commander whose orders had resulted in the shooting of several of the POWs. She stood there in front of me, fearless, upright, and determined to save her brother's life even if meant that she, a former Countess, had to scavenge for food in our garbage.

It must have been obvious to her that from a policy point of view there was no way I could officially give her food. Had I done so, every person with a sad story would have been pounding at the headquarters door demanding help. I informed her that I would not give her food. The proper channel for her request, I told her, was through the military government offices which the Third Army had established. In addition, I warned her in my most stern manner not to return. Then, my heart going out to her in pity and compassion, I ordered her to leave and used the imperative tense of the French verb, *allez vous-en*. This was no way to talk to a countess, but it had to be done. When she left my office, I called the mess sergeant of headquarters company and told him to give her some food but in a totally unofficial manner. In addition, I instructed my adjutant to notify the Military Government Office to see if medical attention could be provided for her brother.

I have often wondered what happened to this woman who can only be described as the "iron countess" for her bravery in standing up to what she must have thought was a monster incarnate. The mess sergeant probably visited her from time to time on an unofficial basis with food, at least that is what I would like to believe. As the commander who ruled over Landkreiss Garmisch (like a US county) I could take no official action that would establish an unmanageable precedent. Everyone was hungry in Germany and that year, 1945, the diet of the average individual probably averages about 1500 calories. This was sufficient to keep a person alive, but they certainly would gain no weight.

We had some semi-humorous experiences in Garmisch. One involved the players of the world-famous Passion Play. Most of these players were in Oberammergau a short distance north of Garmisch. All of these players were actually Nazi and claimed that they had been forced to join the party or Hitler would have forbidden the presentation of the Passion Play. All of these players ended up under the watchful eye of Jim Mullen who, at my request, now commanded one of my companies. He had lots of problems with these players who were not at all the saintly characters they depicted on the stage. I remember visiting Mullen, a devout catholic, and discussing with him

the problems he had with these players. He told me in a rather joking manner that he had jailed the Virgin Mary twice for violating the curfew and had ended up putting Alois Lang, who played Christ, in the manger because he had been carousing after the curfew. We laughed but both of us realized that this was a problem which might have international repercussions. Few Catholics who revered the presentation of the Passion Play realized that the players were members of the Nazi Party and many of them were not really nice people.

The occupation duty and the monotony of guarding POW camps weighed heavily on me. In a way, I agreed with Robert E. Lee's observation that it was a good thing that war was so horrible, or we would love it too much. The sense of purpose in combat and the acute awareness which came with constant vigilance added to the zest of living. Each moment of each day had to be savored because it might be the last moment of life. When this restlessness descended upon me, I began to look for dangerous things to do. On one occasion I took Kentucky and had him drive me up a precarious footpath which led to the top of a high mountain outside Garmisch. Atop the mountain the town's people had erected a religious shrine which they visited from time to time by the thousands. The visit was always a candlelight march from the town square of Garmisch to the top of the mountain and back. I have pictures I took as Kentucky, and I climbed this mountain in a jeep. We finally had to stop because of a gorge we could not cross in the jeep. The final danger was that we had no place to turn so we had to back down the mountain until we reached a small clearing at about the halfway point. Here we turned the jeep around and were able to descend normally. I felt elated by the danger but what was there for an encore?

Another problem arose. General Eisenhower issued the famous "no fraternization" order. Essentially, this meant that the soldiers could have no social contact with the Germans who were to be treated, essentially, as pariahs. This order could not be enforced for simple and obvious biological reasons. Nevertheless, this charade continued with few soldiers paying any attention to the order.

On the one hand we had in Germany several million GIs who had been deprived of female companionship for the length of time they had been in combat. On the other hand, we had several million German women whose men had been away from them for, in some case, four or five years. Suddenly, peace reigned. The women needed food, the men needed women, both had strong biological urges. The result was inevitable. Fraternization became a fact of life and though, as commander, I had to set an example and refrained from fraternization I knew that many, if not most, of my officers and enlisted men had mistresses. The unenforceable order created both social and medical problems for commanders who simply could not order away biological necessities.

As commander of the Garmisch-Oberammergau area I had the responsibility for guarding Schloss Linderhof, one of the many castles built by Ludwig, the Mad King of Bavaria. This castle was simply a large and sumptuous building with absolutely magnificent grounds which had been landscaped to perfection. As soon as my battalion had established itself in Garmisch I visited Schloss Linderhof and had the curator take me on a tour. As I said, the castle was opulent. Finally, we arrived on the upper floor where the king's living quarters were located. The fixtures in his bathroom were made of solid gold and the spigots were shaped like swans. In addition, a dumb

waiter had been installed so the king's food could be delivered to him without servants intruding into his privacy.

The curator, an erudite man, explained everything to me. He produced books to show the inventory, etc., etc. Finally, he said to me, "You know, Herr Oberst, the King lived here for many years all alone. He did not even have a mistress." Then the curator tapped the side of his head in the universal sign that the King was slightly batty and said, "He was quite mad."

Sometime around the middle of July the 10th Armored relieved the 80th Division. I received orders to move my battalion to Füssen, the capital of the Landkreiss of the same name. Here I took over the responsibility for several displaced persons camps, the largest of which was located in a German Kaserne on the outskirts of the town. In addition, I assumed responsibility for guarding another castle which had been built by Ludwig the Mad King of Bavaria. This castle, unlike Linderhof, looked like a castle straight out of Disney Land. In fact, many people can recognize it at sight because it is used on most posters advertising trips to Germany and particularly to Bavaria.

Neuschwanstein housed a large part of the art treasures the Nazis had looted from the rest of Europe. The throne room on the top floor of the castle contained cases full of the paintings of Raphael, Tintoretto, Titian, Corot, Monet and other great masters. Downstairs in the spacious kitchen the silver place settings, all 800 of them, from the city of Metz, France covered a huge table. A room on the first floor contained shelf after shelf of boxes full of precious emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. Some of the stones were in the original settings, in other cases the stones had been detached and simply filled the boxes which filled the 20'x20' room. Some of the stones were ornaments in the hilts of ceremonial swords or in the stocks of fancy rifles. In one box was the most beautiful of all the pieces. It was Napoleon's signet with which he stamped his initial into the wax used to seal his official correspondence. The signet itself was a huge amethyst with the letter "N" incised into it. The amethyst, in turn, was mounted on a gold replica of a French cuirassier's helmet. Finally, the helmet hung from a chain made of four strands of large pearls fastened together and topped by an emerald about the size of the end joint of my thumb. Other rooms contained national treasures such as the tapestry from the Hague, Netherlands.

Naturally, the countries from which these treasures had been stolen were clamoring to have them returned. In turn, every jewel thief in the American Army wanted to get at these priceless pieces of jewelry. For all of these reasons, I had specific orders from General Patton that no one could be admitted to the castle without his personal permission. I meant to and did follow these orders to the letter and had to turn away numerous high-ranking officers who tried to force their way into the castle past my guards.

Neuschwanstein sat atop a square hill, three sides of which were precipitous cliffs. The fourth side sloped into the valley and served as the only approach to the castle. I fortified this road with machine guns, anti-tank cannons, and an especially strong sentry post. I also posted several guard posts inside the castle courtyard and at several points throughout the castle proper. The officer in charge of the guard had strict orders to call me in the event anyone tried to get into the castle without the written permission of General Patton himself. As I mentioned earlier, several generals

tried to bully their way into the castle, but I simply showed them a copy of General Patton's order and asked them if they would like to call the general for permission to enter. This simple threat always worked, and they would leave. Several months later, probably in September or October, the castle was taken over by a commission responsible for returning the treasures to their original owners.

The German Army had built a huge caserne in Füssen. Now, the caserne served as a displaced person's camp. Most of these people were Polish jews, many of whom did not want to return to Poland and face the future under Soviet control. My battalion had the mission of maintaining law and order as well as assuring that the camp was properly administered. The maintenance of law and order proved to be the more difficult part of the mission. The German police reported numerous acts of violence against Germans and even some killing done in execution style. Though it could not be proven, the strong presumption was that the possess from the camp went out at night and ravaged the countryside. I increased the patrols around the caserne, and, in time, the number of incidents decreased but did not disappear completely.

Each morning, I inspected the camp with the Polish chief. Without fail, he would report one or more suicides from the previous evening. Usually, these unhappy people hung themselves from one of the rafters. However, one morning I encountered a particularly gruesome example: the man had hung himself on his own belt by putting it around his neck, fastening to the top of a tier of beds and flinging himself off the top bed. He had died a horrible death from strangulation. I am sorry to say that none of these deaths bothered me. I considered them delayed casualties of the war. All of these poor creatures (men and women) had little to live for because in most cases their entire family had been killed in one of the extermination camps. No doubt, some of them bordered on or were already insane. What was left for them? Their answer: nothing.

One of the few ways a displaced person could support themselves was to become an entertainer providing, of course, that he or she had enough talent. Entertainers had a fertile field in which to operate. The occupation bored the American troops as did the training we still pursued in order to prepare us for service in the Asian theater. The war with Japan still raged and the *Stars and Stripes* dutifully reported the progress of the war in the Pacific. The Battle for Okinawa raged, and we read of the newest weapon, the kamikaze pilot, and the casualties caused by this, the first guided missile. We had absolutely no indication that the war in the Pacific would end soon so we continued with our training program.

The training also served to get the returning wounded into shape. Large numbers of the wounded were returning from the hospitals and our ranks kept swelling. For instance, the 1st Battalion which would normally be at a strength of about 875 officers and men now numbered, at the end of July 1945, almost a thousand. the men returning from the hospital had recovered from their wounds, but the hospital had made no effort to return the men to the fine physical shape needed for combat. Many of the men had lost the fine honing of their survival instincts which combat had given to them and which they required to stay alive on the battlefield. All these considerations meant that the training programs with all their boredom continued.

The training was, of course, intensely repetitious and dull so I directed the special service officer to try to find ways of filling the evenings with entertainment. Into this entertainment gap, so to speak, the displaced persons moved with great alacrity. One of the fundamental attractions for the entertainers was that we fed them before or after their acts. Given the scarcity of food in Germany during this period the food was worth more than the money the entertainers received for their services. Vaudeville acts of all sorts formed quickly and began the tour of our units.

One group of particularly popular entertainers came from the Russian population of displaced persons. Though the soldiers could not understand the language, they could understand the beauty of the music and of the singing. Moreover, the troops were so skillful in staging their skits that language seemed almost secondary. The leader of the troops was a handsome man with a beautiful bass voice whose singing entranced the soldiers. The troop was so skillful in miming that the soldiers laughed at all the proper places and time passed quickly for them. We knew that the Pacific Theater carried different but equal dangers to those we had experienced in Europe. Few of us expected to survive an invasion of Japan.

We continued our training; the entertainers continued to perform. Suddenly, the Russian troop disappeared. To my disgust, I learned that they had been turned over to a Soviet group whose mission was to recover Soviet citizens suspected of collaborating with the Nazis. By now we had enough experience with the Russians to know that being suspected of being a collaborator was tantamount to a death sentence. I tried to find out what had happened to the Russians, but it was a dead end and I had to accept the *fait accompli*. As always, the war continued whatever problems we might have with our allies. Then the bomb dropped. The war and the world changed.