The International Journal of Reminiscence and Life Review
2016, Volume 3, Issue 1, pp. 45-60
http://www.ijrlr.org/ojs/index.php/IJRLR

Shared Reminiscence

My World War II Experience: Part II

George J. Dubell
Hightstown, New Jersey

Germany
(Combat on German Soil)
Aachen to Duren[1]

The 165 mile trip from Moerdijk, Holland to Aachen, Germany had been welcomed. It gave me time to relax, if one could call sitting in the back of an open 2½ ton truck a setting for relaxation. It was a great relief to know that we were going away from the fighting and not into it. It was good to see civilians as we passed through the villages. The people would wave and shout encouragement to us and many of them would throw apples up to us. Sometimes, when we weren't looking, an apple would hit us, and because the truck was moving at a fair rate of speed the apple would sting, making us wonder if some of the civilians were German sympathizers.

I don't remember much about Aachen except that it was a big city much different than anything that I had seen in Holland. We learned that Aachen had been overrun by the US Army's 1st Infantry Division a week or so before we arrived. It was the first German city on German soil to be captured during the war. It had been fiercely defended by the Germans and its loss was a great blow to them. We also learned that the 104th Division, my division, was relieving them because of the losses that they had endured in the battle for the city. They were being sent to a rest area for replacement of men and equipment.

Our General, Terry Allen, must have had a feeling of accomplishment when he learned that the 104th Infantry Division, was going to relieve the 1st Infantry Division also known as The Big Red One. General Allen had been the 1st Infantry Division's Commander in 1942 when they had landed in North Africa to begin the United States' first ground action against Hitler's armies. After the Germans had been defeated in Africa, General Allen and his 1st Division participated in the invasion and overrunning of Sicily, chasing the German Armies to the Italian mainland. At the conclusion of that battle, General Allen was sent back to the United States to use his first-hand combat experience to train a new army division. The new division was the 104th Infantry Division.

After we climbed out of the 2½ ton trucks, we were led to what appeared to be a residential area and were assigned houses that were to be our home for the next few days. The people who had lived there previously were gone. The machine gun section, to which I belonged, moved into one house and the rest of "G" company occupied other adjacent houses. This was quite a change from Holland where we had never stayed in a house and certainly was better than living in a fox hole in some field on a cold night. It was now November 7th and winter weather had started and it was getting cold. All was not complete comfort because there were no electric lights, no running water, no flush toilets, no furnaces for heat. The fighting in Aachen had knocked out all of those conveniences. We were a little confused as to how we should treat someone else's home and we tried not to do too much

[1][Editor's Note] This article represents Chapters 9 and 10 of the author's unpublished wartime memoir titled "My World War II Experience" This work traces the author's wartime experiences from induction into the Army on August 3, 1943, through boot camp and further training, combat in Europe, being wounded in action outside Golzheim, Germany in February, 1945, recovery in U.S. Army hospitals, and honorable discharge on March 7, 1946. This excerpt begins shortly after the author's unit, the 104th Infantry Division, first experienced combat while in Holland.

damage to the furnishings that had been left behind.

The first night in our new location was one of the few things that I remember about our short stay in Aachen. Our cooks had set up a chow line for our company, and they must have raided a supply depot because they prepared a great feast for us and we could have all that we could eat. In Holland we had lived on C rations and K rations which, while providing the energy we needed, never filled our stomachs and, as a result, everyone's stomach had shrunken. That night we made up for lost time. I don't remember how many times I returned to the chow line, but my stomach got so full that it hurt. A lot of my buddies ate so much that they got sick. Finally the eating orgy was over and I guess we all fell asleep. That was the best night that we had in Aachen.

K rations came in a cardboard box thickly covered with wax that reminded me of a crackerjack box. I think there were 3 varieties of rations; breakfast, lunch and dinner. Breakfast was ham and scrambled eggs; lunch cheese and dinner was spam. These foods were contained in sealed tin cans and the eggs and spam were much better when heated. The boxes also contained dry biscuits, coffee, toilet paper, cigarettes, matches and a can opener.

When Bill and I were in a foxhole, we would scrape the thick wax off the box and collect it in a jar lid and make a candle by melting the wax and putting a short piece of string in it for a wick. When the wax hardened it made a very useful candle. We tore the box into strips and burned them, one strip at a time, to heat our tins of eggs or spam and to heat water for coffee. A side benefit was that the burning strips gave off a little extra heat, at least enough to warm our hands. I doubt that the designer of the K ration box ever visualized the many uses that we were able to get out of that box. The can opener contained in the ration was very small and was simplicity itself but most effective. I always carried one and still have one today as a souvenir from that time.

We did nothing for the next few days. We stayed in the house that had been assigned, we talked about Holland, wrote letters, read our bibles, and discussed the wild rumors that we heard. I am sure that I tried to clean up because I had not washed, shaved, or brushed my teeth in more than 10 days. Whenever I could get some water I would give myself a sponge bath and try to wash my clothes. There was no latrine or toilet so whenever I had to relieve myself, I went outside and dug a hole with my entrenching tool and did so. Living now was primitive and was to get worse. We learned that since our battalion was the last unit to be pulled out from Holland, we were now in regimental reserve and could be sent into action at any time. Some of the units of our regiment were already fighting on the outskirts of Aachen continuing from the positions of the 1st Division that we had relieved. None of us wanted to go back into combat and I prayed fervently asking God to spare us, but that was not to be.

Near the middle of November, orders came down that we were moving out. We put on our field packs and fell out into the street with the rest of "G" company and started to walk in columns out of Aachen into a wooded area. When we were deep into the woods, we were told to take cover while our officers figured out what we were to do next. None of us dug in, that is, dug a foxhole because we had not seen or heard any sign of the enemy and hadn't been told that we were near any so we just spread out and lay down on the ground and rested. Several of us looked up and saw about 10 men in a column coming through the woods towards us. They saw us at the same instant that we saw them and we all reacted at the same time. They stopped, saw that we were American soldiers and we identified them as Germans. We yelled "Germans" and grabbed for our weapons and they raced off into the woods. No shots were fired and they disappeared into the woods. After we settled down, we all laughed nervously at our first encounter with the enemy in Germany. Apparently they had been a scouting party returning to their outfit and did not know that we had entered the woods. They had been walking single file with their rifles slung over their shoulders and probably were happy to be returning from enemy territory to the safety of their position. Now our presence in the woods was no longer secret and we were continually alert from that time on.

We continued to advance through the woods, spread out in a skirmish line formation. After moving some distance this way, we were told to stop and dig in because we were going to get air support to our front. Bright red florescent panels were spread on the ground along our line so that our planes could see them and know where we were to avoid hitting us. This was the first time that I had seen the florescent panels and prior to this time didn't know that they existed. We dug in

and waited. It was mid-afternoon and there was plenty of sunlight and we hoped that the pilots would see us when they came.

Suddenly above us a squadron of P47 fighters called Thunderbolts appeared. They didn't waste any time and began to dive, one after the other, to strafe targets in front of us; targets that I could not see. Their targets appeared to be about a mile in front of us. The planes would dive almost vertically down and pull up, circle around and dive again. I don't remember seeing any anti-aircraft fire against them, but the air around them must have been full of it. On one pass one P47 pilot went into his dive and continued almost straight down. As he got near the point where we knew he should be pulling out of his dive, he continued down. I, with others, started shouting "PULL OUT," "PULL OUT," but the plane continued down until it crashed sending up a big cloud of smoke. Most of us who saw this fell back against the side of our foxholes and became very quiet. We had just seen the death of one of our pilots and it caused a very disturbing bad emotional feeling in all of us who saw the plane go down. The remaining planes finished their job and flew back to their base.

After the strafing, we moved out of the woods down a hill and entered a city that I now know was named Stolberg. In order to get into the city we had to walk through a rail yard for freight and passenger trains that had been bombed previously. I was amazed by the destructive power of our bombs. Some of the train tracks had been twisted into loops that reached 30 feet above the ground. The destruction of the terminal was extensive (beyond belief when seen for the first time) and was much more severe than anything that I had seen in Holland.

We entered the city in late afternoon and immediately came under German artillery fire. We continued up a street lined with residential homes until the artillery fire got so intense that we all dived into a ditch that was beside the street. *(I considered leaving the following out of this writing, but it happened and shows how quickly life threatening combat can reduce us to commit acts that are contrary to all of the teachings we learned at home and in church.)*

When we dove into the ditch two German soldiers, who had been captured by our group, dove into the ditch with us. The shelling continued and some of us thought that if the artillery observers directing the fire on us could see that they were also shelling their own men, they would stop the firing. We made the two Germans get out of the ditch and stand in the road. The shelling didn't stop. Every time a shell landed, those two men flinched and had all they could do to keep from diving into the ditch. They thought that if they did they would be shot and if they stayed in the road, as we demanded, they were going to be wounded or killed by their own artillery. Their faces were filled with fear. After several minutes of this, some of us had second thoughts about the inhumanity of our action. The shelling had not stopped and was not going to. If the German observers could see their two men, it made no impression on them and they were willing to sacrifice them to get us. Several of us relented and shouted to the Germans and indicated that they should get into the ditch with us. They dove into the ditch beside us and stayed with us until finally the shelling stopped. I don't remember what happened to the prisoners when we moved up the street. They were still alive and were probably sent back for interrogation. I imagine it took them a long time to recover from the fright of that moment, if they ever did. It certainly affected me as I still remember it 62 years later. The comforting thought is that our humane feeling for our fellow man did rise up and saved us from being barbarians. Never again did I see an inhuman act committed against the enemy by any of my buddies or anyone else in our company.

Our attack continued into the night and finally we were stopped and told to move into the houses beside the road and to try to get some sleep. This order we happily complied with.

At dawn, word was passed that we were moving out again. We fell out into the street and began to walk single file out of the city. We moved into a woods on the outskirts of the city and proceeded through the woods until we came to a field that bordered the woods. The field was covered with grass and led downhill to a village at the bottom of the hill. From where we were, we could look down the hill into the village. I guess the Germans saw us at the edge of the woods because they began to shell us immediately with their artillery.

As the shells came in, we all spread out on the ground at the edge of the woods, but that did not

seem to be the best place to be. When shells are passing through the trees, some of them hit the trees and exploded, sending shell fragments, tree branches and pieces of the trees down to the ground with great force. This is deadly to anyone who is under it. I felt that it was more deadly than a shell that hits the ground before exploding and sends the shrapnel up into the air. The safest place to be was in a foxhole out in the field on the hillside away from the woods. The problem was that as soon as we left the woods we would make easy targets for any soldiers in the village.

After a few more tree bursts, I made my decision. The field looked well cared for and didn't seem to be rocky. The grass covering the field was 6 or 8 inches high and I thought it would be easy to dig through. I thought that the danger of being shot was a lot less than being hit by the shrapnel from the tree bursts. I told Bill that I was going out into the field and dig a fox hole. I took out my entrenching tool and dashed out into the field away from the woods. I flattened myself out on the ground with my head pointing down the hill because I thought that would make the smallest target to hit and started to dig like mad. The ground was soft and I made good progress and piled each shovel full of dirt in front of my head. I continued to dig along my body trying to create a trench deep enough to roll into so that most of my body would be below ground. I could hear my buddies in the woods shouting to me that I was being shot at. I had noticed that when I threw a shovel full of dirt in front of me, to build a mound in front of my head, some of it would come back on me as though the wind was blowing it. It wasn't the wind, it was bullets hitting the dirt near my head and splattering the dirt. I don't know how many shots were fired at me, but at the rate I was digging I soon had a trench long enough and deep enough to roll into and the sniper gave up.

Bill ran out of the woods and joined me and we very quickly had a foxhole big enough and deep enough for both of us. The strange part about this event is that I knew that it was the right thing to do and that I would not be shot. I felt invincible and was not afraid. I guess that the desire to get away from the tree bursts overcame all other emotions. As darkness came on, the rest of my company moved out into the field and dug in for the night. During the night, we had to adjust our position on the hill in preparation for an attack into the village in the morning so Bill and I dug several more foxholes on the hill that night but none as exciting as the first one.

The name of the village at the bottom of the hill was Volkenrath. I will always remember it for two reasons, the first is described above. The second reason I have named "My Battlefield Humor."

Volkenrath was a small farm village at the bottom of the hill where we had dug our foxholes during the night. The houses were built close together with roads on all sides leading into and away from the village. From where we were dug in on the side of the hill overlooking the village we could see across the rooftops of the houses to a field on the other side of the town rising up to a ridge at the top much the same as the hill that we were on. The town had been built in a valley formed by the hills surrounding it.

At dawn, I was looking from my foxhole *over* the rooftops to the hill rising on the far side of the village. Near the top of the hill, I saw two men walking towards the top.

They weren't in any hurry and probably thought that they were out of range of our rifles. I estimated that the distance to them was at least 1500 yards; I didn't know if my machine gun could reach them or not so I decided to find out. I did not want to hit them so I aimed behind them and fired two rounds. I waited for what seemed like a minute, watching the men as they neared the top of the hill. I thought that my two shots had not reached them but suddenly they began to run as fast as they could and disappeared over the ridge. I smiled to myself because I had made them run as I had been made to run by them. I remember this incident *very* clearly and call it "My Battlefield Humor" because no one got hurt, and my shots came close enough to scare the two men into racing to the top of the hill; it made me smile to see them in a sort of panic.

A little later in the morning word was passed that we were moving down the hill and into Volkenrath. We all picked up our equipment, climbed out of our foxholes and moved into the village. I do not remember being fired upon and in a couple of hours the village was ours. It appeared that most of the Germans had withdrawn during the night. After the village was secure, we

went into some of the houses, ate our C rations and rested.

After Volkenrath, my memories of combat in Germany are very vague and confused. We realized that our division, along with several others, was involved in a major campaign. The objective was to overrun the Ruhr Valley that encompassed a vast area from Aachen to the Roer River and then to Cologne, a major city on the Rhine River. The Ruhr Valley was of great importance because it was a great industrial area of Germany and a major supplier of the war materials needed by the German Army. The loss of this industrial valley would cripple the German ability to continue the war and would be the beginning of the end of the war. The German armies fought very hard to defend this area of many cities and villages, and it meant that we would be involved in over-running many of them.

According to the history of the 414th Regiment titled "COMBAT HISTORY 414TH INFANTRY REGIMENT, 104TH INFANTRY DIVISION," G Company, my company, was involved with the fighting for the German cities and villages of Kothberg, Eschweiler, Weisweiler, Frenz, Inden, and Pier and many smaller villages in the area. This covered a time period from November 16 to December 16 when we were ordered to stop our advance because the Germany Army had launched a major attack in the Ardennes forest south of us. This counter-offensive became known as the Battle of the Bulge, a name given to it because the German penetration of our lines at the point of their attack pushed our line back on a broad front producing a bulge in our line. Pier was the last city that my company overran prior to being halted. Pier was on the west bank of the Roer River and had been one of the objectives of the campaign. The largest city that we captured during this drive was Eschweiler, a city of 50,000 people.

We did not know it, but after leaving Volkenrath, our division objective was to capture Eschweiler. There were several small villages on the outskirts of Eschweiler that had to be secured before the final assault on that city could be made. My company was involved in over-running many of these villages. The villages were separated by several miles and we had to reach them by hiking over fields and sometimes up roads and most of the time at night.

The most difficult part of these advances was that most of the time we were under German artillery fire which was most accurate. This land was German land and the German artillery units knew the exact distances to almost any place and as soon as our movement was observed, the shells would start to land. When this happened we would dive for any indentation in the land or get behind any building or raised object, anything that would offer some protection from the flying shrapnel. And I would pray to God to stop the barrage. In my mind I would repeat over and over the 23rd Psalm, especially the verse that says *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."* Somehow, praying always seemed to help me endure the shellings which eventually stopped. When the shelling stopped, we would get up and move out, continuing our attack. It wasn't only the shelling that stopped us. The German infantry was also firing at us. The German machine gun was very fearsome. It could fire at the rate of 1100 rounds a minute compared to my gun that had a rate of 750 rounds a minute. The noise that it made was like ripping a sheet of paper and when we heard it we hit the ground instantly. The action that I have described was not continuously taking place. Most of the time, since we moved at night, we were not observed and were able to cover a lot of ground without being directly engaged in a firefight.

The weather became bitter. It was winter and the daytime temperature was at or below freezing most of the time. During the night it dropped into the twenties or below. Most of the time, it seemed to be sleeting or snowing. There were many times when we were moving from one position to another, my hands and feet would be so cold that I could not feel them. Many of the guys developed frostbite of the hands and feet and had to be evacuated to a hospital for treatment. Sometimes the treatment required amputation of fingers, hands, toes and feet. I was lucky, I never developed frostbite or trench foot, a more severe form of frostbite.

We had been issued winter clothing as soon as we went to Holland and now that the weather had turned so cold I wore all of it. In a letter home I described what I was wearing to keep warm. I wrote: "I am wearing two pairs of long underwear and two sweat shirts, two sweaters, my olive drab wool pants and shirt, two pairs of sox, my field jacket and sometimes, if needed, my heavy wool overcoat. Over all of this I wore my raincoat. I wrapped a wool scarf around my neck so that it also covered most of my face

and my head; under my helmet I wore a wool cap that had ear flaps and of course wool gloves on my hands." Looking back at that description, it is difficult to imagine how I was able to move with the weight and bulk of all of it. Most of the time we were wet from the sleet and snow but, somehow we all managed.

Fortunately we weren't spending a lot of time in foxholes. When we captured a city or village we stayed in that place for a day or two. During that time we occupied buildings or houses and immediately built fires in whatever was available. Most houses had stoves in which we could burn wood or coal bricks. I had never seen a coal brick before. They were used by the Germans to provide heat and to be used in their kitchen stoves. The stoves were similar to the wood burning stove my grandmother used in her kitchen to cook and bake food. A coal brick was made of pulverized coal, mixed with a binder, and formed into the shape of a brick. Every home had them. They burned evenly and produced a lot of heat. They saved the day for many of us and once inside the first thing we did was start a fire in the stove. When we knew we would be in a building for several days, we cooked our rations, supplemented with potatoes and onions from a garden and canned food that the German family had preserved and stored in the cellar. We also heated water using our helmets as basins and washed ourselves and some of our clothes.

Sometime near Thanksgiving we entered Eschweiler. The only thing I remember about that was carefully crossing on a long bridge that had been destroyed and lay partially submerged in the river. After the city was secured, my company was assigned a section of the city and my machine gun section was assigned a building to occupy. The building was a combination of what we would call a hardware store with apartments on the second floor. The name on the building was Franz Wolff and later we learned that his family owned the business and the building.

The day before our division captured Eschweiler, my company had occupied a small village on the outskirts of the city. It was late afternoon and our cooks had arrived in jeeps carrying hot food. They set up a chow line in a building nearby. Bill and I and Bob Teasck started to go for chow when a jeep drove up and stopped in front of the building where we had taken shelter. There were three men riding in the back of the jeep and they climbed out and stood in the street. In less than a minute, two mortar shells landed on the roof of the building we were in and one landed in the street near the jeep. The three men were wounded before we could greet them. They were three replacements for our company and we never got to say hello. We loaded them back into the jeep and they were rushed to an aid station. I would judge that they had the shortest combat experience possible. I don't know if they survived, but if they did they had some story to tell. The delivery of the mortar shells told us that the Germans had an observer nearby that could see us and that we had to be extra cautious in moving about.

Our stay in Eschweiler lasted for several days. Bill Hura, Bob Teasck, Wilbur Nero, my squad's first replacement, and I along with several others took over the apartment above the hardware store. The family that had lived in it prior to our arrival had left it and probably joined with many other German citizens when they evacuated the city. I don't remember seeing any German citizens in the city during the short time that we were there. The apartment was quite comfortable and we made it more so.

Wilbur Nero was a great scavenger. He would go out and go through other buildings, and if he saw something that he thought we could use or that would make us more comfortable, he would bring it back to the apartment. I don't know what the owners of the apartment did when they returned after the war ended and found other peoples' furniture, china, and silverware in their home. I imagine that there were many arguments with friends and neighbors over who the stuff belonged to.

We used everything in the apartment that made us comfortable. We ate our rations using their china and never washed a dish. We drank coffee using their cups and beer mugs; the larger the mug the better we liked it. We slept on their beds never taking off our uniforms. There was no running water or electricity so we used candles and got water from the temporary kitchen that had been set up by our cooks. We did not try to destroy the apartment; however, we were not too careful in how we used it. When we moved out to go into another attack, the apartment was much worse than when we had arrived. I guess it was our way of getting even with the Germans for causing the war.

After we left Eschweiler, the rear echelon troops and service companies moved in and turned it into a Rest and Relaxation Center for those on the front who were actually doing the fighting. Our battalion returned several times before Christmas for rest, re-equipping, and relaxation. We found that many improvements had been made.

There was electricity in certain areas and there were many army kitchens in operation. It was easy to get a good meal. A German movie theater named The Apollo was reopened by a service company and the latest movies from the U.S. were shown there continuously. They were free and we could go to them whenever we wanted; however, it was not like going to the movies back home. In a letter that I wrote home, I described going to the movies as follows;

> *Going to the show here is quite different than going at home. The movie is given indoors and boy do the G.I. Joes pack the place. Some of the boys have a week's growth of beard, are muddy and have torn clothes (front line troops); others are clean shaven and look good (rear echelon troops). You sit down if you are lucky and look around. The "Joe" next to you has a rifle across his lap; the boy in front of you is carrying a sub machine gun. You see, everyone comes armed. I'll bet that if the producer of the picture had to stand on the stage before all of those clean, happy, smiling faces he would say 'please let them like it'. Once the picture starts, all is forgotten and everyone just becomes a movie fan once again and goes on enjoying himself'. Sometime just before Christmas, I got to see "Saratoga Trunk" with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman at the Apollo Theater.*

There is one incident that I will always associate with Eschweiler and will always remember. It happened when our stay at Franz Wolff's ended and we were told to get ready that we were moving out. The words "moving out" always produced a chill in all of us because it meant that we were going back into combat. I put on my gear and headed out of the apartment to go down the stairs to where our company was forming up. The door to the apartment next to ours was open, and just outside the door, sitting on the floor, curled up in a fetal position was the sergeant of a machine gun squad. He had all of his equipment on but was unable to move. He kept saying that he could not go out there again and was paralyzed with fear. I and Dick Reardon, who was in a mortar squad, tried to encourage him to move, but he could not. He wanted to but just could not. Finally, Dick and I had to get down to the street and join the others so we just left him there on the floor, leaning against the wall crouched down with his hands clasped around his legs crying. Later that day, Dick and I went to the captain of our company and explained to him what had happened to the sergeant. We did not want the sergeant to be charged with desertion. The captain said that he was glad that we had come forward to advise him and that he would see what he could do to get the sergeant assigned to a rear echelon job where there would be no fear of combat. I never saw the sergeant again.

I remember this incident because it illustrates how the horror of combat can destroy a person both physically and mentally. This condition was named Combat Fatigue. It was not uncommon.

"G" Company moved out of Eschweiler on foot in the beginning of December. None of us knew where we were going. We soon found out that we were going to join with the rest of the 2nd Battalion in the campaign to drive the Germans out of the Ruhr Valley and that our first objective was to reach the Roer River. For the next few weeks we were in continuous combat. Sometimes we were the lead company in attacking a town or village. Other times we were in battalion reserve when other companies in our battalion led the attack. Being in reserve meant that our company was held some distance behind the attacking company and could be called in to help them if they needed more strength or had accomplished a breakthrough and needed help in exploiting it. Being in reserve never removed us far from the fighting, except when we were in Regimental reserve, but it did give us time to rest, receive replacements, and pick up new supplies of food and ammunition.

The forward movement of our attack was never in a straight line. Most often, my company would be required to move from one location to another as demanded by the attack. That meant hiking over fields and broken ground or through woods, sometimes in daylight and many times at night in order to gain a better position for the attack or to bypass a particularly difficult German

strong point. We covered many miles during the campaign and most of the time we were subjected to enemy artillery fire. When we encountered an enemy strong point, we received small arms and machine gun fire from the defenders. When this happened we would hit the ground and dig foxholes or crawl to a ditch or some other form of protection until the firing subsided. We received devastating support from our own artillery. Spotters for our artillery often times were integrated into our battalion and if we hit a troubled spot they would call for our artillery to drop shells on the enemy position. The Germans feared our artillery and for good reason. We had lots of it and it was very accurate. It saved the day for us many times.

This phase of our campaign took us into or near the cities of Weisweiler, Frenz, Inden, and many other smaller villages. Each place had to be captured or overrun. "G" Company was involved directly or in support of other attacking companies in our battalion during this phase of the campaign. Our battalion was one of three in our Regiment, the 414th. Our Regiment was one of three Regiments, the 413th and the 415th in our 104th Division and we were all pushing towards the Roer River. My memory of this time is very confused and I do not have a clear picture of what contribution Bill and I or our machine gun section made in the outcome of the battles. I do remember hiking from one place to another at night, diving for cover to escape enemy fire, being soaking wet, cold and dirty all of the time and developing dysentery. We were there and that is all that I can say about this very confusing time. The final attack in this campaign took us to the Roer River, the first major objective of the campaign and I do remember that attack very clearly.

Pier, a fairly large town on the west bank of the Roer River, was our final objective. It was now near the middle of December and orders were received that "G" Company was to be one of the lead units in the attack on the town. None of us were happy about that and I think that I had almost reached the end of my courage and endurance. I know that I prayed to God that the attack would be called off, but it wasn't.

We hiked to our jumping off line during the night reaching it just before dawn. About 200 yards across a flat field, similar to potato fields back home, we could see Pier. "G" Company spread out along the invisible "jump off line" about 100 yards long. Our attack was to be made on a broad front. We would have to run 200 yards across the flat field, where we would have no protection until we entered the edge of the town.

Our officers told us to stay quiet and rest as long as we could and that the attack was to begin shortly after dawn and was to be preceded by a very heavy artillery barrage prior to our jumping off. A final instruction was to give a rebel yell as loud as we could as we raced across the field and charged into the town. We had a number of guys from the South in our company and that must have made them happy.

The artillery barrage arrived on schedule and was intense when it fell on the part of the town that we were to enter. When it lifted we waited a short time and finally the signal to charge was given. I started to run as fast as I could, screaming like a wild man, not even knowing if I could run that distance. I picked out a barn at the edge of the village and headed for it. I fully expected to be hit by a bullet before I reached the barn. When I was almost to the barn, I remember saying to myself "I'm going to make it." I repeated this over and over until I slammed into the side of the barn and stopped. Bill and my other buddies also made it. We rested for a few minutes and then advanced slowly to a farm house inside the town. We entered the farm house to get more protection and discovered that the Germans had been eating at a table in the kitchen and had left in such a hurry that the food was still warm. Apparently our attack had taken the Germans completely by surprise and now they were running to the river to cross to the other side. By noon, Pier was secured and we were in the process of setting up outposts in case of a counter attack.

Later in the day, our good cooks had reached our area, had set up a chow line and were giving us hot food. Pier was one of the most heavily destroyed cites that I had ever seen. It was just a pile of rubble from one end to the other. It had been bombed by our Air Force; it had been shelled repeatedly and several attempts had been made to capture it before we were successful. It was very important to the Germans and to us because it was on the Roer River and could be used as a jumping

off point for our crossing of the Roer that was soon to follow. Our company took quite a few prisoners at Pier. A lot of them were the same age as we were which, for some reason, surprised me. I thought that they would be older.

At the end of the day, my squad was assigned a house on the very end of the main street of the town to be an outpost to warn of enemy patrol activity or possible counter attacks. We occupied the house for three or four days and made it quite comfortable. Our officers told us to tighten up our security and to be very alert as to identifying any men dressed in American uniforms who tried to enter the town, especially during the night. They said that there had been rumors of German soldiers dressed as G.I.s driving army jeeps and speaking slang English, the way we would, trying to get through our lines. We also heard rumors that the Germans had launched a big attack south of us. This was the beginning of the German counter offensive on December 16th in the Ardennes Forest, that became known as the Battle of the Bulge. We knew very little of what was going on or where it was happening. We did not know it, but their attack temporarily halted plans for our division to cross the Roer River and continue our drive to reach the Rhine River about 15 miles away.

On December 19th, "G" Company was pulled out of Pier and began hiking away from the front. I remember the sense of relief I felt when I realized that we were going away from the fighting. We hiked back to Eschweiler and were told that we would be there for a few days. Once again we took over someone's home and made it our own. The news of the German offensive was not good. We learned that they had overrun the 106th Infantry Division and were trying to get to Liege, Belgium. Our division was being repositioned to form defensive positions on what would be the northern shoulder of their drive if they were able to get that far.

Christmas was fast approaching and we tried to get into the Christmas spirit. We found that German families celebrated Christmas the same way we did. Searching through the houses, we found Christmas decorations very similar to those that we used back home, so we appropriated them. We cut a small tree and decorated it with the German decorations, supplementing them with creations of our own. There was no electricity so there were no lights, but the decorated tree looked great to us. Adding to the spirit was the number of letters and packages from home that we were receiving. I am still amazed at how efficient the military postal system was. No matter where we were, if we stopped for a few days the mail from home reached us. The mail clerk who delivered the mail, no matter how dangerous the situation, became the hero to all of us. I was blessed because every mail call brought me letters from home and especially letters from Peg who wrote to me almost every day. No one who has not been in our situation could ever know what those letters and packages meant to us. The letters from Peg filled my heart with love and I read and re-read them. They were the beauty in all of the ugliness that I experienced each day. They gave me hope that one day I would be with her. All packages were shared and for a short period of time, we had the Christmas spirit.

On Christmas Eve, orders came down that "G" Company was going to move from Birgel to a village named Burzbuir. It was about 3 miles distant and closer to the Roer River. We were told that before we reached the village we were going to dig in defensive positions in the fields on the outskirts of the village near the river in case the Germans would pull a surprise attack taking advantage of Christmas when they thought our guard would be relaxed. It was bitter cold and we hiked up the road leading to Burzbuir. It must have been 8 or 9 o'clock at night when we reached a field and were told to spread out and start digging in. Bill and I selected a spot and started to dig. It was almost impossible. The ground was covered with snow and frozen solid. The other guys found the same situation. We were supposed to keep as quiet as possible but all across the field there was cussing and the clanging of shovels as we tried to break through the frozen ground. Eventually, by chipping away with our entrenching tool, we broke through the frozen ground, which was 6 to 8 inches thick, and started to make headway in making our foxhole deeper. We finally got down about 4 feet and stopped. Now the cold of the night hit us. The procedure for being on guard in a foxhole was for one person to be awake while the other tried to sleep in the bottom of the foxhole. It was so cold that staying awake even for one hour became a challenge. I couldn't control my shivering. The only thing that I wanted to do was curl up in the foxhole and cover myself with anything that I had in my field pack to try to keep warm. Bill and I took turns, but I am sure that

there were times when both of us were asleep at the same time. I think that Bill and I wrapped up in our shelter halves (half of a pup tent) that we each carried in our packs.

Somehow we got through the night and there was no attack. Later some of the guys said that they could hear the Germans on the other side of the Roer River singing Christmas carols. I did not hear them. Sometime before dawn we left our defensive positions and hiked into the village of Burzbuir. I was so cold that I could not feel my hands or feet. It must have been below zero all night. It was the coldest day that I have ever experienced. In the village we were assigned houses and told to go inside and try to get warm and to rest. All civilians had left the village long before we got there. Bill and I and the rest of our squad went into a house and fortunately there was a cooking stove in the kitchen. We filled it with wood and coal bricks and soon had a roaring fire in it.

The stove had an oven in the bottom much like the one that my grandmother used to do her baking. The door was opened so that more heat would get out into the room. None of us was fully aware of what we were doing and as we started to get warm we started to remove some of the equipment that we carried. Field packs came off, as did bandoliers of 30 caliber ammunition that some of the guys carried. Also hand grenades and other things that would be uncomfortable to lie on when we spread out on the floor to sleep. I remember seeing two hand grenades and a bandolier of 30 caliber bullets lying on the oven door. The hand grenades were mine. Somehow the oven door got closed and the grenades and bandolier went into the oven unnoticed by anyone. We all lay down on the floor and went to sleep.

I don't know how long I slept but it probably wasn't too long when I was wakened up by what sounded like rifle shots. I instantly knew what it was. I remembered the bullets and grenades on the oven door and saw that the door was closed. I pulled the door open and pulled the grenades and bandolier out of the oven. The 30 caliber bullets were exploding and the slugs were flying around the room. I put the bullets on the floor and stood on them hoping that when they exploded the slugs would stay close to the floor. The other guys were now awake and I yelled that they should get out of the room which they did quickly. I continued to stand on the bandolier and I stared at the hand grenades on the oven door and prayed that they would cool down and not explode. They did and everything returned to normal. I think that I got some sleep after that, but that is one experience that I will never forget. It was the second close call that I had had with my hand grenades. The first was in Holland the day before my 20th birthday.

It was now Christmas Day and a messenger came to the house that we were fixing up and told us that a Catholic chaplain had reached the village and was going to give a Christmas service for any Catholics who wanted to attend. A little later, the messenger came back and told us that the Protestant minister was unable to reach our village but that the Catholic priest was going to give a Protestant Christmas service to any Protestants that wanted to attend. I, with several of my buddies, went to the service. It was conducted in a way that was very similar to those given in my church back home. The Chaplain led us in prayer, gave a Christmas message, and we sang a few Christmas carols. It was short, but effective. I was glad that I had attended.

A second blessing that we received that day was served by our Company cooks. At the beginning of the war, President Roosevelt had vowed that every member of the United States Armed Forces would be served a turkey dinner at Thanksgiving and Christmas no matter where they were, if it was at all possible to get the dinner to them. We had received our Thanksgiving turkey dinner just before we captured Eschweiler, and now once again our cooks had performed their magic. A messenger brought word to us that our cooks had set up a chow line in a building near us and that we should go, a few at a time, and get the hot meal. Burzbuir was a very small village and we did not have far to go. I took my mess kit and canteen and went to get the meal. It truly was a turkey dinner and the cooks filled my mess kit and canteen with as much as they would hold. In a letter home, I described the meal as follows: "we had turkey (plenty of it, potatoes, beets, corn, bread, coffee and fruit salad." I took my meal and went back to the house that we were occupying and joined my buddies in celebrating Christmas. Fortunately the Germans did not disturb us in any way that day.

The German attack in the Ardennes Forest south of us was pushing back our lines on that front and was causing a lot of casualties to our men. The concern was so great that all offensive action on our front

was postponed. Our primary job now became to strengthen our defensive position along the Roer River and to improve our defensive positions south of us. As a result of all of this, the plan for my division to cross the Roer River and continue our offensive towards Cologne was put on hold. For the next six weeks we stayed in or near Burzbuir.

On a number of occasions, I, along with other men in my company, were assigned to a work group and trucked into the Hurtgen Forest south of us to construct defensive positions in the forest. We dug foxholes, mortar pits, bunkers and trenches. We cleared branches from the trees, mostly pine trees, to improve visibility in the forest and to create fields of fire in case the Germans tried to advance through the woods. We would be trucked to the defensive site early in the morning and work all day. The trucks would return in late afternoon and take us back to our company. The work was hard, but it was good to be away from the front, and I never objected to having to do it. The forest was covered with snow and it was very cold, but most of the time the days were clear with bright sunlight and, in a way, it was very beautiful.

It was this time during the winter, when the 8-17 bomber formations were the most visible to me. That is to say, their contrails were the most visible. The United States 8th Air Force stationed in England was now sending 1000 plane formations into Germany. Many of the formations flew over us. They flew at altitudes of 20 to 30 thousand feet. It was very difficult to see the bombers at that altitude, but their contrails against the bright blue winter sky made a very impressive and beautiful sight. We could not see the German fighter planes that continuously attacked them, but, occasionally, we would see a contrail leave the formation and when the disabled bomber reached a lower altitude we could see the bomber slowly spinning towards the ground. Many times we could see parachutes floating to the ground. They always landed in Germany well beyond a place where we could help the airmen. These were the times when we were really saddened by the sight. At other times, we would look up at the formations and yell "GIVE THEM HELL YOU GUYS, GIVE THEM HELL!!!" as they passed over. It is difficult to imagine that when a thousand plane raid was passing over us there were 10,000 men in the air at the same time.

"G" Company remained in Burzbuir for a number of weeks. I celebrated New Year's Eve there. It wasn't a bad place to be. Burzbuir was a very small farm village located about a mile from the Roer River. We could see the Roer from the village and directly across the river was the great industrial city of Duren. It didn't occur to me that we would be crossing the Roer and attacking that city in the near future.

Sometime near the middle of February, my battalion was moved back to Eschweiler for a rest. It was during this time that I, with some of my buddies, was sent to a large VII Corps Rest Camp that may have been located in Brand, Germany. It was here that I got my first shower since the one that I had taken back in France in September. A number of shower platforms were in a very large tent. It was an assembly line procedure because the camp had to service hundreds of men each day. We took off all of our clothes, stood in line, and climbed onto the shower platform when it was our turn. The shower was limited to three minutes; one minute to get wet, one minute to soap up and one minute to rinse off. The control of the shower was with a non-com and was tightly controlled. Once dry, I stood in a line and, much to my surprise, was issued a clean uniform, including sox and underwear. This truly was a blessing. In the field, we tried to keep clean as best we could but we never changed our clothes and actually never took them off. Needless to say, the clothes that I turned in were filthy. After the shower, I was given a blanket and was told to find a place to sleep. I felt like a new man.

I walked around for a while and later found a building that was already crowded with other guys sleeping on the floor. I found a corner in one of the rooms and slept on the floor until the morning. It was probably the best night's sleep that I had in a long time because I did not have to stand guard or worry about incoming shells that we had to contend with on the front. The next morning, I found a chow line and got a good breakfast. Then I started to look for a movie theater that was on the base. Before I found it, an announcement was made on a public address system calling for all Company "G" men to form up at the motor pool to be returned to their unit. This was a great disappointment to me because I thought that I would be in the rest camp for three days. I got back to my company just

in time to move back to Eschweiler.

Back in Eschweiler, we were given a final inspection of clothing, equipment and weapons. The German offensive in the Ardennes had been stopped and was being pushed back. The plans for our offensive, that had been put on hold, were now activated. We were in Eschweiler for about a week and then one night "G" company was transported by truck to a German town on the Roer River opposite Duren on the other side of the river. It was February 23rd and the Division attack of Duren was about to start. The second battalion, my battalion, was to be in the second wave to cross the Roer. We got into position during the 24th and during the night of Feb. 24th "G" company crossed the Roer River and joined in the attack or Duren. The easy life of the last six weeks was over.

I can't leave this part of my story without describing an event that happened to my machine gun section just before we left Eschweiler to join the attack on Duren. It indicates the schoolboy attitude that we still had about combat even after having been in it for weeks. It is a fond memory that I have and one of the few tales of the war that I have told others.

My machine gun section was occupying a room on the second floor of a building in Eschweiler. We knew that very soon we would be involved in the crossing of the Roer River and the attack on Duren. Lieutenant Marty Meyer, who was now leader of our 4th platoon, having been given that assignment because we had lost our original platoon leader and most of our non-coms, came up to our room carrying a bottle of whiskey, a ration that officers received periodically. He said that he wanted to share it with us. Lt. Meyer knew most of us because he had been platoon leader of the second platoon when we were at Camp Carson. He told us that we would soon be attacking Duren and told us to find some glasses. He opened his bottle and poured each of us a good sized drink. Then in a schoolboy way, we all raised our glasses and drank a toast saying "I'll see you in Duren" then we threw our glasses against the wall. Without saying much more, the Lieutenant left us. That was the first drink of whiskey that I had ever had and I choked on the first swallow. Fortunately, when the attack of Duren was over, we were all there unharmed. Years later, at one of our Division reunions, I reminded Marty of that incident and we both laughed.

GERMANY
(Combat on German Soil)
Duren to Golzheim, My Last Days of Combat

February 24, 1945 (Saturday)—My company had been holding several villages on the Roer River since the end of December 1944. First there was Birgle, then Burzbuir, and now we were forming up getting ready to cross the Roer River and attack the city of Duren. Rumors had been going around for weeks that the big move to cross the Roer River was imminent. We thought that it was to begin in early February, but the Germans who were expecting the attack had opened two large dams south of us to flood the Roer and the surrounding lowlands. The flooding had made the river much wider and the current very swift. The river had overflown the river banks and flooded the land that would have to be crossed to get to the river. Because of this the attack had been postponed several times. Now the river had returned almost to its normal size and the orders had come down that we were to get ready to move out.

We did not know it, but the attack had started the previous night on February 23rd. Two battalions of the 413th and 415th regiments had crossed the river that night and had overrun a part of Duren and several small towns on the other side of the river. They had fought all day on the 24th and had established a good bridgehead on the east side of the river. Division engineers had constructed bridges across the river during the day so when our time to cross came we had an easy time of it.

The background for the attack that I have written above came from reading the division history. We knew that the dams had been opened and that the crossing had been postponed several times because of the flooding that it caused. We also knew when the word came to get ready to move out that we were going to cross the Roer. I remember very little about my actual crossing of the river.

Our crossing took place around 11 PM on Feb. 24th. I imagine that we all ran as fast as we

could to get across the bridge as quickly as possible. The first thing that I remember after crossing was running down what had been a wide street. The street was pitted with huge craters made by bombs dropped by our air force and by our artillery that had shelled the city heavily just prior to the initial crossing. The buildings alo.ng the street were not much more than piles of rubble. Even though it was near midnight, the whole area was enveloped in a golden light that was coming from the many buildings that were burning. The light made me very uneasy because it made us very visible to the enemy. Usually in a night attack the visibility is very limited and provided us with a degree of safety.

As we advanced at a good pace down the street, a small airplane flew over us. It was similar to our Piper Cub used for reconnaissance and was clearly visible in the glow of the fires from the burning buildings below. The plane was only a few hundred feet above the ground and banking right over us. I could see the swastika on the plane and the pilot who was peering down at us. I, along with Bill and several others, ran at a record setting speed and dove into the first bomb crater that we came to. At first, we did not realize that the pilot was only trying to see what was going on down below. We were afraid that he would strafe us or be followed by fighter planes that would. He did neither and continued to fly over the city and disappeared. Needless to say, my adrenalin was really flowing as I climbed out of the crater and continued into the city.

Our advance continued almost unopposed. The Germans had apparently withdrawn and only fired a few shells into us during the night. Our advance continued until dawn when we were told to stop and to occupy the buildings nearest us and wait for new orders. I went into what appeared to be an apartment building and waited. At dawn our cooks drove up and set up a chow line. We all ate hot food and then somebody asked if we had any mail that they could take back. I did not have any mail, but I thought this would be a good time to send a souvenir back home if I could find one. I went back into the building that I had been in and searched for something small that I could put into a K ration box for mailing. A K ration was one meal contained in a waxed box a little larger than a Cracker Jack box. We carried them when there was little likelihood that our cooks could bring us food. I found a Nazi flag, about 2x3 feet and several small Nazi pennants that were mounted on small staffs to be used by children and the civilians to wave when their troops paraded. I removed the pennants from the small staffs and folded them with the flag and stuffed them into an empty K ration box, wrapped it with paper that I found, tied it up and addressed it home. I gave it to one of the cooks who took it back for mailing. Sure enough it reached Mom and Pop and I still have the flags. These items were the only souvenirs that I ever sent home, except for some paper money from the various countries that I had been in.

It was now early afternoon of Feb. 25th and we were told to move out and get ready for our next attack. We moved out and hiked for a short distance until we came to a group of Sherman tanks parked in a large courtyard in a village, I later learned that it was named Marzenich. We were told that we would be riding on the tanks when we made our next attack against the town of Golzheim which was about three miles away. We had never done this before and, as a matter of fact, we had rarely seen a tank when we were attacking any place. A new strategy was being implemented which would give us increased firepower and fast forward movement. The idea was to get the Germans on the run and keep them running so that they would not have time to dig in new defensive positions. I was kind of pleased that I would not be advancing by foot over open ground making a pretty good target for the enemy. The rest of the guys felt the same way.

We milled around for a while until orders came for us to climb up in the back of the tanks. There is a flat area behind the turret of the tank that can hold six to eight men and their equipment if everyone holds on to something when the tank is moving. Bill and I climbed up on our assigned tank with the rest of our squad. There were probably eight on our tank. This was a new experience for all of us including the tankers, the guys driving the tanks. We were all laughing and talking to the tankers who were just as nervous as we were. It was now early evening and the order to move out was given.

The group of tanks, three or four I think, started up and moved out into the field that we had to pass over to get to Golzheim. The tanks didn't move very fast but we all had to grab something to keep from

falling off. We were still joking with each other about this new experience. We, or at least I, felt more secure and less apprehensive as we went into this attack knowing that the tanks were going to give us a lot of protection both during our advance and during the attack when they would be shelling and machine gunning the town before we entered it. Just the presence of the tanks would throw fear into the Germans as their tanks did to us.

As we approached Golzheim, the tank that I was on started to rotate the turret. As it turned, it began to push me off the side of the tank. I grabbed a rope that was attached to the tank and put my feet on a little ledge just above the rotating track and held on for dear life. I remember shouting to Bill and the others "Peg should see me now" and everyone laughed. I managed to hang on and never really felt any danger and the turret swung back to point front and I was able to regain my place on the back of the tank. All these years later, I remember that incident and can still see it clearly in my mind.

Another incident happened while we were on our tank that wasn't quite so funny. It was dusk and we were 500 or 600 yards in front of Golzheim when our tank once again turned the turret so that the cannon was aiming to our left where off in the distance we could see the silhouette of tanks approaching Golzheim from another field almost perpendicular to us, Our tanker, thinking that these were German tanks coming into the town, began to fire his 50 caliber machine gun at them. We watched from our position on the tank as the 50 caliber tracers hit in the area of the other tanks. It turned out that they were our tanks coming in the attack from another position. Fortunately the tanks had radios and the identity was quickly established and the firing stopped. We learned that two men riding on one of the wrongly identified tanks had been wounded.

The tank that I was riding on stopped several hundred yards in front of Golzheim, which was a small farm village in the center of fields of flat, open farmland. The other tanks in our group also stopped and were in line abreast of our tank. It was dark now and was probably near 10 PM. The night was clear with some moonlight. We were told to dismount from the tank and to get behind them. The tankers began to fire shells into the village and when they stopped we were told to advance on foot into the village. This was the beginning of our attack, but the tanks remained where they were. We spread out and walked over the open field and up a road that led into the village. We could see 30 to 40 feet in front of us in the dim moonlight and from the fires that were burning in the village. As I approached the first houses on the edge of the village, I saw shadowy shapes coming towards me. At first I thought that the shapes were of some of the men from our company who were in the attack. As the shapes got closer, I realized that they were German soldiers coming towards us with their hands raised above their heads. We continued to advance and they continued to come towards us until they were mixed right in with us. We did not have enough men to stop and take charge of them so we just gave arm signals to indicate that they were to continue to walk to our rear where we hoped that the tankers and others who were behind us would round them up and take charge of them. It was obvious that they did not want to fight anymore and they continued to our rear with their hands raised above their heads. I thought later that they could have easily escaped capture once they passed through us by slipping away in the darkness because there were not many of our guys behind us at that time.

We continued into the village, stopping here and there cleaning out houses and rounding up Germans who surrendered. I don't remember how long it took to secure the village but I, with Bill and others in our company, reached the other side of the village and could see that there was nothing in front of us but a few haystacks and darkness. We were told to stop in place and to occupy the buildings that were nearest to us. I was looking at the haystacks approximately 50 yards in front of me, as were men of another squad from our platoon. We agreed that Germans could come across the field hidden by the haystacks and attack us and we would never see them because of the darkness and they would be on us before we could be ready. We decided that the haystacks should be set on fire to illuminate the approach to the village. We did not know if there were Germans near the haystack so our plan was that the squad would advance down what appeared to be a road leading from the village and stay well to the right of the haystacks and that while they were moving forward I would fire into and around the stacks for several minutes. We had estimated that the squad would be adjacent to the stack in about two minutes and would stop and wait until I stopped firing then they would run to the stack and set in on fire. This worked perfectly

and the squad returned safely. The haystack burned all night and lighted the field and beyond as we thought it would. Little did I know that shooting into a haystack would be the last shots that I would ever fire during WWII.

The building that we occupied that night was an old farmhouse surrounded by a wall. The entrance to a courtyard behind the wall was through an archway that was like a very small tunnel. Sometime after the attack ended, I, with Bill Hura, Arnold Penning, Joe Lynch, Jack Sterm, and others, went into the house and probably instantly fell asleep. We had been awake for at least 48 hours and were dead tired. The next thing that I knew it was daylight and some of the guys were looking out of the window watching a battalion of Sherman tanks advancing across the field on the edge of Golzheim to attack the next town that we could see about two miles away. In order to get a better view, I went outside and stood in the entrance to the courtyard under the archway. During the night, a Sherman tank had pulled under the archway and a tank crewman and I watched the other tanks (approximately 16) advance across the field. It was about 6 AM and was clear and sunny. The tanks in the attack were lined up four abreast and four rows deep.

Each tank was separated from the other by 75 to 100 yards and the first row of tanks had reached the buildings at the edge of the village. The tank formation seemed as though the tanks were on a checker board, and as we watched, some of the lead tanks began to burn and we could see tank crewmen coming back towards our village on foot. It was obvious that the lead tanks were being hit with German artillery. There were no infantrymen involved in the attack that I could observe. I remember thinking at the time that the tanks were sitting ducks out there in the field as they moved on the town.

Suddenly, and without any warning what-so-ever, I was enveloped by a brilliant white light and the sound of a very loud explosion. Instantly I knew that a shell had landed a few yards from me and my panicked thoughts said "that was really close" and "how did I ever escape being hit by it." I did not feel any pain. I thought that once again I had been lucky and had not been hit. I dove to the ground further back under the archway for protection. This all happened simultaneously and in a microsecond. Lying on the ground, I still felt fine but wanted to get further back into the courtyard, so I started to crawl. It was when I tried to pull my left leg under me and it did not move that I knew that I had been hit. I called out loudly for a medic and when I took a deep breath to cry out I felt warm blood flowing down across my chest and stomach under my shirt. I now knew that I had been hit in more than one place. I still did not feel any pain and really never did. Some of the guys got to me within minutes and started to take care of me. I don't know exactly what they did but we had been trained to handle these situations. I assume that they took my first aid kit from my cartridge belt and sprinkled the wounded areas with sulfa powder which was in all kits. Then they probably gave me a shot of morphine and bandaged the wounds. I knew that my left leg was broken, but we had no splints so there was not much more that they could do for me except comfort me and give me encouragement. In a short time, an ambulance drove up, and I was put on a stretcher and loaded in the ambulance. Prior to putting me on the stretcher, I had to take off my full field pack. I unbuckled my cartridge belt and slipped my arms through the straps. When I was lifted up, the field pack and belt stayed on the ground. My 45 caliber automatic pistol, trench knife, canteen, and hand grenades were left behind. My personal belongings in my field pack were left behind, this included my shaving stuff, soap, writing paper and pictures from home, including one of Peg. The only things that I had left were the clothes that I was wearing. Just before the ambulance door was closed, I looked out and saw Arnold Penning standing there and we waved to each other. I don't know who else came to my aid. It never occurred to me that I did not see my buddies Bill Hura or Joe lynch. It wasn't until I was back in the states recovering in Halloran General Hospital, Staten Island that I learned that Bill had been killed by shrapnel from the same shell that hit me. He had been inside the farmhouse not more than ten feet away from where I was standing outside under the archway and was looking out a window watching the tank attack when the shell struck. He died instantly in the arms of another buddy, Joe Lynch. Bill died before I had been taken away, but my buddies did not tell me because they were afraid that the knowledge would cause me some problems.

There was another wounded man in the ambulance. I judged that he was much more severely wounded than I because he was moaning and calling for his mother. I don't know who

he was or if he survived the war. He may have been the tank crewman that I had been talking to when the shell struck. I know that that guy had been hit also. During the ride back to the aid station, I had a feeling of helplessness because I did not have my colt 45 with me. I wondered what I would do if we were intercepted by Germans. This was the first time that I did not have my pistol at my side since arriving in France and I felt defenseless. My other memory of that ride was of having a feeling of relief knowing that I would not be in combat again in the near future and perhaps never.

The ambulance trip to the field hospital was not very long. The hospital had probably been set up in Merzenich, the village where our attack had started. I remember being carried from the ambulance into a room and being placed on a table. Two doctors began to examine me and one of them started questioning me by asking me my name and serial number, etc. By this time my vision was getting a little hazy and I remember snapping at the doctor that all of the information that he was asking for was on my dog tags. The other doctor asked me to start counting backwards starting at ten. That's all that I remember of those minutes on the table. Sodium Pentothal was a wonderful anesthetic. It could be administered as a shot and it acted almost instantly and started to wear off after a few hours. It was a blessing to all of us who had to undergo surgery quickly without an elaborate setup. I will remember this day forever; Monday, February 26, 1945. I was 20 years old.