56th Armored Infantry Battalion

History
Narrative

Compiled By:
John M. Nugent
H/B 56th, CCB
12th Armored Division, APO 262
revised 1994
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A Subject Index to the history of the 56th Armored Infantry, 1942 - 45; including activities and events; people, places, and things. Mostly as experienced and remembered by H/3 Company.

Clothing, Winter. The ETO, 1944/45: Front-line troops fought through a large part of the winter inadequately clothed. Third Army reported in November that 60 per cent of its troops lacked sweaters, 50 per cent lacked a fourth blanket, and 20 per cent lacked overshoes in the proper size. Smaller percentages needed jackets and raincoats. The problem became most acute in December when the weather turned bitterly cold and damp.

Food- Rations, Combat: C Rations- 6 cans, 3 containing meat combinations, and 3 containing biscuits, hard candy, cigarettes, and either coffee or lemon powder or cocoa. The 3 meals weighed 5 pounds. K Rations- Meat products or cheese in small cans. Other items (lemon, coffee, buillon powder; biscuits, candy, gum, cigarettes) in a sealed bag. Each unit enclosed in an inner carton dipped in wax, plus an outer cardboard box. Others- D Ration, 5-in-1, 10-in-1.

Medical Service- First Aid procedures called for a wounded man, if able, to seek protection from fire, examine his injury and assess its severity, sprinkle it with sulfa powder, apply a dressing, and swallow his sulfa tablets. Then he was to get back to the aid station on his own or call for the aidman. Medics on the line confined treatment to the bare minimum needed to fit casualties for immediate further transportation; controlling bleeding, pain and infection; immobilizing broken limbs; and administering plasma.

Medics. 82nd Armored Medical Bn.-- It was found advisable to follow closely behind the combat units because pockets of resistance headed by SS troops would often ambush the rear of the columns. Ambulances were never sent out after 1700 hours (5:00 pm) no matter how serious the condition of the patients. At one point the ambulance haul was over 100 miles to the nearest Evacuation Hospital and all ambulances were on the road.

Supply-- Rolling spearheads require enormous quantities of gasoline, food, ammunition, and other supplies to keep rolling. In one 24 hour period the 12th consumed about 315,000 gallons of gasoline. The division lost only 29 trucks out of about 500 employed.

Trenchfoot-- General Hawley's blunt assessment, "The plain truth is that the footwear furnished U.S. troops is, in general, lousy." During October and November (1944) 11,000 trenchfoot casualties were admitted to the Paris general hospitals from the four American field armies. Trenchfoot is an injury, not an infection. Symptoms-- numbness, followed by swelling; then by intense pain; and in some cases, by tissue death, with gangrene.

Experiences of the wounded at Army Hospitals- Evacuation, Station, General and on Hospital Trains, during the winter of 1944/45 in the ETO.
Further adventures of the wounded in the late spring and summer of 1945- Air Evacuation, Hospital Train, General Hospital, Hospital Ship 'Acadia,' Army Hospitals in the Zone of the Interior (the U.S.)
12th ARMORED DIVISION
History- A Summary

TRAINING
On 15 September 1942, the governors of the states of KENTUCKY and TENNESSEE met at the newly-constructed CAMP CAMPBELL for participation in the activation of the 12th Armored Division. Major General CARLOS BREWER assumed command on the activation of the unit.

Filler replacements began arriving on 24 October 1942 and the usual Mobilization Training Program began on 10 November. Training for the new men was typical of all new units with the normal eccentricsities of the weather of the area, the usual road marches, and first echelon maintenance. Included in the training was a well-publicized athletic program.

On 1 April 1943, the 56th Armored Infantry Regiment with the necessary attachments was given the special mission of guarding a portion of the route of a train trip of President Roosevelt.

The first overnight division exercise began on 27 April. Six weeks later the division, along with other units of the IV Armored Corps, was transferred to Second Army. IV Armored Corps staged a two-day problem on the CAMP CAMPBELL reservation on the 16th and 17th of July.

In August 1943 the Division participated in two preparatory exercises for the coming TENNESSEE maneuvers. The first was a five-day river crossing staged on the nearby CUMBERLAND RIVER. The second was a four-day field exercise involving air-ground training staged at the home station of CAMP CAMPBELL.

On 3 September the units started the move to the south in order to participate in the TENNESSEE maneuvers which lasted from 6 September to 1 November. These same units were involved in eight of the operations of the maneuvers.

Following the maneuvers the division moved to CAMP BARKLEY, TEXAS, where it immediately started reorganization along the new lines which eliminated the regimental organizations and made the battalions self-supporting. Also at this time units received the numerical designations that were retained throughout the entire combat period.

In early 1944, field problems became more frequent. Night driving, scouting and patrolling, and security practice were on the schedule during the month of February. Some of the units were selected to go to FORT BLISS for anti-aircraft firing. Many men were leaving to cadre new units or to join those already overseas. Replacements were being trained and absorbed into units of the division.

On 8 March 1944, the 44th Tank Battalion was relieved from assignment and the 714th Tank Battalion transferred in to take its place. Many of the personnel of the 714th were returning to the division after being separated from it during the reorganization.

In June the Division was scheduled for testing by the War Department to determine if a state of readiness for overseas existed. These tests were never completed. A few days later on 7 July, the 12th Armored Division was en route to CAMP BOWIE for retesting and the rest of July was spent in preparation for shipment overseas...

The Division moved to the NEW YORK PORT OF EMBARKATION where it engaged in a training program in preparation for the ocean voyage. Major General Roderick R. Allen assumed command of the division at this time.

The next training for combat that the units received was in and around TIDWORTH BARRACKS, the spring board for American armored divisions en route to the Continent. Maintenance sections and tank crews were now servicing the new Ford tank engine. Other troops were cleaning and processing new but familiar equipment.

Movement to the Continent and to an area in the Ninth Army zone was accomplished by 22 November 1944. Events soon ended this attachment for, on 27 November, the Division was alerted for an unexpected move to the Seventh Army. By the time of this alert an advance party of officers had observed the combat techniques and tactics of the 2d Armored Division in order to become better prepared for combat with the Ninth Army.
On 27 November the division was assigned to Seventh Army and was ordered to move to LUNEVILLE, arriving there on 2 December. On 5 December the division was assigned to XV Corps and on the same day the division, minus the 493rd, 494th and 495th Armored Field Artillery Battalions, was ordered to move to KIRRBERG. The 493rd and 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalions were sent to the vicinity of DRULINGEN to support the 44th Infantry Division, and the 495th Armored Field Artillery Battalion moved to the vicinity of LE PETITE PIERRE to support the 100th Infantry Division. These armored field artillery battalions were the first units of the division to participate in combat.

By 8 December the division had relieved the 4th Armored Division in its sector and its mission was to support the advance of the 26th Infantry Division in breaching the MAGINOT LINE and continue the attack to the SIEGFRIED LINE. At this time the 12th Armored Division command post was at DOMFESSEL. The three armored field artillery battalions were returned to the division to participate in this action.

During this drive towards the SIEGFRIED LINE the division’s actions were divided into two phases — the first from 7-15 December and the second from 19-25 December.

In the first phase the division was opposed by elements of the 111th Panzer Division which was fighting a delaying action. The 12th Armored Division formation consisted of Combat R on the right, Combat Command A on the left, and Combat Command B in reserve. During this phase none of the units under Combat Command B became heavily engaged with the enemy.

The division’s casualties during its first experience in combat from 7-15 December were 6 officers and 37 enlisted men killed, 16 officers and 141 enlisted men wounded.

The 80th Infantry Division moved into the 12th Armored Division sector and took over its area by 15 December, thus ending the first phase.

In the second phase from 19-25 December the division was opposed by the 257th Volksgrenadier Division which was fighting a defensive action. During this phase the division was involved, at first, in scattered action at BETTVILLER, SINGLING, BINNING and UTWEILER and then, in accordance with Seventh Army’s defense plans, and orders from corps, the division consolidated its forward positions and prepared for the defense of its area. At this time the division command post was at RAHLING.

On 25-26 December the 12th Armored Division was relieved of its defensive mission in the front lines and moved to ALBESTOFF to form the XV Corps reserve.

On 29 December the division became a part of SHAEF reserve. On 31 December the division moved to a bivouac area south of DIEUZE.

The 12th Armored Division remained in SHAEF reserve until it was released to Seventh Army which, on 6 January, ordered Combat Command B to HOCHFELDEN and on 7 January attached it to the 79th Infantry Division under VI Corps control.

On 8 January the rest of the 12th Armored Division was ordered to HOCHFELDEN where it was placed under VI Corps. It was to be the corps reserve, and it was also ordered to maintain a reconnaissance screen along VI Corps’ south boundary.

On 7 January the 79th Infantry Division was fighting in the BISCHWILLER - WEYERSHEIM - DRUSENHEIM area near the RHINE River. Combat Command B was attached to assist in the reduction of the German bridgehead established across the RHINE in the HERRLISHEIM-GAMSHEIM area.

While Combat Command B was to attack to the south and seize HERRLISHEIM the 79th Infantry Division was to attack DRUSENHEIM.
1 Jan., 1945. 6th Army Group: Germans launch offensive, designated Operation NORDWIND, against U.S. Seventh Army. In XV Corps area, two-pronged enemy thrust forces 16th Cav Gp, 47th Div, and 100th Div to give ground. Enemy drives salient into left flank of corps S of Bitche. Enemy threat to Maginot Line positions S of Wissembourg is serious. 14th Arm Div moves to guard Vosges exits.

2 Jan. Enemy threat to Maginot Line positions S of Wissembourg is serious.
8 Jan. Enemy enters Riauling. CCB, 12th Arm Div, attacks with 714th Tank Bn & 56th Arm Inf Bn toward Herrlisheim.

10 Jan. Elements of CCB, 12th Arm Div are virtually surrounded at Herrlisheim, but tanks sever enemy lines in order to reinforce infantry within the town.

11 Jan. CCB, 12th Arm Div, withdraws from Herrlisheim and takes up defensive positions W of Zorn River.

16 Jan. 12th Arm Div attacks to reduce Gambahein bridgehead: infantry elements of CCB cross river SE of Rohrweiler when enemy fire prevents construction of bridge for armor: CCA attacking from Weyersheim toward Offendorf, makes better progress but fails to reach objective.

17 Jan. 12th Arm Div makes little headway against Gambahein bridgehead: CCB is again held up at river SE of Rohrweiler: CCA gains precarious foothold in Herrlisheim with 17th Arm Inf Bn, but 43rd Tank Bn is cut off outside the town and wiped out.

18 Jan. 12th Arm Div continues losing battle against bridgehead, which enemy has reinforced: CCA relinquishes hold on Herrlisheim; attack to relieve elements trapped in the town fails.

19 Jan. 12th Arm Div withdraws for relief and contains enemy attack at line of relief. 36 Inf Div, takes up defensive positions in Rohrweiler-Weyersheim region.

3 Feb. In Fr 1st Army's U.S. XXI Corps area... 12th Arm Div attacked to corps to speed drive S from Colmar toward 1st Corps, attacks through 28th Div from Colmar. CCB sieges bridgeheads across Ill river in vicinity of Sundhoffen and Ste Croix en Plaine: CCR drives S astride Colmar-Rouffach road.

4 Feb. CCB, 12th Arm Div, holds bridgeheads across the Ill until relieved by 109th Inf, 28th Div. CCA captures Hatstatt, on Colmar-Rouffach road, but CCR meets strong opposition NE of there and is unable to progress.

5 Feb. In U.S. XXI Corps area, CCA of 12th Arm Div, jumping off early in morning, drives quickly S from Hatstatt and enters Plaine at 0512; shortly afterward makes contact with 4th Moroccan Mtn Div of Fr Ist Corps, which had arrived at S edge of town earlier. CCR clears Herrlisheim–pre-Colmar, NE of Hatstatt, and is relieved there by 28th Div.

6 Feb. 12th Arm Div provides fire support for 28th Div, blocks exits from the Vosges, and eliminates isolated pockets of enemy.

11 Feb. 12th Arm Div is attached to Corps and takes over screening mission formerly held by CCB, 10th Arm Div.

28 Feb. In accordance with orders of 25 Feb, 63rd and 70th Inf Divs, 12th Arm Div, and 101st Cav Gp, all formerly within XV Corps zone, pass to control of XXI Corps in current positions.

17 Mar. 12th Arm Div, which was to have exploited through 63rd Div, is transferred to XX Corps, Third Army.

18 Mar. 12th Arm Div, with CCB on left and CCB on right, begins drive thru 94th Div toward the Rhine in the Warm area.

19 Mar. 12th Arm Div ordered to veer to the SE to the Rhine and seize all bridges found intact.

20 Mar. CCB cuts the Autobahn, mounts it and races to the Rhine near Grunstadt. 1st platoon, B Co, 56th AIB, reaches the Rhine at 2330.

21 Mar. 17th AIB, CCR reaches the Rhine at 0100.

24 Mar. CCR clears Speyer after a rough fight. CCA occupies Ludwigshafen.

24 Mar. 12th Arm Div reverts to control of XXI Corps and the Seventh Army.

28 Mar. 12th Arm Div crosses the Rhine shortly after midnight. CCA and CCB ordered to pass through the 3rd Infantry Div and advance to Wurzburg.

31 Mar. BBC announces: "The U.S. Seventh Army's 12th Arm Div, near Wurzburg, is the farthest Allied unit into Germany at this time."

5 April. CCA bypasses Wurzburg, advancing to the NE toward Schweinfurt. TF Fields, CCB attacks to take Kitzingen. CCR continues to the NE.

11 April. CCB advanced to the S and SE.

13 April. CCA assisted in the capture of Schweinfurt. Division received word of its new mission of exploiting territory S of Nurnberg.

17 April. Because of a change in Army and Corps boundaries, the mission of the 12th Arm Div was changed and Munich was given as the direction of attack.

22 April. TF 1, CCA, reached the Danube at Lausen. TF 2, Reached the Danube at Dillingen and captured a bridge intact. TF Fields, CCB, attached to CCA to assist in holding the bridgehead.

27 April. 12th Arm Div advanced against scattered resistance. CCA and CCB crossed over the newly constructed Lech River bridges.

3 May. CCA crossed the Austrian border.

4 May. 12th Arm Div ordered withdrawn from the front lines and made Seventh Army reserve.

8 May. VE Day.
R-5-5-T-R-I-O-T-E-D

HEADQUARTERS 12TH ARMORED DIVISION
Camp Campbell, Kentucky

September 15, 1942

GENERAL ORDERS

NUMBER ........ 1

SECTION I - ACTIVATION: PIC 1st Hq AGF, July 6, 1942, Subject: "Activation of 12th Armored Division", file 320.2/9 (Army Forces) (R)
GNOPN (7-6-42) as amended, and auth Sect II, GC 54, Hq Arm Forces, Sept 2, 1942 the 12th Armored Division, to consist of the elements listed below, is activated this date:

Headquarters, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division
43rd Armored Regiment
44th Armored Regiment
50th Armored Infantry Regiment
92nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion
117th Armored Engineer Battalion
473rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion
494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
495th Armored Field Artillery Battalion
82nd Armored Medical Battalion
Supply Battalion, 12th Armored Division
Headquarters, 12th Armored Division Trains
Headquarters Company, 12th Armored Division Trains
132nd Armored Signal Company
Service Company, 12th Armored Division

Reorganization - November 1943. Camp Barkeley, Texas.

Battalions were made self-sustaining. The supply battalion was eliminated, while the reconnaissance battalion was replaced by a squadron of mechanized cavalry. As a result of these changes, new unit designations were established, and some units and personnel were transferred from the regiments. This was the new line-up:

The 43rd and 44th Armored Regiments became the 43rd, 44th, 23rd, 714th, and 779th Tank Battalions. The 43rd, 44th, and 23rd Tank Battalions remained as part of the division, while the 714th went to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and the 779th went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, as separate tank battalions.

The 56th Armored Infantry Regiment became the 56th, 66th, and 17th Armored Infantry Battalions.

The Maintenance Battalion became the 134th Ordnance Maintenance Battalion.

The 92nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion became the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized.

The Supply Battalion was transferred intact to the Second Army, and the Division Service Company was disbanded.

A Reserve Command, a band, and a Military Police Platoon were established.

Part of the 119th Armored Engineer Battalion was redesignated as a separate Treadway Bridge Company, which was relieved from the division.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A T Gun Pltn.</th>
<th>1st Rifle Pltn.</th>
<th>2nd Rifle Pltn.</th>
<th>3rd Rifle Pltn.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pltn Ldr</td>
<td>Pltn HQ</td>
<td>1 A T Gun Squad</td>
<td>Pltn HQ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 A T Gun Squad</td>
<td>2 R/1 Squad</td>
<td>3 R/1 Squad</td>
<td>3 R/1 Squad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A T Gun Squad</td>
<td>3 R/1 Squad</td>
<td>Mortar Squad</td>
<td>Lt. MG Squad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Coy HQ) 
Coy Ldr 
HQ Section 
Personnel Sec etc 
Sub Coy Ldr etc 
Coy Repair Sec 

MG Jeep 
Half-Track M3A2 
GMC 2 1/2 ton Truck 
A T Gun 

p. i e
The 56th Infantry.

The 56th Infantry Regiment was formed from personnel of the 17th Infantry. During the Civil War the 17th Infantry was in the 2nd Division, V Corps, Army of the Potomac. Its first engagement was the siege of Yorktown in the Peninsula Campaign of 1862.

On May 15, 1917, the unit was constituted as the 56th Infantry Regiment. On June 16, it was organized at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, from personnel of the 17th Infantry Regiment. On November 16, it was assigned to the 7th Division. It was engaged at Metz during World War I.

It was inactivated at Camp Meade, Maryland on September 21, 1921. It was demobilized July 22, 1922.

On July 7, 1942, the unit was reconstituted as the 56th Armored Infantry Regiment, and assigned to the 12th Armored Division. On September 15, 1942 it was activated at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

In the summer of 1942, cadre personnel began arriving at the newly constructed Camp Campbell, straddling the Tennessee-Kentucky line. Receiving, housing, reclassifying, and organizing incoming personnel kept the cadres busy. The next two months were highlighted by the first formal guard mount on August 17, the pre-activation training course, planning the obstacle course and dummy grenade courts, a 14-lecture orientation program, the extra-curriculum activity of picking a name for the division, and endless schools at night for officers.

Filler replacements began to arrive on October 24, and the Mobilization Training Program began on November 10.

During November, 1943, the 12th Armored Division was reorganized, and the third battalion, 56th Armored Infantry Regiment became the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion. Companies G, H, and I became companies A, B, and C.
KILLED IN ACTION

Abney, Clarence L.
Adamantitis, Joseph J.
Aegeg, Wilmer E.
Allison, Edgar W., Jr.
Amison, William C.
Ancell, Wilford C.
Anderson, John F.
Anderson, Walter C.
Ashley, Carlos E.
Antour, Edward
Atkins, William S.
Atkinson, Willard W.
Bacquet, Paul C.
Barrent, Albert
Barnes, Gerald W.
Barnes, James D. Jr.
Barrett, Jack L.
Harry, Edward E.
Basaett, Jay
Berta, Mark J. Jr.
Berman, Milton
Bird, Virgil T.
Blackburn, John T.
Blair, Clyde J.
Blake, James E., Jr.
Blodgett, James F.
Boch, Richard A.
Bolm, Gregory F.
Boerger, Lester E.
Bourne, Eugene S.
Bowman, Philip R.
Brisco, Douglas J.
Brown, Jack C.
Brown, Halvin
Bubl, Herlyn R.
Buchan, Scott W.
Burson, Douglas L.
Byrom, Buford D.
Caldwell, Donald H.
Carlin, Billy E.
Carrigan, Billy E.
Castronova, Nicholas
Chavez, Felix
Chayt, Albert I.
Cherry, Albert
Clifford, Edward K.
Clingerman, Hugh A.
Collingworth, Delbert
Cook, Phyllis R.
Cooper, Howard R.
Darnell, Delbert C.
Dawes, George C.
Deal, Velea F.
Dellmar, Anthony J.
Demond, William F.
Dick, Carl J.
Dielh, Arthur A.
Dillon, Neville L.
Dobick, Nicholas
Dixon, Robert L.
Dumas, Russell D.
Eddy, Harold R.
Egan, Richard C.
Elrick, Richard D.
Emery Everett L.
Esker, Emile G. Jr.
Eswell, Robert A.
Fenger, Haymore P.
Franke, Paul
France, William A.
Fredman, Herkel
Fruh, Albert W. Jr.
Furman, Richard K.
Gagliardi, Salvatore
Gahery, Thomas E.
Garcia, Joe M.
Gervais, Louis C.
Gill, Walter H.
Glover, James H.
Gomes, Edward J.
Gonzalez, Philip
Grady, Doyle R.
Griewach, Alfred E.
Grobb, Robert L.
Grover, William B.
Gruhle, Raymond J.
Gumm, Howard F.
Custafson, Roland H.
Cutter, Robert H.
Culley, Robert H.
Culver, Paul
Culwell, Carl E.
Daly, Hiram A.
Dall, Raymond F.
Dane, Alvin B.
Danhak, Leo C.
Darebyen, Harry F.
Decker, Robert A.
Henderson, James W.
Hickey, Robert A.
Higdon, Robert A.
Hill, George E.
Hill, Robert I.
Hollingsworth, James
Holmes, Ernest H.
Horne, Robert E.
Horne, William F.
Houston, Thomas L.
Huff, Glen E.
Hulsizer, Frank E.
Hunter, John H.
Jaktas, Stephen J.
Johnson, Carl G.
Johnson, James E.
Johnson, James R.
Johnson, Maynard E.
Jure, John H.
Kain, Robert J.
Kaschke, Edward
Kally, Albert L.
Kempfer, Jacob Jr.
King, Willard E.
Kirkham, Benjamin C.
Kline, Gordon A.

56th Armored Infantry Battalion

Eoconias, John J.
Erkeuer, Bert T.
Ergnest, Benjamin W.
Ehle, Stanley E.
Dublinski, Clarence
Lane, Clinton M.
Lapitsis, James P.
LeRoux, Francis C.
LeSnik, Frank S.
Littler, John R.
Looser, Carol J.
Lopes, John
Lucas, Garry G.
Lydon, Thomas M. Jr.
MacMickle, Bruce S.
Mewtastes, John M.
Malinowski, F. M. Jr.
Martin, Warren
Mattice, James
McCabe, Edward J.
McDowall, Martin T.
Michael, William F.
Miller, Thomas E.
Mitchell, George J.
Mullendoll, Froyd W.
Moore, Ernest W.
Honore, Walter K.
Hottier, Maurice
Humphrey, Eugene D.
Hyers, James B.
Hyre, Lewis G.
Neal, Bernard C.
Holm, George P. Jr.
Novak, Stephen
Kwinkski, Daniel A.
Ochs, George E.
Oltor, Seth T.
Odonnell, Anser G.
Peabody, Alex A.
Patten, John J.
Pefly, George F.
Perrotti, William F.
Poff, Charles W.
Popek, Carl
Powell, Claude J.
Preston, Roy W.
Quarle, Leander E.
Reilly, Kenneth M.
Reed, Russell K.
Reider, Ralph L.
Reynolds, James F.
Rick, Fred B.
Ridgely, Thomas L.
Ringlette, Lee J.
Robinson, James P.
Rousem, Carroll V.
Rogers, Robert A.
Roth, Marvin
Roth, Warren G.
Ruscherger, Walter E.
Rundell, Thomas W.
Russell, Richard L.
Ryan, William F.
Schactman, Joseph
Scheuer, Albert W.
Schlund, Gordon E.
Schmidt, Carl S.
Schober, Lawrence E.
Schulte, Charles E. Jr.
Sear, Donald J.
Sheehy, Charles D.
Shipman, Irving H.
Sifuentes, Nick
Gillery, James A.
Simone, Glenn A.
Siverling, Leslie T.
Spears, John
Springer, Keith F.
Steffensen, Wesley R.
Steiger, Eldon E.
Stone, Leonard H.
Stricklin, Walter R.
Strachan, Stanley J.
Sull, Peter A.
Swart, Franklin W.
Swinsick, Frank T.
Taylor, John H.
Taylor, Luc J.
Thatcher, George C.
Thellem, Harold R.
Tommaseo, Albert T.
Torquay, Gordon E.
Toscano, Frank H.
Vitrovato, Stephen F.
Trevor, Lewis A.
Waters, Jasper F.
Washington, Dink
Weber, Charles C.
Wells, Harold K.
Whiting, Oscar E.
Wiley, John
Williams, Henry W.
Willie, Charles M.
Winkler, Robert J.
Wojcik, Frank
Wildenburg, Orville L.
Zandman, Robert B.
Zaroff, Thoma F.
The history of activities and events of small military units during World War II are fairly rare. Unless someone made it a daily habit to keep a diary, the attempt many years later to describe what actually happened hour-by-hour, day-by-day, week-by-week and month-by-month is almost impossible. The first part of this history is taken from letters written home between November 1942 and August 1944. They were saved by the family and while not a daily report, were in most instances a twice a week account of life in the 1st squad, 2nd platoon, H and B Company, 56th Armored Infantry. Everyone who served remembers certain individuals and many comical and tragic events of that period. These recollections have been added to the summaries of the letters thereby giving this particular unit and its members a life and dimension above and beyond most military histories.

With the aid of published histories, a diary, some daily logs and the recollections of some veterans of the 56th, the period of September 1944 to the fall of 1945 is fairly well described.

H Company of the 56th was originally made up of people from New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Ohio. There were a few from Massachusetts and Connecticut. Some southern accents and some people from the West Virginia hills added to the mix. California and the Southwest gave us one Chinese and three or four Mexicans. There were probably two or three from many other states, but the largest group came from the northeast region of the U.S. Most were in their early twenties. Four or five were past thirty and were always called "pop" or "old man." There were a few enlistees, eighteen, nineteen and twenty years old. The draft of these did not begin until the summer of 1943. Ethnic groups represented, in addition to those mentioned above, included: Irish, Italian, German, Poles, Swedes, Lithuanians, Hungarian, Russian, English, et al. There were a lot of Catholics and at least one Mormon.

Those who helped with personal recollections, included:

- Bob Beach
- Phil Parratore
- Harold Mothersell
- Vic Challen
- Charlie Peischl
- Marvel Rowland
- Robert Grenfell
- Fred Payne
- Don Turney
- Sigvard Hatteburg
- Roy Learned
- Jim Whiteside
- Gene Jaeger
- Jim Read

also included:

- The Diary of Elmer Bright
- A Daily Log of Steve Pederett
- U.S. Dept. of the Army. Historical Division. United States Army in World War II.
- The European Theater of Operations
- I. The Lorraine Campaign.
- II. The Last Offensive.


3100 Ranger Dr.
Lawrence, Kansas 66049. 5/23/94

p. iv.
This History is Dedicated to the Memory of:

Ed Sutkaitus, 1st squad, 2nd Platoon, H and B, 56th.

James Mattox, Machine gun squad, 2nd Platoon, H and B 56th.  
KIA, Rohrbach, France, December 1944.

Delbert Darnell, Platoon Sgt., 2nd Platoon, H and B, 56th.  
The United States Rifle, Cal. .30, Model 1936 is the new standard weapon of the Service. It is a semi-automatic type, that is to say one shot is fired for each squeeze of the trigger. It cannot be operated full-automatic. It was developed at the Springfield Armory by J. C. Garand. Mr. Garand had been experimenting on this type of weapon since in the early 1920's, and several experimental rifles were constructed, each being an improvement over its predecessor.

This rifle was approved on January 9th, 1936.

This rifle is a clip fed, gas operated, self-loading shoulder arm. It is operated by the gas generated by the fired cartridge being used, after the bullet has left the muzzle, to compress the operating rod spring and compensating spring, to cam open the bolt, extract and eject the fired case and to cock the hammer. Upon the forward movement of the bolt, the top cartridge is stripped from the clip and fed into the chamber. The Ings cam closed and the rifle is ready to fire.

This rifle uses the standard caliber .30 ammunition. The clip holds eight cartridges and may be inserted into the magazine either edge up.

There are three wooden parts to this arm, they are: the stock, the rear hand guard and the front hand guard.

The standard Model 1905 bayonet is used with this rifle.

In 1939 a contract was given to the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, of New Haven, Conn., to manufacture for the United States service 65,000 of these rifles. This contract was continued for many thousands more during World War II.

The gas cylinder group of the first model M-1 rifle is of the screw-on type, the barrel does not protrude and the front sight screw enters from the side. This type of gas cylinder has the port which bypasses the gases from the muzzle of the barrel to the cylinder as an integral part of the gas cylinder. There must be maintained an accurate alignment between the muzzle and the end of the cylinder.

The front end assembly has been altered, so that the gas to operate the arm, is taken from a port bored in the barrel, slightly back from the muzzle.

The increased tempo of modern warfare dictated the redesigning of the M1 rifle (Garand) to permit selective semi-automatic or full automatic fire. This new rifle known as the M2 (T20E2) is fed by a 20 round magazine similar to but not interchangable with the BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle). The receiver has been lengthened 0.3125 inch to insure ample rearward travel of the bolt so the new cartridges in the magazine are uncovered at each shot.

The gas cylinder lock has been replaced by a recoil check (brake) which incorporates the gas cylinder lock. It reduces the muzzle climb in full automatic fire.

This weapon was approved for procurement in 1944 and had the war continued, production would have commenced in January 1946 on an initial order for 100,000.
HISTORY

Manufactured by the White Motor Car Co., the M3A1 was designed as a reconnaissance vehicle with an armored body mounted on a commercial truck chassis. The M3 was the last of a line of such military vehicles which began in 1929.

The M3 began operations with the U. S. Army in 1939. Armament was usually made up of a .50 cal. M2 machine gun on a skate mounting traveling on a rail inside the hull. In addition one or two .30 cal. machine guns were fitted. A canvas top could be attached for the protection of the crew from the elements.

The M3 half track was equipped with four-wheel drive and a 110 hp six cylinder engine which gave it a cross-country speed of 55 to 60 mph. Thirty gallons of fuel provided a 250 mile range.

In 1941 M3A1 half tracks were sent to England under the Land-Lease program. Called White Scout Cars, these vehicles were usually operated without the .30 cal. machine guns.

CHARACTERISTICS

Length: 18 feet 5 1/4 inches
Width: 6 feet 5 1/4 inches
Weight: 13,000 lbs
Maximum speed: 60 mph
Engine: 6 cylinder Hercules JDX, liquid-cooled, 110 hp
Transmission: 4 forward, 1 reverse dual range synchromesh
Armor: Hull front .5 inches, sides and rear .25 inches
Armament: One .50 cal M2, two .30 cal M1917A1 machine guns
Camp Campbell, Ky. Visiting General

Camp Barkeley, Texas. Visiting General
Pig-a-back carry
Routine marches thru the snow—typical training winter of 1942

p. v. e.
Dave Lovett sends good picture of Empress of Australia and bit of history: The Kaiser, in a burst of optimism, had selected the Tirpitz (Original name) of the Hamburg-Amerika Line as his personal yacht (wt. 21,000 tons) and as the site on which the British would surrender when the Boche won the great War. Neither materialized and the Tirpitz entered the Canadian Pacific Fleet. Once again there seemed to be some indecision in selecting a name and was named The Empress of China briefly, but eventually went into service as the Empress of Australia.

143,000 persons lost their lives as an earthquake demolished The City of Yokohama and half of Tokyo on Sept. 1, 1923. The toll would have been several hundred higher had it not been for the efforts of the Empress of Australia. Under Captain S. Robinson she was at Yokohama when the city was devastated, and became a voluntary refugee vessel providing food, clothing, shelter and safe transport to Kobe for those who escaped the quake and tidal wave and fires that followed. Captain Robinson was later honored with the order of The Commandership of The British Empire.

War clouds were gathering on the horizon in the summer of 1939 when King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited North America on the Empress of Australia and returned on the Empress of Britain, 6 of the white Empresses were painted grey and converted to troop carriers. The Empress was torpedoed off Africa in 1941, but damage was minor and she remained a troop carried until finally scrapped due to old age in 1952.
MEMBERS OF AN ARMORED INFANTRY REGIMENT firing U. S. weapons during training in England. In 1941 the Ordnance Department began its experiments with the rocket launcher, which resulted in the invention of the 2.36-inch rocket launcher (bazooka). This was the first weapon of its type to be used in the war.

SOLDIERS PLACING A BANGALORE TORPEDO under barbed wire
Down the side of a channel steamer and into an LCI

p. v. h.
Ready to start on attack mission
Night fire of the dreaded German 88 mm guns as portrayed by a German artist.

Anguish of combat is captured by artist Howard Brodie.
WOUNDED SOLDIERS BEING EVACUATED in tracked vehicles during the winter months. Cargo carrier M29 (top); half-track personnel carrier M3 (bottom).
p. v. o.    Numbing cold and winter took out G.I.'s not reached by German guns.
M-8 Assault Gun
75 mm Howitzer on Light Tank Chassis
Jeep Ambulance Evacuation

Litterbearers Carrying a Casualty Back Through a Minefield

P. V. S.
Going down for cover, a G.I. does the only thing possible during a German 88 mm barrage.
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The 56th Armored Infantry Battalion inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, December 5, 1945.
Chapter 1.

Recollections. 1942/43.

On September 15, 1942, the 56th Armored Infantry Regiment was activated at Camp Campbell, Kentucky.

Half of the Camp was in Tennessee, the other half in Kentucky. The Camp was about 7 miles long and a mile wide.

Carpenters were still working on some of the buildings when Basic Training began in early November of 1942.

The barracks were the two-story, wooden buildings, with large, open squad rooms and latrines, wash rooms, showers, and noncom quarters at one end. The barracks were lit by bare overhead light bulbs, and were heated by coal furnaces. Single bunks were arranged 15 to a side, leaving a large aisle down the middle. There was an open clothes rack at the head of the bunk and a foot locker at the foot.

After arrival in Camp, everyone was assigned to barracks and on the following morning taken to the field house and given aptitude tests. Assignments were then made to the different units of the 12th Armored Division.

We were assigned to H Company, 3rd Battalion, 56th Armored Infantry Regiment. We were quarantined to the barracks for 72 hours, and had to get someone who had been in Camp the required time, to go to the PX to buy hangars and other necessities. We were issued musette bags, shelter halves, gas masks and cartridge belts.

We were told that in the Armored Force, you wear your overseas cap on the left side of your head, one finger above the left ear and one finger above the left eyebrow. No pass to town until we'd been in Camp for four weeks. Everyone was ordered to get a GI haircut.

The day usually began when the CQ (charge of quarters) stomped into the barracks, turned on the bare overhead light bulbs, and blew a loud blast on his whistle. The first thing to do was to get enough clothes on to fall out for reveille. A few of the guys grabbed a few extra winks and then leaped up and put on their shoes and then their overcoat over their long underwear and then fell out. Most of us were dressed and may even have started the chores around our bunks before we fell out. In the early days 1st/Sgt. Hervey slept in our barracks. Soon after the CQ's whistle, he came striding down through the barracks. Anyone still in their bunk got flipped onto the cold floor.

We fell out in the company area in front of the barracks. We fell in by squads and platoons. The orders were:
"Fall in! Dress Right and cover down!"

This meant, being directly behind the guy in front of you and extending your left arm at shoulder length and touching the right shoulder of the man on your left. On the next command, "Front," you let your arm drop and looked straight ahead at attention. Each squad then reported to the platoon sergeant and the platoon sergeants reported to the lst/Sgt.

After reveille, life really became hectic. The latrine was pandemonium. 240 men trying to wash, brush their teeth, shave, shower, use the urinals, or whatever. Shoving, yelling, bitching; because you still had to finish dressing, get over to the messhall to eat, and then back to the barracks to sweep and mop the floor and check your clothes to see that they are buttoned and hanging neatly. Check everything in your footlocker to see that underwear, etc. is clean and folded neatly and toilet articles are clean and in order. No excess civilian junk in the footlocker. Sheets and blankets on the bunk must be tight and square at the corners. Top blanket must be so tight that a quarter would bounce when dropped on it.

The messhall had its own peculiar rules. We marched in and then stood behind the seat bench waiting for the signal to begin. The dining room orderlies put the food on the tables in bowls and on platters. The plates and cups were upside down. At the blast of a whistle, everyone turned over their plate and cup as they sat down and at the same time grabbed for bowls and platters and began scooping food onto their plates. Most of those guys must have been raised in a boarding house. Anyone with table manners would have starved. When you reached for a bowl or platter it was usually empty. You soon learned to plan your moves and to move fast.

When there was time before an activity or formation, we usually had to police-up the area. The order was: "fall in, in a line of skirmishers, noncoms in the rear; asses up, elbows down, move out, pickup everything that doesn't grow." Discarded cigarette butts had to be picked up and the paper torn. The paper was then wadded into a ball and the tobacco was scattered. (This was before filters).

The first formation was usually at 0800 hours. The first uniform worn was usually Class A, which in the fall/winter/spring, was wool OD pants, shirt and blouse (a hip length jacket) with gold buttons, army insignia buttons and division insignia patch sewn on the arm at the left shoulder. On the head a plastic helmet liner. When it was cold, an OD woolknit cap with bill (always referred to as a go-to-hell cap) was worn under the helmet liner. Gloves with scarf, and the heavy OD overcoat, reaching below the knees. The overcoat was about the most awkward, cumbersome, use-less piece of clothing that the military ever devised. (A hip-length mackinaw would have served better). Two years later in France, when we were pulling items of clothing from our duffel
bags, before they were sent to Luneville for storage, we pulled out those overcoats and threw them down the cellar of an old French house.

The first activity every weekday morning was close order drill. An armored infantry platoon was made up of five squads of twelve men each. Three rifle squads, a light machine gun squad, and a 60 MM mortar squad. We drilled by platoons. "Forward March!", "To the Rear March!", "Cadence count!", "Right Flank March!", "Right Oblique March!", "Doubletime!"

At 0900 hours the uniform had to be changed for the next formation. (And sometimes every hour on the hour after that). You were usually given about three minutes to change.) From Class A uniform into fatigues; green, herringbone twill pants and shirt, and your field jacket. And always the canvas leggings, lacing up the hooks from ankle to knee and then blousing the pants over the tops of the leggings.

Standing there waiting for the action to begin, the cold wind burned cheeks, nose and ears and feet were so cold that we kicked one foot against the other, continuously, to keep the blood circulating. The Manual of Arms with your M-1 rifle, which weighed about nine pounds. Always hold it by the balance. "Right Shoulder Arms!", "Left Shoulder Arms!", "Present Arms!", "Port Arms!", "Inspection Arms!", "Order Arms!", "Parade Rest!", "At Ease!" Over, and over and over and over again.

1000 hours and into the barracks to change uniform, again. March to an open field where everyone spreads out his shelter-half on the ground. Then kneels on the ground and learns how to field strip and then detail strip the M-1. First, separate the M-1 into three groups. Fingers numb from the cold disengage the trigger-housing group from the barrel and receiver group and the stock then pulls free. Detail stripping the first two groups leaves you with many, many small parts on the shelter-half. And always clean and oil. Cleaning equipment, rod and oil, in the stock.

1100 hours, poison gas lecture. That was one hour that everyone dreaded. The effects of Mustard and Phosgene gas on people was illustrated with photographs of victims from the first World War. In addition to these displays, the lectures covered the different kinds of gases the Germans might use today, and the effects on people, vehicles and terrain. This was followed by an explanation and dry-run through the procedures for decontaminating anything that had been exposed. A substance called DANC (decontaminating agent noncorrosive) was used for this purpose. All of this of course was related to the cumbersome gas mask which was strapped under the left arm, and which had to be worn for many formations and marches. And always the drill- trying to juggle your rifle on your shoulder while you held your helmet between your knees, unsnapped the container, pulled the gas mask out, and then pulled it over your head and down over your face.
Lunch time and march back to the company area and unload equipment in the barracks, then over to the messhall. Back out into the field for an afternoon of Extended Order Drill, Hand and Arm Signals, Military Courtesy and Discipline, Compass Reading, etc.

Back to the company area by 1700 hours (5:00pm) to get ready for Retreat. Change into Class A uniform and stand formation in the company street. While the flag at Battalion Headquarters was being lowered, the bugler played, "To the Colors." And the cold wind cut like a knife, or the snow was up to your knees, or the street was covered with ice, or the cold rain poured down in buckets, or the hot sun scorched and burned.

Usually after supper the evening was your own. Unless there were weapons to clean or you had been tapped for a detail. Reading and letter writing were popular with some. The drinkers spent their evenings at the PX. Movies were 15¢ and changed every other day. There were several theaters in different areas of the camp. A pack of cigarettes was 15¢. During most training throughout the day you were given a ten minute break, and nine out of ten guys lit a cigarette. Even on the ten, twenty and twenty-five mile marches, you were given a ten minute smoking break every hour. The Day-Room was a frame building, one-story, across from the barracks. This was a lounge area, with tables, chairs and a coke machine. If you were near the Day-Room at break time it was a cold coke with your cigarette.

All activity in the barracks was supposed to cease at 2100 hours (9:00pm) which was LIGHTS OUT. TAPS was at 2300 hours and everyone was supposed to be in bed for bed-check.

Personal laundry was usually done on weekends over in the shower room.

Homesickness was a problem, although no one talked about it. Very few guys arrived with an old buddy at their side. New friendships had to be made, but whom could you trust. Along with the loneliness and depression went the aches and pains of the body. Muscles, bones, tendons and nerves were being stretched and bent in ways that no human body was meant to be stretched and bent. For weeks, the pain was excruciating; and the continuous, daily pounding on your body would only be relieved when the army had your body in shape. And, to add to everyone's misery, racking coughs and head colds set in with a vengeance.

During November they were still giving shots in the arm at the Dispensary. There were at least four or five, one of which was for typhoid. It didn't make any difference what each one was for, they all gave you a very sore arm. Whenever you visited the Dispensary, the medics seemed to be spending a lot of time sitting around, smoking cigars and drinking coffee.
Most of the noncom cadre of the 56th had come from Fort Knox, Kentucky, where they had trained with the 8th Armored Division. Before that, many of them had served in the Cavalry at Fort Riley and on the Mexican Border.

I don't know how many of them might have been caught in the draft of 1940, or how many might have served with the old peacetime army of the thirties. They were a mixed bunch, but H Company may have done better in getting and keeping some of the better ones.

First Sergeant Hervey was a long, lean, dark-haired, quiet (most of the time) guy, who minded his business in the Orderly Room, and took charge of outside formations when required. One dark, cold morning in November of 1942, when H Company was standing reveille; the first and second platoons had reported. No report from the third platoon, where buck sergeant Sullivan was filling in for platoon sergeant Rick. Finally First sergeant Hervey bellowed, "Goddammit Sullivan, don't stand there like a bump on a c--t, REPORT!" The company cracked up. First Sergeant Hervey left us sometime in the spring of 1943. Sergeant Sullivan disappeared and was never seen again.

The platoon sergeants were: Eugene Munkwitz, first platoon; Donald Haig, second platoon; and Fred Rick, third platoon. One raw, blustery, cold day in November of 1942 (probably the second week of basic) S/Sgt. Haig brought the second platoon in from a rough day in the field. Before he dismissed to get ready for Retreat, he told us he would be running us through mud up to our ass every day, and would then bring us back in five minutes before Retreat, and would expect us to be cleaned up and in Class A uniform and standing Retreat on schedule. On Thanksgiving Day he got drunk, went into the Orderly Room and told Captain Zapitz off. He lost his stripes and was transferred out to E Company (evidently the boneyard for those who could not get along with Zapitz and Lt. Col. Means). Delbert Darnell was appointed platoon sergeant of the second platoon.

Munkwitz, Darnell and Rick saw us through Basic Training 1942/43, bivouacs and training in the spring of 1943, the Hellcat Combat Camp, the Cumberland River Crossing, Tennessee Maneuvers, the move to Camp Barkley and the reorganization of the regiment and division, the loss of all those guys to the 4th Armored in November of 1943, the influx of the ASTP guys in March of 1944, the repetition of basic several times, the two-week platoon problems, the night training problems, the HOUSECAT BRIGADE, the Troop Train ride east, the Empress of Australia ocean voyage, the cold, damp days in England, the channel crossing, the first days in France and combat.

Darnell was given a battlefield commission, assigned to the first platoon and was killed at Herrlisheim. Rick was also killed at Herrlisheim.
Chapter 1.

recollections - JN
letters home - JN
1942/43

Of the rest of H Company cadre, Aldrich was Motor Pool sergeant, Siefert was Communications sergeant. Most of the others were squad leaders in the platoons— Lukasek and Hatteburg in the 1st platoon, Watson in the 2nd platoon, and Sullivan in the 3rd platoon.

Captain Zapitz was company commander of H Company. He had been a lawyer in civilian life. He was rather short in stature and seldom smiled. Bob Beach, who was Motor Pool officer for H Company in the winter of 1942/43, wrote in a letter in 1987, "I was assigned to H Company in August 1942. Captain Zapitz was CO. The incident on Thanksgiving Day 1942 was particularly embarrassing for me. I had a girl friend from California visiting me and I took her to the Orderly Room to meet Captain Zapitz. We were in the Orderly Room when an altercation broke out at the barracks near the Orderly Room. Captain Zapitz dashed over to the barracks and started screaming. I don't know what all the altercation was about, but Captain Zapitz got rid of Staff Sergeant Haig and another sergeant."

"Zapitz, to say the least, was a very excitable person. He should have sent the First Sergeant to take care of it and stayed away. ...he didn't have the temperament to be commanding troops."

"Haig was one of the original cadre in H Company and a darned good sergeant."

Letters Home— Training continues. Learned how to sight the M-1 rifle and how to fire from the prone position. The company was introduced to double-time. We marched to one of the camp theaters nearly every day to watch training films, Why We Fight: 'Blitzkrieg in Poland,' 'The Battle for China,' etc. We had trouble staying awake in the dark theater.

Marched with full pack for three hours some mornings. Learned how to take apart the Browning water-cooled, 30 caliber machine gun, identify each part and put it back together again. Our fingers were numb from the cold. Platoon drill has not been too good. Had to drill after hours. Late for supper, not much food left.

Gas mask drill. Took part in Division Review. Class A uniform. Platoons, six across and ten deep marched past the reviewing stand while the band played. That night, fell out with packs and gas masks and marched five miles in the dark.

Thanksgiving Day 1942— scrubbed the barracks. Had a good meal with free cigarettes, candy and nuts. Weather very cold. Crawled through the mud, then dug foxholes from the prone position. Pulled KP from six in the morning until ten at night. Sat down only to eat.

Sunday morning, after church, the company had to wade through mud and water in a large field picking up paper, etc. No reason given. Rumor- California in February for maneuvers and desert training. Made some friends in the barracks— George Bator, Walt Boone, and Barney Lofsted.
Chapter 2.

letters- JN

1942/43

The first week in December began with a hard, cold rain. The company marched out through thick mud to the training area where we stood around shivering from the cold and trying to learn to read a compass. The following day the temperature really dropped so we put on overcoats, but feet and faces, ears and noses really got cold. The next day it snowed hard. Training continued.

The second week, still very cold and starting to snow again. Everyone in the company was reassigned to a squad by their job specialty and reassigned to different bunks in the barracks. Monday morning, after breakfast, the company fell out with packs, entrenching tools, and gas masks and marched a good distance out into the country. Dug foxholes all morning, then marched back to the company area for lunch; marched back out to the training area and dug until 1600 (4:00 pm). Filled the holes until 1630, then back to the company area for retreat.

The middle of the month the company was tested on scouting and patrolling. Scheduled to go out on the rifle range, the week before Christmas. Will probably get up at 0400 and spend the whole day on the range, no matter what the weather. Went to the movies with Barney Lofsted one night and into Clarksville with Marion Booth another night. The Orderly Room will not issue a pass to town unless you have a pack of condoms in your pocket. Condoms are free.

Saturday morning, up at 0500. Fell out at 0600 with packs, cartridge belts and canteens and marched several miles in the dark to the rifle range. Began firing at 200-yard targets:

"With ball ammunition, lock and load.
Ready on the right, ready on the left,
ready on the firing line,
Flags up, flags waving, flags down,
Targets, UP!"

Each man fired twelve rounds. The guys in the pits pulled the targets down, pasted them with black markers and ran them back up again. Everyone recorded their scores on their booklet. At noon the mess truck came out and we ate from our mess kits. We continued firing through the afternoon.

Rumor- Indio, California for maneuvers and desert training. Sunday, up at 0500 again. Marched back out to the rifle range. Very, very cold. Fired until noon. Marched back to the barracks, changed to class A uniform and then marched in Division Review for visiting generals and civilians from town. Monday, back to the range. Still very cold. Fired from prone, kneeling and standing positions. Drew helmuts from supply room.
Chapter 2.

letters - JN

1942/43

Christmas Eve, up at 0500 again, and marched back out to the range. Began record firing. Those who finished firing early reported to the kitchen for details. A goodly number from the company, including many non Catholics went to Midnight Mass. Got to bed at 0130 and back up at 0630.

KP the day after Christmas. The company still on the range. Rapid Fire this morning. 1100 it clouded up and poured. We waded back to the company area through red Kentucky clay, driving rain and deep puddles.

Monday, December 28, it was too muddy and wet to go to the range. Got up at 0600. Had close order drill in the rain. At 0830 we marched about five miles to a muddy field and had extended order drill. Fall in, in a line of skirmishers, run forward, throw yourself flat on the ground, then up and run forward again. Returned to the company area and had instruction in firing the machine gun.

Nick Sifuentes of the 1st squad, 2nd platoon has a guitar which he plays fairly well. One radio in the barracks, which is always tuned in to Nashville and its' hillbilly music. Wednesday, the weather still too rainy to go to the range. 41 guys still have to fire. Very cold today, but we stayed outside and fired dry-run on the machine gun. The company is getting ready to move to the other side of camp.

On Tuesday we had advance guard tactics. The 1st platoon sent out two scouts. Then a point of ten men followed. The rest of the platoon marched five yards apart on each side of the road. The second and third platoons followed in the same order. Lt. Gombos had two machine guns and a squad concealed in the woods. They opened fire, and the company dropped into the mud and water and then moved up to knock them out.

KP last Saturday, 0430 to 2000 hours.

New Years Eve, machine gun practice outside in the morning. Those who hadn't fired rapid fire, marched the five miles to the range at 1500 and completed firing. New Years Day, the weather warmed up some. No special food in the mess hall. Sat around the barracks most of the day.

The first week of January, 1943, we packed up all of our belongings and moved about thirty blocks to another area of camp. Now in two barracks instead of three. The barracks have double decker wooden bunks, with about sixty men to a squad room. Had machine gun manipulation most of the first day, and ate out of our mess kits. Sandbag machine guns, next on the schedule.

Weather very nice on the weekend, but Monday morning was the coldest it has been. Wind blew sharp and cold out of the north.
But we marched out to the machine gun range. Had to sandbag the machine guns, and then fired, or laid alongside as a coxswain on one side or assistant gunner on the other. On the range all day. When we get back to the barracks every evening, we have to clean the machine guns.

We should be eligible for furloughs the 20th of February.

January 11, we finished firing on the machine gun range.

"Blocks out, bolts forward, covers down.
Lay on pasteur number one.
In bursts of five, traverse from left to right.
Half load.
Relay on pasteur number one.
Commence Firing."

It was very cold the entire week we were on the range. The kitchen truck drove out and we ate out of mess kits. The day we fired record, it snowed heavy. We first fired the 30 caliber from a ground mount. Given two minutes to traverse the target. Then we fired at an anti-tank target with the machine gun mounted on the back of an armored car. We were given 35 seconds to traverse the target.

Quite a few of the guys have been going over the hill. Every morning when roll is called, a couple more will be missing. About six are gone now. They now read the Articles of War to us and threaten us with the death penalty."

Someone said that H Company had the division record for AWOLs. Captain Zapitz, fell us out one morning, and threatened to personally come after the next AWOL, shove a bayonet up his ass, and drag him back to the company. Battalion Headquarters, heard about this, and made Zapitz apologize to the company at formation the next morning. That night five more guys went over the hill.

Monday morning, with full combat packs and gas masks, we marched out to a wooded area where we set up tents. Each man has a shelter half, pegs, pole and rope to assemble the tent. Camouflaged the tent and then crawled inside. On the whistle, out of the tent and into foxholes which we had dug. Climbed out on the 'all clear'.

Then 'gas attack!' Hold your breath and get the mask out of its container while holding your helmet between your legs. Pull the mask over your head and down over your face. Put the helmet back on and test mask for leaks. Double-time in place. 'Strike tents!'

Five minutes to tear down and roll packs.

Dug an emplacement for the 37 MM anti-tank gun.
letters- JN
1942/43.

We fell out for calisthenics every morning. Striped to the waist in January and usually started out with an exercise called the side-straddle-hop. Another exercise was to drop to a squatting position, put your hands flat on the ground in front of you, and then kick back with your legs until your body was horizontal and resting on your hands and the tips of your toes.

A cold morning during exercises, one of the guys complained about not feeling well. He was ordered to remain in ranks and continue to exercise. He fell to the ground and passed out. He had spinal meningitis. The company restricted to the company area for two weeks. Medics come to the barracks every morning to check throats and chests. Company goes out every day for drill and other training. Three guys broke quarantine and went to the PX.

The day before the quarantine was to expire, the colonel came around inspecting the barracks. He found some dust and slapped another two weeks restriction on us. Lt. Gombar promised to get rid of the restriction in some way.

January 18. Ed Sutkaitus, Pete Mattionie and Nugent went to the movies in the old area of the camp in the afternoon. In the evening, Nugent and Sutkaitus were off to the movies again. A road march and bivouac; Nugent and John Rice pitched a tent together. The afternoon was spent in poison gas training.

Sunday morning the 25th, Nugent and Sutkaitus off to Mass and then over to the Day Room to write letters. Everyone in the company scheduled for the dental clinic. Nugent on KP on Wednesday, 0530 to 2300. Thursday, inspection in the barracks. All equipment laid out on the bunks, Dress in class A uniform and stand at attention at the foot of the bunk. The Colonel, a Lt. Col., a Major, a Captain and several Lts. from Division inspected. The evening of the 25th, Nugent and Sutkaitus went up to the Service Club for dinner, then to a movie. Rumored that the 8th Armored will be leaving camp.

Thursday, January 28, the company fell out with gas masks. Marched out to the gas chamber, lined up, put on masks and moved into the chamber. Inside, take off masks and walk through. The chamber was full of tear gas. Came out gasping and crying. Eyes burned and itched. Filed back in without mask on. When gas was released, hold your breath, put on the mask and walk out. In the afternoon the company marched at attention for 8 miles with packs and gas masks. After returning to the barracks had to double-time in place for 5 minutes. Repeated the same march on Friday but had to double-time for 10 minutes after returning to barracks. Saturday the company marched out to the training area and the Capt. gave a talk on the bayonet. Bayonet drill followed. The battalion had company pictures taken. The regiment now has stationary with a 56th insignia drawn by Walt Disney, on it.
The first week in February, 1943. We dug tank traps. The company then went down to the camouflage area of the 2nd Army, Special Troops to observe demonstrations. The Company was split up again. Mattionie and Sutkaitus were moved to the other barracks. Regimental Retreat ceremony on Thursday evening. Class A uniforms and the band played.

Bayonet Drill—The bayonet is 12 inches long (later on we traded in the long blade for a 6 inch bayonet). The Lt. tells us that we have to learn the spirit of the bayonet. On Guard! Short Thrust! Long Thrust! If the bayonet gets hung up on a bone, fire your M-1. This will jar the blade loose. When you withdraw the bayonet, step forward bringing the butt of your rifle up under the enemy's chin. Then smash in his face with the steel butt plate of your M-1.

Nugent and Sutkaitus went up to the service club and then over to see a movie.

Weather for the first couple of weeks was warm with a nice breeze. About the 11th it started to rain and then turned to sleet and snow. Sutkaitus and Nugent went into town on Sunday, about every place was closed. Went to the movies Monday night. The 2nd platoon had to clean rifles every night during the past week. On Tuesday the company started an advance march—with packs, gas masks and rifles. Then loaded into trucks and rode out to a training area:

The regimental commander had issued an order during early training, stating that we were infantry, by God, and we would train as infantry. Which meant that we marched or double-timed to training areas, unless time was more important, in which case we loaded up in large trucks and rode to the area. No riding in halftracks until after basic training.

We ate lunch in the field and then ran a problem. The first platoon defended a hill and the second and third Platoons had to attack it. Smeared mud on helmets and then used leaves and twigs for camouflage. Put grass and weeds in and over fatigue's and smeared mud on our faces. Crawled through the woods on our bellies and then fifty yards from the hill, up and charge.

Gas attack instruction and bayonet drill all week.

Regimental Retreat parade, again.

The second week of February—marched out to the bayonet range. The dummies were up and we ran them through. Then we had a two hour road march with full equipment. Everyone without an army driver's license reported to the motor park and drove a truck in a convoy. General Lear visited the camp. Sutkaitus and Nugent caught a camp bus and went down to the service club, Saturday night. Had dinner and then went to the movies.
Sunday morning, February 15, woke up and the barracks was like an icebox. All the water pipes were frozen. Lists for furloughs posted. 37 men's names, who have dependents, is up. 29 picked to go first. Nugent and Sutkaitus off to the movies Sunday the 21st. The show was stopped halfway through and all 92nd Recon were told to report back to their barracks. Sutkaitus and Nugent went up to the Service Club. MPs came in and told everyone to report back to their companies. Guards posted at PXs and movies. No one allowed in.

The last week of the month- The stationary with the 56th AIR "Disney" character arrived. One morning out at 0830 with full equipment. Marched 10 miles by 1030. Everyone limping, after the march. Fell out after lunch and marched another 5 miles. Then had to double-time for 30 minutes. The middle of the week-the obstacle course. Up and over a twelve foot board wall by a rope; drop on the other side, up a slanting ladder and across a log, jump through a framework of logs, run and grab a rope and swing over a ditch filled with water, across a big ditch of water hanging by your hands from a ladder about 10 feet above the water, through a small tunnel, over log obstacles, and then through wire entanglements. KP until 2100 one day. Everyone signed up for furloughs. Guard duty Monday night. Guard duty usually on Wednesday and Saturday of each week. Regimental Guard, walk a post in two hour shifts. Division Guard, patrol the streets in a Peep. Patrol from 2000 to 2200, then back to the guardhouse for four hours sleep (in your uniform), then back out on patrol from 0200 to 0400. It was bitter cold and we nearly froze in that open Peep.

Tuesday, out on the combat range. Bitter cold. Lay on the ground with overcoats and gloves off and fired at silhouette targets. It got so cold, the company returned to the barracks. Out on the range again on Wednesday and fired at moving targets. Two men from each platoon sent to aircraft spotter training. A lot of men being transferred out of the division. Some are getting ratings and being sent to Fort Knox. Sutkaitus and Nugent off to the movies. KP on Thursday. Up at 0300 Friday morning. Fell out at 0430 with full packs and gas masks. Hq. Company, 3rd Battalion leading. Followed by H Company and then I and G. Very fast pace. Sun finally came up. 5 minute break every hour. Everyone limping by 0900. Stopped for lunch in a field. Back to the barracks late in the afternoon. Had marched over 25 miles. Stretched out in our bunks with our feet hanging out in the aisle. The medics came along and checked. Everyone with blisters was told to report to the dispensary. No sympathy from the dispensary.

That 25 Mile Hike was the end of BASIC TRAINING.

Nugent and Sutkaitus off to Clarksville on Saturday.
Chapter 3.

Recollections, 1988-

With the end of almost four months of Basic Training (no one ever figured out why they tacked on an extra three weeks) the army had us almost in shape. The aches and pains and hacking coughs were disappearing. We responded to commands with some semblance of military form and discipline. On the 25 mile hikes and going through the obstacle course, the platoon leaders told us that we were in better shape now (February 1943), than we ever had been or ever would be. It was true of course but we were too busy feeling sorry for ourselves to believe it.

You were supposed to get a furlough every six months. It didn't always work out that way, but it gave you target dates to aim for. On the first furlough in March of 1943, you found that you had to wear your uniform at all times. If you were a male between 18 and 40 years of age, you had better have papers on you, stating who you were, what your draft status was, where you were going and where you had come from. The streets, public conveyances, depots, service clubs were swarming with MPs and SPs looking for likely arrests to fill their quotas.

When you got home, nothing was the same. Most of your old acquaintances were in some branch of the service. Those that weren't had a different life style that didn't include you anymore. So that it suddenly dawned on you that your friends were back in old H, 56th, and that the daily life with them was what was now important.

The Army had the Articles of War read to you at every opportunity. There were about 150 of them and they threatened you with everything from extra duty after supper to the firing squad. (After the war, Eisenhower and some of the moms of America, put together something called the Soldier's Code, which would protect our boys from mean officers, noncoms and the Articles of War.) One day during February of 1943, old H Company was sitting in one of the buildings down at the motor pool, while Capt. Zapitz read the Articles of War to them. It was rather warm in the building and we had just eaten lunch. Nugent dozed off after awhile, but jerked awake when Zapitz snarled at him, "You back there, on your feet, you will stand for the rest of the reading." OK Zapitz, one more black mark in the book for you.

We used to go into town (Clarksville or Hopkinsville) to a movie after we had seen all of those at the camp theaters. During the war, before the movie began, they would show a movie of the flag waving and the Star Spangled Banner playing. The civilians would all leap to their feet, slap their right hand over their heart, and sing the National Anthem. The GIs remained slouched in their seats, caps down over their foreheads, and feet on the seats in front of them. Scowls and rude remarks directed at the GIs, by the civilians. Note- You don't stand for a picture of the flag.
The MPs in Clarksville and Hopkinsville couldn't get it through their heads that Armored Force personnel wore their overseas caps on the left side of their head (All others wore it on the right). In addition to being harassed and hassled, some guys were arrested and calls had to be made out to the 12th's headquarters to get them released.

Some of the guys who served in H/56, during the winter of 1942/43, but seemed to disappear during or right after basic training. They must have some hidden talents that the rest of us weren't aware of:

Wallace—wore red satin pajamas to bed at night. The rest of us slept in our underwear. He was a short stocky guy, with sandy hair and a red face. Must have been in his late twenties or early thirties. He married a widow with five kids, and then one day he was gone.

Schmerhorn—tall, Lanky kid from Schenectady, New York. Slept in one of the top bunks. Hated the Supply Sgt. with a vengeance. Threatened to stick a bayonet in him. There was a long line waiting to do that. Most of us decided that winter that when we went into combat, that SOB would die before any German or Jap. The Orderly Room must have gotten the word, because that sucker got transferred out. Lt. Combos offered the job to me, but I declined, since I had just struck up a lasting friendship with Sutkaitus. Also, I didn't think being yelled at by 240 guys wanting equipment and supplies was worth the stripes and extra money. Besides, Darnell, Challen, Fred Payne, et al would have missed me in formations. Back to Schmerhorn. Every payday someone stole his money. No one that I remember ever figured out why they picked on Schmerhorn. It got so bad that he took to sitting up all night in the upper bunk, with a drawn bayonet, and his money between his legs. One day, like Wallace, he was gone.

And the kid from California—he had just gotten married when he was drafted. We were sleeping in the single bunks and Hervey was lst/Sgt. This kid kept a photograph of his new wife on the shelf above his bunk. He was the type of guy that others like to tease. He'd be sitting on his bunk and a few guys would stroll down, look at the photo and then start in. "You know she's sleeping with every man and boy in southern California." From there on the language and the description of the lady's activities got raunchier and more explicit. The poor guy didn't know how to handle it. The more he screamed, the more they teased. The crowning blow came right before he was to leave on furlough.
At short-arm inspection, the medics said he had the crabs. Shave off the pubic hair and rub on the old Blue Ointment. How could he go home to his new wife in that condition? He appealed to the 1st/Sgt. and anyone else who might countermand the order. No luck. Shave! He then just seemed to disappear from the company.

Early on in basic, we had at least six to eight Italians. They all seemed to speak fluent Italian. They used to stand around together down at one end of the barracks and sing raunchy songs in Italian. We assumed they were raunchy. They all seemed to disappear from the company at one time.

Pete Mattionie, Sutkaitus and I used to hang around together. One day Pete was transferred out. We heard that eventually he ended up in the Pacific with the 1st Cavalry Division and was drowned during the invasion of the Los Negros Islands.

After H Company moved from one area of Camp Campbell to another, we were in the two-story wooden barracks, and sleeping in double bunks. Nugent was in a top bunk, not too far from the door, and Pop Lubin was in the next lower bunk. M, slept in the bunk above Pop. M used to spend his evenings down at the PX with several others from the company, drinking 3 2 beer by the case. "Lights Out" was at 2100 hours (9:00pm) but bedcheck and taps was at 2300 hours (11:00pm). So the beer drinkers (serious beer drinkers, that is) staggered back to the barracks at taps and many of them laid down on the floor between the bunks where they passed out. Pop Lubin always woke Nugent to help him get M into his bunk.

The defeat of the 1st Armored Division, by Rommel's Panzers at Kasserine Pass in North Africa, was felt all the way back to every armored division then in training in the United States in the winter of 1942/43. One story that filtered back was that some general had ordered a full-field inspection of American troops near Kasserine, with pup tents up, everything laid out on the ground (white shorts and T-shirts, white socks, towels), cartridge belts and bandoliers. The Germans strapped the holy crap out of them. It wasn't long before we turned in our white underwear, socks and towels and were issued underwear and towels in olive drab color. The training in the field got rougher. Everyone had to dig a foxhole, get down in it, and then let a Sherman tank roll over it. Lt. Combos was the first person in the company down into one of the foxholes.
recollectsions - JN

Halftrack Drill, mounting and dismounting, the spring and summer of 1943. Each squad lined up in front of its halftrack in two rows. On the command, "mount up," one half of the squad ran back to the left the other to the right, and mounted through the door on the back of the halftrack. Rifle squad halftracks had back doors, mortar and machine gun squad halftracks didn't. On the command, "dismount and fight on foot," we went out the back door. However, on most problems we went over the side and many times climbed back in over the side. Combat would tell its own story.

During the training on other weapons, Parratore was assigned as an instructor on the submachine gun. Since he didn't have any particular expertise with that weapon, he decided that those in charge figured that all Italians from Chicago were proficient in the use of the submachine gun. Challen and Parratore were sometimes sent off on training assignments together. An argument usually arose as to who was in charge, since Challen was a sgt. and Parratore was a cpl.
With the end of basic training, exercises of tactical problems in the field began. The company rolled out every morning in seventeen halftracks. A radio in the halftrack of the 1st squad of each platoon. 1st squad of each platoon also pulled a 37mm anti-tank gun. Night bivouacs were scheduled for twice a week.

The first Saturday in March, a 28 mile hike. Grenade training. Cleaned 22 caliber inserts for the 37mm anti-guns. Rained very hard Friday night and Saturday.

The first bivouac for the 3rd Battalion was the second week in March. Climbed into the halftracks with full equipment and barracks bags and rolled out in the cold and rain. Pitched tents in a large open field. Those going on furlough on the 10th, had to go out with the company, pitch their tent, stay over night the first night and then return to camp and leave on furlough. Nugent off on furlough on March 10th. Sutkaitus found in his tent on the third day, very sick with Yellow Jaundice. Taken to the hospital.

Each man issued his own M-1 rifle. Also issued first aid kit and head net for protection against mosquitoes. New order—Double-time from 0500 to 1700 every day on every errand. Details: room orderly—sweep, mop, fire furnaces. Battalion runner. Cleanup details from 1830 to 2330. Some of the company made pfc. One stripe, $4 more a month. More men left on furloughs on March 20. Passes to Clarksville and Hopkinsville.

Monday, out on a problem, waded a creek. Tuesday night, problem, 2nd platoon holding the woods, 1st and 3rd supposed to move through in the dark. Company got Thursday off, it rained. Up at 0200 the following week. Rolled out of the Motor Pool at 0400. Bivouaced 30 miles from camp. Problem on infantry combat range. Issued 48 rounds of ammunition. Fired machine guns and mortars. Tuesday it rained hard, tents leaked. Rifle inspection every night. Thursday, fired from a moving halftrack at stationary targets, then fired at moving targets from stationary halftrack. Thursday night through Saturday, the wind blew and it rained hard. Mortar firing demonstration, Friday morning. Returned to camp Friday noon. Cleaned weapons and equipment all afternoon.

Rumor: the Armored Force will be issued new uniforms in the fall—blue, with a white stripe down the sides of the pants. A platoon leader of H company, made company commander. Clothes not GI to be sent home.

Night problem began at 2000. Returned to camp at 0200 the next morning. Up at 0700 and cleaned equipment all morning. Monday, Division test. The 1st platoon of H company represented the 3rd Battalion. 12 mile road march scheduled.
Second week of April 1943. Prisoner Guard—every company had to pick up its own men who were in the stockade, and guard them during the day on company training exercises. Then return them to the stockade at night. The guard was issued 8 rounds of live ammunition, and the guard was told that if the prisoners escaped, he would have to take their place in the stockade. If he shot an escaping prisoner, he had to pay for the rounds fired and was then transferred out to another company. These prisoners were guys from the company that you had been living and training with. Guarding them in the field was very nerve-racking.

On Friday, inspection. Laid out all equipment on our bunks and stood at attention while being inspected. Saturday, the company had a 25 mile hike. Packs, gas masks and rifles. It rained hard during the first part of the hike and no one had brought raincoats. After the rain stopped it got very hot. The company marched 25 miles in 5 hours. Double-timed part of the way.

Visited Sutkaitus in the hospital. He gets out this week.

Had a night bivouac on Thursday. Spent the night as a listening post out on a hill.

April 15, spent all afternoon trying to put camouflage twine on our helmets. Rained hard yesterday while the company was out on a problem. Turned very cold last night. Grenade throwing this morning. Rumor—If we do alright on maneuvers, we'll be shipped to a POE.

KP, Thursday the 19th. 0600 Thursday morning until 0200 Friday morning. Waited up for rations. Put the rations away and then fixed 900 sandwiches. Went to bed at 0200 Friday morning and got back up at 0300, an hour later.

Blankets in barracks bags, toilet articles and underwear in musette bags, rifles, bayonets, entrenching tools and gas masks in place. Loaded up in the halftracks, and the regiment rolled out of camp at 0800. The convoy rolled through Nashville, passed through Murfreesboro and on down into southern Tennessee. Didn't have any lunch and hadn't had much breakfast. Pitched tents up in the hills, and had a sandwich for supper. Rained that night and everything and everyone got wet.

Up at 0230 Saturday morning. Dressed in Class A uniform. Didn't have much breakfast. Packed up in the dark and rain, fixed bayonets, loaded rifles with a clip of live ammunition. Rolled into the town of War Trace and the 1st platoon established its CP there. The 2nd platoon set up its CP in the town of Christiana. The company CP was at Bell Buckle. The battalion CP was at Nashville.
The regiment was strung out along the railroad tracks from one end of Tennessee to the other. H Company covered 40 miles of track. Each man given a stretch of track to guard and patrol with fixed bayonet and orders to arrest anyone on or near the tracks. Halftracks set up at strategic points and machine guns fully loaded. The regiment patrolled from 0630 Saturday morning until 2100 Saturday night. No food or rest all day. Invited over for supper by a farmer. Told him we couldn't leave our post. Offered to bring some food out.

Joe Kearney stood in the middle of the tracks, lifted his arms like Al Jolson singing "Mammy" and began to sing "Moonlight Becomes You" to a 12 year old mountain girl sitting on the porch of a hill cabin. Some members of the 2nd platoon walked into a country school house Friday evening and were accepted by the folks there who were having a recital.

The regiment climbed into the halftracks late Saturday night and started back to camp. Rolled into Camp Campbell at 0630 Sunday morning; wet, sore, tired, hungry and disgusted.

President Roosevelt had gone through on the train and the 56th had been guarding the tracks against sabotage. Troops had been strung out along the tracks across the South.

The 22nd of April, Lt. Gen. Devers, commander of the Armored Forces, paid a visit to camp. 3rd Battalion, 56th was honor escort. One platoon from each company. Dressed in Class A uniforms, climbed aboard the halftracks and rolled out to the airport. Air Corps em lounged around with uniforms unbuttoned, no salutes, very unmilitary. The band played for the review, Gen. Devers inspected, and the honor guard escorted him to Gen. Brewer's house. Saturday morning, grenade throwing, then run through mud for four miles.

Guard duty 1230 noon on Sunday. Last post ended at 0200 Monday morning. Lights had just gone on, changed into fatigues and rolled out with the battalion. Then all of Monday fired the machine gun on the anti-aircraft range. Pitched tents that night. Place was full of field mice and swarms of mosquitoes. Tuesday morning six names were called to report back to camp to fill out papers for ASTP. Reported back out to the bivouac area that evening. Fired machine guns with tracer ammunition, after dark, then fired the 60mm mortars. Place was swarming with mosquitoes. Wednesday morning a field demonstration and then loaded up in the halftracks and rolled back to camp.

Shaved, showered, and cleaned weapons. Loaded up in the halftracks and rolled out again. Ran a problem with the tanks. The company was captured and moved back to a prison camp.
25 mile hike scheduled for Friday. Some men from the 56th transferred to the 8th Armored. USO stage show in camp. Sunday, Regimental Guard- 1500 Sunday afternoon until 1800 Monday night.

Bivouac from Monday morning to Wednesday night. Night problems one week, 2nd and 3rd platoons dug foxholes and the 1st platoon tried to move through. Problem ended 0200 in the morning. Company went through the obstacle course twice in one day. Now have $10,000 life insurance. $6.25 deducted each month for War Bonds.

The first week in May - More of the company left on furlough. KP on Monday. Up at 0300 Tuesday, stuffed blankets into barracks bag, ate out of mess kit. With musette bag, gas mask, M-1 rifle, cartridge belt with all equipment, we slung our barracks bag over our shoulder and marched out of the company area to the motor pool where we climbed aboard the halftracks. The 3rd Battalion, made up of about 50 halftracks and other vehicles, moved out onto the road in a convoy for the bivouac area.

Drove through Hopkinsville and went about 36 miles from camp. Pitched tents, entrenched them and then went out on the anti-aircraft range for a dry-run. The ground was very hard to sleep on. Up the next morning and had the usual daily routines. That afternoon, walked across a field, and they opened up firing machine guns over our heads. Then released tear gas at us and we put on gas masks.

Wednesday afternoon, seven men from the company were returned to camp and then reported to the Service Club for a three-hour test (about 150 questions). The test was for technical courses at some colleges and universities. (ASTP-Army Specialized Training Program). When we finished the test, back out to the bivouac. It rained later that night.

Thursday, out on the combat range. Issued 24 rounds of live ammunition in 3 clips. Started running and crawling across open ground and through the woods. Weather very hot. At the top of the hill, targets popped up and we fell and started firing. We then put on gas masks and continued firing.

Friday, fired the 22 caliber on the anti-aircraft range. Struck tents at 1400 that afternoon. Got back to camp at 1500 and cleaned rifles and machine guns before we could wash up ourselves.

The 2nd platoon will represent the company in a division test.
Slept out again and ran another problem the next day. Made bayonet assaults up hills, captured enemy positions, etc. Rained Friday night so the company slept sitting up in the halftracks. The column had stopped in the middle of the highway. Ate breakfast in the middle of the road at 0400 Saturday morning. Moved out on another problem. Returned to camp at 1400 Saturday afternoon, and then cleaned weapons.

Sutkaitus out of the hospital on the 21st. Issued steel helmets this week.

May 1943. Five em from the 56th appeared before a special board for consideration for ASTP at Ohio State University. Three were recommended; Nugent and Workman from H company, and one man from 1st battalion headquarters. A total of 30 men from the 12th and 20th Armored combined were sent to Ohio State at Columbus, Ohio. Nugent's grades in the math exams were not high enough to qualify, so he returned to duty with H company, 56th.

Nugent returned to Camp Campbell on June 10. Name on the bulletin board for KP the following day. 29 men from the company had been shipped overseas. With the company so under strength, those left are pulling KP one day, guard duty the next, and then other details.

Sgt. Seifert recommended Nugent for radio school. The first squad of each platoon has a radio mounted in the halftrack. When the squad dismounts for exercises, the radio is unlatched and the operator carries one half and has to draft a helper to carry the other half. One half weighs 40 pounds, the other half 45 pounds. This weight in addition to rifle, pack, etc. Radio school lasts two weeks. H company is to stand regimental guard on the 15th. Twenty men for guard duty. The week of the 17th, the company went through the battle inoculation course—200 yards long, thickly woven with barbed wire, land mines planted hither and yon, and four machine guns firing about three feet above the ground.

Up at 0400 on June 21 and rolled out on a two week bivouac. A replica of the Siegfried Line had been laid out near the bivouac area, with camouflaged pill-boxes, barbed wire entanglements, etc. H company had six pill-boxes to capture. The 1st squad, 2nd platoon started out with 3 torpedo men blowing the wire, the riflemen and rocket men kept the embrasures closed, and the flame throwers ran forward and shot flame at the enclosures. Then the demolition men ran forward carrying pole and satchel charges of TNT which they threw into the embrasures. All of this time, the artillery was throwing shells over our heads—75s, 105s, 155s. Even the old noncoms were complaining about how rough the exercises were. "Combat can't be this bad."

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Returned to camp the afternoon of July 4th. Rumors—Fort Riley next month. Some say California, others Tennessee, some say Louisiana, yet others say overseas. New regualtion, passes to town only three times a week. Scheduled for a two-day problem later this week.

Fired on the rifle range on the 9th. Big inspection on Saturday the 12th. Spent Friday night scrubbing the barracks, and marking articles with last initial and the last four numbers of serial number. Saturday morning, laid everything out on the bunk for full field inspection. Fell out in the company street at 0930 in class A uniform for rifle and bayonet inspection. Back into the barracks and stood by bunks for inspection. Nugent and Lubin off to town. Turned in comforters.

The week of the 12th—KP Monday night, Tuesday, and Tuesday night. Thursday, Division Guard. Drove around the camp all night in a Peep. Stole some milk from a messhall about 0400. Inspection of everything we owned and anything not suitable to take on maneuvers was turned in and a requisition for a new one put in. Friday and Saturday, out on a Division Problem. Slept on the ground Friday night, without blankets. Bothered by chiggers, mosquitoes and the heat. Up at 0300 and started the attack. Up and down steep hills. Five halftracks out of action, smashed radiators, thrown tracks, etc. Back to camp at 0300. Cleaned weapons and equipment.

All personal articles (anything that can't be taken on maneuvers) to be sent home by the 15th. Will be leaving Camp Campbell for good on September 1. Group pictures were taken of each platoon. Learning how to block vehicles on flatcars. A new 1st/Sgt. joined the company. Out on a four-day problem tomorrow. Village and Street fighting. No longer run problems as a company. Work in Combat Commands. This combat command is the 3rd Battalion, 56th, plus battalions from 43rd and 44th Armored Regiments, 3rd Battalion of 494th Armored Field Artillery and a company from the 119th Armored Engineers.

The week of the 19th—Out on three, two-day problems. Rolled out in the morning and after a long hot dusty ride pulled into the bivouac area, dug foxholes, and stood guard all night. We fought the problem in the hot sun all day, and came in about 1800 hours; cleaned weapons until 2100, then ran through the same thing the next day. Guys on guard duty fall asleep in the middle of the road at night and very nearly get run over by halftracks. Walked guard for five hours straight, then ran a problem for a mile through the woods. Friday, everything we own must be taken out into the field and laid out for inspection.
The company went through the Village Fighting course. Village had a Nazi flag flying over it. Ran the problem in squads, with fixed bayonets, firing live ammunition. Ran and fell, fired, jumped fences, charged into houses, threw grenades into rooms. Sprained ankles, skinned knees and elbows. Everyone stiff and sore. Morale very low. Everyone cursing the 56th, the 12th and Camp Campbell. They can't decide whether we should be West Point spit and polish or a combat outfit. Many guys are now in the prison stockade. Walter Winchell called this place a second Alcatraz.

Weather very hot. Physical exercises all week. Running, push-ups, carrying others on the back, crawling, etc. 16 mile road march during the hottest part of the day. Aircraft identification training scheduled. 5 day problem coming up which will involve aircraft, diving, bombing and strafing. Friday, full inspection in the field. Saturday, rifle inspection, physical inspection, full field inspection and form 32 inspection.

The Cumberland River Crossing.

The entire division took part in the problem. Rolled out of camp early Monday morning. Finally parked on a hill about 5 miles above the Cumberland River. Marched down to the river with full combat equipment on. Weather very hot. The engineers threw a pontoon bridge across and all of the division vehicles crossed. The company loaded up in rubber assault boats and paddled across. Then marched about ten miles to the bivouac area. Everyone short on water. Couldn't drink from any of the springs or creeks, only from Lister bags when they had been hung. Lister bag water had iodine and salt in it. Bivouaced in the woods. At 2300 that night, marched back to the river, crossed it and then crossed back again.

Laid around the bivouac area Tuesday and Wednesday. Wednesday noon had a "P" ration chocolate bar for lunch. Had a "K" ration for supper. Moved out at 2330 that night. Very difficult moving through the woods and up and down hills in the dark. Finally reached the river at daylight and crossed it. Loaded up in the halftracks and moved out again. Dismounted and moved forward on foot again. 2nd platoon of H company seemed to be the only ones doing any fighting. Hadn't seen the kitchen truck for a couple of days, no one had any water and it was hotter than hell.

Lt. Peters, the new platoon leader of the 2nd platoon was leading us. He kept cheering the platoon up, and letting us take short breaks in the shade. (The word was that Lt. Col. Means took a dislike to him and had him transferred out. He ended up in Italy and someone said that he was KIA). Finally got some water. Thursday night finally got some "K" rations.
Slept out in the field and were on and off guard duty all night. Hadn't changed clothes, shaved, or eaten a good meal for a week. Problem ended at noon. The company came in, cleaned weapons and equipment. Nugent and Sutkaitus off to the movies.

The last of August and everyone in the company is flat broke. A good number went into town anyhow. The rest doing laundry or writing letters. They came around looking for guys for guard duty and details. Sutkaitus and Nugent hid under their bunks, then took off for the Service Club. Went to a movie in the afternoon and another in the evening. 15 guys from the company given discharges. The company so understrength that the few that are left are pulling details every other day.

Out on a problem for four hard days last week. Marched all Thursday night and ran the problem all day. Will be pulling out sometime next week for maneuvers in Tennessee.
Although the training during the spring and summer of 1943 was as rough as Basic Training had been, several things had happened to make it easier to live through. We had made friends. Many of these friendships were closer relationships than any we had, had in civilian life. You no longer had to be alone. Now we bitched and complained by squad, by platoon and by company. We cursed noncoms, officers, the battalion, the regiment, the division, Camp Campbell, Kentucky and Tennessee, the army, the food, MPs and civilians.

Capt. Zapitz, the company commander of H company was transferred out early in 1943, to Battalion headquarters. Bob Beach was assigned as CO and was promoted to 1st Lt. The supply sergeant that everyone hated was also transferred out. Barney Loftsted became supply sergeant. A lot of good friends were transferred out. 1st/Sgt Hervey left because of ill health and Bob Beach replaced him with a Sgt. Wheatholder. Wheatholder couldn't do the job and was soon replaced by Jim Nixon. Nixon couldn't get along with his CO in one of the other battalions and so was sent along to H company. Jim Read, who was a cook with G company, said that the conditions in that kitchen were so bad that when Delbert Darnell (acting 1st/Sgt. of H company at the time) asked him if he wanted to transfer to H company, he jumped at the offer. He transferred in as a baker. "Blackie" Hale was a member of the kitchen crew, and Jim Read said that "Blackie" always had to ask him what the directions were for cooking anything. (There were some guys in the division, who could not read or write. The division sent them off to evening classes). The only thing that "Blackie" would cook was meat and he always cooked that until all of the juices were gone.

Sometime during the spring, the officers (battalion, regiment, division?) had a party at one of the service clubs. Some of the enlisted men were drafted to wait tables and clean up after the party. About eight men from H company were sent over wearing their winter OD, class A uniforms. Some of the guys, when clearing glasses from the tables, would drink what was left in the glasses, and by the end of the evening were pretty well oiled. When we got back to the barracks about 0300 in the morning, J.A. Finn from the 1st platoon, had a sack of oranges which he had swiped from the party. He proceeded to line them up on the top of his footlocker, and swaying back and forth in the dark barracks in a drunken stupor, he gave close order drill commands to the dozen oranges.

The spring of 1943, and a problem off the reservation. The 3rd battalion had just spent the morning running and crawling through the woods and underbrush and was sitting on the side of a hill trying to catch its breath. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Means, walked by with another officer.
As he passed the 2nd platoon, H company, we heard him say, "all that these GIs ever think about is their bellies."

1943 summer

On a very hot and humid day in the summer of 1943, the 3rd battalion had just finished running a problem. Lt. Col. Means came upon old H company and proceeded to give it a little lecture on water discipline. "When the water supply is limited and you have only one canteen of water to drink, you will use half of that canteen of water to shave."

Another problem in the summer of 1943. The 1st squad, 2nd platoon was sitting on an embankment. Most of them were eating that greasy hunk of processed meat from the "K" ration. Lt. Col. Means passed by. (He must have been following H company around that summer.) As he passed us he said, "that stuff taste any good?" And we said, "Its not too bad when you're hungry." And Lt. Col. Means said, "I wouldn't eat that stuff myself."

The clouds of dust raised by the company's halftracks on motor marches and field problems, left everyone's face covered with a thick layer of gray and/or brown dust. And everytime the column stopped, the command went out, "First Echelon Maintenance." As the column rolled along, you always heard, "Take your distance, we don't want to lose two vehicles to one shell."

On a platoon problem in the summer of 1943, the Camp Campbell reservation, H company bivouacked out in the middle of a field. Nugent ended up as the tent mate of Sgt. Sohl. (Sutkaitus must have been in the hospital). After attaching the shelter halves and setting up the tent, Nugent got out his shovel to dig the trench. Sgt. Sohl, "Its not going to rain." Nugent, "I thought it was SOP to entrench your tent, even if you were in the middle of a three-month drought." Sgt. Sohl, "I don't feel like digging a trench, its not going to rain." No trench was dug. In the middle of the night a storm came up and flooded the field. Sgt. Sohl and Nugent got very wet. Moral- Try and stay with your old buddies.

Sometime in the spring of 1943, H company was out in the countryside one morning, engaged in squad exercises. This was after Lt. Combos had left the 2nd platoon and before Lt. Peters had taken command. A new 2nd Lt. seemed to be directing this particular exercise. He was a short red headed guy. We were on a road at the side of a very heavy growth of trees. The Lt.'s directions to the 2nd platoon were, "Men, you are going to go through those woods on your bellies. I am going around by the road and will meet you on the other side. Be careful in the woods, there are rattlesnakes in there. If you're bitten, take out your bayonet, slash the bite and then suck out the poison." That Lt. disappeared from H company before we even learned his name.
August of 1943, Camp Campbell, Kentucky. Very hot and very humid. Orders were that the top button, at the neck of your fatigues was to be buttoned at all times, as were the cuffs of your sleeves at the wrists. HBT (herring bone twill) was not the coolest cloth to make a uniform out of, but that is what fatigues were. In the hot weather, the salt from your sweat turned those green fatigues white. On this particular day two guys from the third platoon, H company, were loading a truck in the company area. They had unbuttoned their fatigues at the neck and at the wrists. They were sweating like Turks as they worked and then Lt. Col. Means drove into the company area. Seeing the unbuttoned fatigues he said, "Give those men extra duty every night for two weeks."

In the beginning the regiment was commanded by Colonel Charles Owens. Lt. Col. John Evans was executive officer. Colonel Owens was relieved in early 1943 as being too old to command a regiment in combat (he was 49). John Evans took over and was promoted to Colonel. Lt. Col. W.B. Means was CO of the 3rd battalion. (West Point graduate). Red-headed guy with the disposition of a piranha. He held officers school several evenings a week. Stated that he would relieve any officer caught associating with enlisted men. (Most of the officers had been enlisted men at one time). After the CO of H company had been promoted to 1st Lt. in January of 1943, he was summoned to battalion headquarters by Means and was made to stand at attention for a good long time while Means chewed him out. Means then told him that he would not be promoted to captain.

In January or February of 1943, Bob Beach was assigned as CO of T company. A lot of fillers came in and were trained, put through weapons firing and then assigned to companies. Bob Beach returned to H company as CO in March of 1943.

Just before the 3rd battalion, 56th, went out to the "Hellcat Combat Camp" in early summer 1943, the H company CO was summoned to battalion headquarters where the battalion CO (white with rage) told him that Col. Evans was recommendig the H company CO for promotion to captain.

On a hot afternoon, summer of 1943, off the Camp Campbell reservation, orders were that there was to be no swimming in nearby creeks and streams. Some of the 2nd platoon, H/56 badgered S/Sgt. Darnell about cooling off in a nearby creek. He said, "I don't care, but if you get caught, I'll deny that you ever asked me." There were times when we rolled the half-tracks into shallow streams and washed them down.
During the worst of times, certain individuals in H company always managed to keep morale up. In the spring and summer of 1943, some members of the division, had even written to Walter Winchell complaining about the conditions at Camp Campbell and about the inhuman training they were being subjected to. Later Campbell was referred to as a desert training center in a story in the New York Times. The troops were always promised that they would be able to lodge complaints with the IG when he made his visits. I suppose that he did visit, but we didn't trust him, and I never knew of anyone that talked to him. I don't remember that he was ever mentioned after we got to Camp Barkeley.

In the 2nd platoon of H/B 56, Vic Challen, (squad leader, 2nd squad) always led the platoon in singing (mostly raunchy party songs) on every march we ever made, from the coldest winter days of 1942/43 with the snow, ice, and sleet to the hottest day of August 1944. Even though we were miserable in body and in spirit, Challen kept us singing.
1943, 3rd of September— Left the barracks and bivouaced on the reservation. Packed winter clothes in one barracks bag and this was sent to someplace in Tennessee. The rest of our clothes were put in the other barracks bag to be taken with us. After setting up tents, we returned to camp and GI'd the barracks. It rained from the 2nd to the 7th. GI haircuts on the 1st, half an inch.

Saturday night, September 4, at about 2000 hours, the convoy moved out. The 56th covered 4 miles—tanks, medium and light; armored artillery (the priests); 37 self-propelled; halftracks; jeeps; jeeps; jeeps; cargo trucks; etc. Drove all night but stopped at midnight for coffee. The drivers were having trouble staying awake and some of the roads had washed out. Got to the bivouac area at 0500 Sunday morning. Set up camp, went to Mass and then cleaned weapons the rest of the day. Place was full of cactus.

Monday started the regular schedule we had been following all week— reveille at 0545, inspection of arms, police the area, straighten up tents, breakfast, butts manual, play softball, a lecture on how to conduct yourself while on maneuvers and then lunch. Afternoon off, but usually spent washing clothes, writing letters, etc. Nugent and Sutkaitus, 12 hour pass to Lebanon. Thursday another 12 hour pass to Nashville. Supper and a movie. The regiment furnished transportation, open supply trucks.

The first exercise to begin the night of the 12th. We are part of the Blue Army. The 94th Infantry Division, tank destroyers, paratroops, etc. are the Red Army. Movie in the field the other night was Algiers with Hedy Lamar. Very cold at night. Lubin and Nugent sleeping on two blankets with three over them. Everyone shivering from the cold at reveille. Maneuvers should be over November 7. Rumors say Camp Forrest or Campbell for reorganization or Camp Phillips, Kansas. Furloughs after maneuvers. Exercises are to last four days, then three days of rest. We have a mobile PX. Watermelons selling for 75¢ and $1.00.

The 11th of September, Sunday evening, went into tactical bivouac, dug foxholes, etc. Crept down to the kitchen, one at a time to eat. In bivouac all day Monday. The 12th was in reserve. The Red Army was somewhere near Murfreesboro. The 98th Infantry Division (Blue Army) started out to attack. We were strafed all day by enemy aircraft.

Monday evening the 3rd battalion, 56th, started out. The 1st platoon, H company took off in one direction, the 3rd in another and the 2nd in yet another. The mission of the 2nd platoon all week was to bring a convoy of trucks of food for the whole division from Nashville up to the front lines. If the
enemy had gotten us the 12th would have gone without food. We brought the convoy through at night. The 2nd platoon, H company, started out with the 1st squad in the lead. The 5 halftracks roared down the highway, but were stopped because a mine field had been laid across the road. Detoured around and came to a bridge where we were told that it had been blown, so had to go 60 miles out of our way through enemy territory. Dark by this time and we got to Donelson about 9 miles south of Nashville, but the convoy hadn't shown up. Took out for Nashville, tore down the main street then drove all night, but never found the convoy.

Next day, put out guards and waited for night. During the day, saw paratroops dropping about 2 miles from us. They didn't come near us. After dark, rolled out and picked up the convoy of 24 trucks somewhere north of Lebanon. Took the trucks to a big field where the rations were put in other trucks and taken to different units of the division. The 2nd platoon got pounds of cheese, loaves of bread, crates of oranges, melons, eggs, bacon, ham, etc. We lived "high off the hog" all week. The 1st and 3rd platoons ate "C" rations.

The 2nd platoon brought the convoy through every night of the week. The 3rd platoon had been captured, and on top of that it rained all week. The problem was over Thursday night, and we moved out Friday and arrived, 25 miles south of Murfreesboro where we set up bivouac. Cleaned the halftrack, equipment, weapons and washed clothes.

Went tactical at 0600, Sunday morning. Dug foxholes, camouflaged everything and then were bombed and strafed by enemy planes. At 1300 word came down that the whole thing was a mistake. The battle wasn't supposed to start until 1700, so we went to Mass and then laid around until time to move out. Loaded up in the halftracks, and moved out with H company leading the 3rd battalion, the 3rd battalion leading the regiment, and the 56th leading the division. No sleep Sunday night. Monday morning 3 halftracks from the 2nd platoon went down a road to scout. Enemy artillery opened up along with enemy bazookas. Jim Manning opened up on them with the heavy 30 caliber. We all dismounted and took to the woods. Three halftracks declared out of action and sent to the rear for the week. Five squads would have to ride in two halftracks all week. Set up a firing line in the woods and opened up on the enemy. The umpire made us fall back as the Reds outnumbered us. Nugent and Sutkaitus out on the right flank in a thicket. Company moved out without them. Stayed in the thicket all day. Came out at 1700 hours and caught two Reds trying to capture our kitchen. Reached the front lines after dark.
About 2300 the Reds started firing from both sides of the road as the halftracks moved up. Five from the 2nd platoon took off up the road to a cemetery where some Reds had been spotted. Got into a fight with the umpire so went back to the halftrack. 3rd battalion moved out on "foot" to clear the way for the tanks and halftracks. The 1st and 2nd platoons of H company started across a field and the Reds opened up. Finally got through them and moved on to the Cumberland river. Extra clothes, blankets, toilet articles belonging to the first squad had gone to the rear when the tracks were declared out of action. The night got very cold. Stood guard at the river all night. Off guard duty the guys laid together on the ground and tried to get warm. Problem was over at 1400 Tuesday. KP the rest of the day. Bivouaced 45 miles east of Nashville. KP again. Nugent and Lubin, 12 hour pass to Nashville. Went to the "Y", showered, went swimming, got something to eat and went to two movies. Bought 2 dozen doughnuts and returned to bivouac area. Guard duty all night.

October 5, early Monday morning, very cold. Rolled out for about 25 miles, dismounted and moved forward on foot. Mounted up and moved out again. Roared up and down the hills at about 40 miles per hour. Cumberland river, the first objective, way down below. Took off at about 40 miles per hour, then stopped a few miles from the river.

Started out on foot for the river about 2200 Tuesday night. Left the halftracks behind. Had 12 cans of "C" rations and our raincoat in our pack. Marched quite a distance to the river. Divided up into boats, twelve men to a boat. Tried to be quiet but equipment was noisy. When the boats reached the other shore the Reds were waiting. Sgt. Sohl, Elder and Nugent jumped to the shore and took off through the woods. The others in the boat were captured. Sgt. Sohl et al got back with the rest of H company about daylight when the attack started. The 1st platoon went around one side of the hill, the 2nd platoon went around the other. Thought the Reds were surrounded, but the umpires let them withdraw.

Fought in the hot sun most of the day. The umpires made H company retreat. Five guys from the 2nd platoon on a hill waiting to attack. Suddenly surrounded by Red paratroops. Taken to their CP. They had chased H company back to the river. About 2000 hours, D/56 took the territory we were in and we returned to H company. Stood guard all that night. Resumed the attack the next day. For two days, only 3 cans of "C" rations to eat, and no rest or sleep.

Had seen a movie the last rest period and Nugent and John Rice went to Nashville and took in another movie.

Cleaned weapons, equipment, the halftracks and washed clothes.
October 12, Sutkaitus, Lubin and Nugent on outpost manning the 37mm anti-tank gun guarding the road leading to the 12th's gasoline and oil dump. 2nd platoon of H company, guarding the dump for two days while the 94th Infantry Division tries to punch a hole in the Red Army lines. 56th then supposed to drive through and knock out rear installations.

Very cold at night but hot during the day. Children in the area have been selling us cake, cookies, pop and chocolate milk. (The troops are not supposed to buy things from the locals). 2nd platoon has a new 2nd Lt., right out of OCS. Sunday night the colonel told the battalion that ten days from now all of our tracks and other vehicles would be loaded on flatcars, we would climb aboard trains and the Division would move to Camp Barkeley, Texas. Near Abilene. He said it would take ten days to move and twenty days to reorganize after we got there. Supposed to be reorganized by December 1st.

This week spent pulling guard duty day and night. Moved out Monday morning from Gallatin to Nashville then down to Murfreesboro and then a ways east of there. Wednesday morning the company traveled northeast through the Tennessee backwoods. The problem ended Wednesday at noon near Lancaster. KP Thursday. At noon moved back toward Nashville. Crossed the river near Carthage and arrived about 12 miles from Nashville about 2200 hours. Friday morning, close order drill in a pasture. Sutkaitus, Nugent and Mothersell off to Nashville on a 12 hour pass. Went to the Y. Had a hot shower, a swim, got a haircut, saw three shows and wandered in and out of stores. Started to rain on the way back. No top on the truck. Wearing suntans and it got very cold. Saturday very cold. "B" barracks bags delivered from storage. Got out scarves, gloves and sweatshirts. Changed to winter uniform (ODs).

Pulled guard duty, 1200 to 0300. Spent most of the time by the fire. Halftrack drivers were told that their tracks will be shipped to Camp Barkeley Texas in ten days. Most of the 12th's light and medium tanks have already been shipped.

Pulled out at 2200 Sunday night, October 31. 2nd platoon of H/56, plus one platoon of light tanks from the 44th Armored Regiment was the point, leading the entire Blue Army. Plans were to cross the Cumberland River and attack the Reds on the other side, but the Reds got there first and blew up the bridges. Fell back and waited until the engineers put a pontoon bridge across. Met the enemy on the other side and lost half of our halftracks. Three light tanks and the 1st squad, 2d platoon, H/56 halftrack surrounded by Reds. The
umpires argued for half an hour and then called things a
draw and let us fall back. The 1st squad dismounted from
the halftracks and climbed up on the light tanks. Then we
attacked and we knocked out 10 tank destroyers. Rained
all week and was very cold. Got a pass to Nashville on
Friday.

November 4, Wednesday, maneuvers ended. Rained hard all
week and very cold. No chance to change clothes, no place
to dry out or get warm as fires were not allowed in the
tactical situation. Cold C rations to eat. The problem
began Monday morning with H/56 and B Troop of the 2nd
Cavalry leading the Blue forces. The 2nd platoon of H/56
was in the lead. Stopped at Doakes Corner where the Reds
held a hill. Took all afternoon to drive them off. Kept
going and then hit more resistance at about 2300. Crawled
over barbed wire fences, through wet grass and bushes,
waded a stream in the pitch dark and finally hit the Red
lines. Laid in the wet brush, five yards from the Reds,
for two hours. Kept up a constant fire.

S/Sgt. Darnell took four men from the 1st squad and they
scouted around to the left flank. Raining hard and we
walked into a Red outpost and were captured. They marched
the five of us back to their battalion CP where we slept
on the cold wet ground without blankets. Up at daybreak,
no food, and were marched five miles back to the Red's
regimental CP. Then marched two more miles to their PW
camp. When they weren't looking, S/Sgt. Darnell would
drop to one knee and cut their phone lines with his wire
cutters. Marched five more miles to their IPW. Got there
about 1500 in the afternoon. They gave us one can of "C"
rations. Then marched to their PWE and then taken to the
Blue Army PWE. Slept on the cold wet ground again that
night. Back to the 3rd battalion, 56th the next day. Problem
ended with H/56 taking a bridge that the Reds had been
holding.

H/56 bivouaced about 5 miles from Watertown, the place
where the battalion entrains for Texas. Movies every night,
inspections of all kinds being pulled, most equipment to
be turned in. The Division sketch book published. Word
that the battalion will move out on the 17th.

All of the Armored Divisions, except the 12th, have been
reorganized. In Texas, the regiment will be abolished and
separate battalions will be formed. 3rd battalion will
remain the 56th. Instead of 3 companies in a battalion,
there will now be 5. Instead of 3 platoons in a company
there will be four. 57mm will replace the 37mm anti-tank
gun.
Abilene, Texas.

CAMP BARKELEY: Site of main entrance to Camp Barkeley, one of the nation's largest military camps of World War II. At peak, 60,000 men were in training here. Named for Pvt. David B. Barkeley of the 88th Division, who died on a secret scouting expedition behind German lines during the Meuse-Argonne Battle of World War I. Among famous units trained here the 45th and 90th Infantry Divisions and the 11th and 12th Armored.

A Medical Training Replacement Center, the largest in the country, was also established here, with 15 battalions. In May 1942, the Medical Administrative Corps Officer Candidate School was activated and graduated about 121,500 candidates.

Camp Barkeley eventually grew to be a community of the size of Abilene of the 1940s. It had a 2,300-bed hospital, 2 cold storage plants, a bakery, 4 theaters, 2 service clubs for enlisted men, 15 chapels, and 35 post exchange buildings.

The military personnel were housed in huts, except for some 4,000 in barracks. Part of the post was also a German prisoner-of-war camp. Once some of the prisoners escaped, to the alarm of Abilene citizens, and others attempted to tunnel under the fence. Camp Barkeley was declared surplus in 1945.
KP for two days in the bivouac area before moving to Watertown. Very cold, wearing winter underwear, wool overcoats, etc. Movies every night. Laid on the cold ground shivering and watching, "The 39 Steps", "The Good Fairy", "Seven Sinners", "Carefree", etc.

Nugent appointed to the billeting party for Camp Barkeley. Two men picked from each company. Left on the first train Saturday morning at 0630. Rode in a Pullman. Went from Watertown to Nashville, to Memphis, crossed the Mississippi over to Little Rock, then to Texarkana, then south and along the Gulf, then north to Camp Barkeley. The 56th left Watertown on Sunday.

The barracks at Camp Barkeley are huts, one-story, made of plywood, with two gas heaters. Eight men sleeping in the hut but there will be nineteen when the replacements come in. Only Nugent and Sutkaitus left of the old 1st squad, 2nd platoon.

H company CO, Lt. Beach, made Captain. Big inspection by the colonel. Weather very hot, the last part of November. Furloughs to begin on the 23rd or 24th of this month. 50 per cent of the company to go the first time, and all furloughs to be over by the first of the year. S/Sgt. Darnell got all of the 2nd platoon down, but then found that only 25 percent of the company could go the first time. Nugent and Sutkaitus weren't on the list, but were put on when two guys decided they didn't want to go at this time.

Clothes are a problem. Turned in two pair of OD pants last summer and haven't gotten replacements. Only have one pair of fatigues now, and are expected to have on a clean pair every day. Table waiter today and guard duty tonight. Probably won't be at Barkeley for more than two months, then California for Desert Maneuvers or overseas. Rifle marksmanship and bayonet training scheduled for the next two months.

While the first group from H/56 were on furlough, the army transferred out a large group to the 4th Armored Division. Those in your own squad you realized were gone, but never did comprehend exactly who and how many went. We were however, very seriously understrength.

Sunday morning, December 13 and the Catholics off to Mass at 0930. On alert at midnight and that means restrictions. Be ready to move out on four hours notice. Sutkaitus back from furlough and off to radio school for three days. Bayonet review and poison gas instruction for Corps tests this week. Problem on last Wednesday. Assaulted a mesa. Could see for miles in every direction. Not much foliage; scrub, mesquite and cactus. Went on pass to Abilene.
1943
fall

On one weekend during maneuvers, Lt. Col. Means, had the 3rd battalion, 56th assembled for a lecture. He began the lecture with what he considered a joke. "Men", he said, "the chief of police in Nashville called me up one evening last week and asked me to come over to the jail. When I got there he told me that he would like me to look at some GIs he had back in the cells. I went back and looked; and, by God, I knew they were from the 3rd battalion, 56th. Their shoes were shined and their asses were chewed out."

One day on maneuvers, the CO of H company was driving down a road when he passed G company. He stopped to visit with the CO of G company since they were old friends. They were sitting on the hood of the CP halftrack when the battalion CO drove up, and proceeded to give the G company CO a good chewing. Said that his vehicles were not properly camouflaged, and then restricted him to the maneuver area for two weeks.

Nick Sifuentes was a short Mexican kid from California, a member of the 1st squad, 2nd platoon, H/56. He played the guitar. He and Sgt. Sohl, assistant squad leader, did not get along. On maneuvers, we put our class A uniforms and civilian shoes in our barracks bags and these stayed with the supply trucks while we were fighting the problems during the week. They were accessible to us during the weekends in the bivouac area so that we could dress when we went on pass to Nashville. One Sunday evening, when we were placing these clothes back in the barracks bags, Nick took one civilian shoe and one GI shoe from Sgt. Sohl's tent (Sohl was asleep at the time), and put them in the barracks bag in the supply truck, heading off for storage some place during the week. When Sohl got up Monday morning, all ready for the week's problem, he found one civilian shoe and one GI shoe. Although he cursed everyone in the squad, he never did find out who was responsible. He spent the week running through the briars and the bramble with a civilian and a GI shoe on his feet. (After maneuvers Nick was transferred out to the 4th Armored Division and was KIA in France).

Toward the middle of October, the nights became rather chilly in the Tennessee maneuver area. Many of the farmers had piles of fence posts which we liberated to build large fires to keep warm. The farmers presented the army with bills for their missing fenceposts and we were told to stop the thefts. We did tear up a lot of property roaming through the Tennessee countryside and the army probably got large bills for this, also.

Another day on maneuvers, Bob Beach saw the CO of G company again. He had written a letter to Colonel Evans, Regimental CO, requesting transfer from the battalion. Colonel Evans called him
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up and told him, no officer ever requests transfer out of his outfit. George Yates saluted and as he was walking away, Col. Evans said, "George, don't worry, I'll handle it."

A couple of problems later as H company headed down a country road, it hit a small creek with signs denoting a mine field. The CO stopped the column and while the 1st platoon probed for mines, Lt. Green XO, began moving the vehicles across the ditch and into the woods. While this was going on, Col. Evans, Lt. Col. Means and the Army Chief Umpire (a Brig. Gen.), drove up. H company's CO reported to them and they watched a few minutes and then drove off. The following Friday the problem was over and Lt. Col. Means had an officer's meeting at Bn. Hq. The rain was coming down in sheets and there was no cover. The officers stood there while Means introduced a half dozen brand new 2nd Lts. He then turned to the CO of H company and said, the next time you embarrass me like you did the other day, I'll relieve you!" Bob Beach asked what he had done and Means said that when he and Col. Evans and the umpire had driven up, that Beach was just standing there with his vehicles out in the open. Bob Beach tried to explain that H company had a deep ditch to cross but Means wouldn't listen. After the meeting the CO of H company was so mad that he had 1st/Sgt. Nixon type a letter to Col. Evans asking for a transfer. However, he heard nothing.

All of the division's vehicles were left in the maneuver area for another armored division. A crew was sent to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas to pick up vehicles to take to Camp Berkeley. One of the last things Col. Evans did was to put Lt. Col. Means in charge of the contingent from the 3rd battalion to go to Camp Chaffee. We never saw him again.

On one problem, as H company rolled down a back road, raising thick clouds of hot dust, it passed a foot infantry division company marching along both sides of the road with their heavy packs. As the halftracks of H company passed them, they were heard to yell, "we get blisters on our feet, and you guys get blisters on your ass."

One day as the column of H Company halftracks rolled down a road in Tennessee, some old guy tried to cut through the column. There were signs warning civilians not to do it. The old guy was in front of Harold Mothersell's halftrack. Mothersell rammed him and lifted his vehicle up on the roller on the front of the halftrack. He rolled the old guy down the road for 40 miles with the old guy yelling and screaming all the way.
One dark night, before a problem, and toward the end of maneuvers, Lt. Col. Means went over to the 56th Aid Station and demanded that Dr. Zimmerman, the battalion MD, give him all of the benzedrine that was on hand. Dr. Zimmerman protested that that was a prescription drug and he couldn't pass it out like that. Means ordered him to give him the benzedrine. Means went back to the battalion and passed out the benzedrine to platoon leaders, platoon sgt.s, halftrack drivers, etc. with orders to swallow it and stay awake. Dr. Zimmerman went over and reported Means to the Division Surgeon.

One day on maneuvers, Lt. Col. Means came by the area of I Company. He looked at their latrine and then at Elmer Bright and said, "Lt. your latrine is not on the proper azimuth. It does not match the azimuth's of G and H Companies."
Chapter 8

December 1943

Christmas Day, December 25, 1943, sitting around the hut; playing poker, writing letters and listening to the radio. S/Sgt. Darnell's wife went home and he brought out his radio. Sutkaitus, Nugent, Hagen, and Fred Payne went to Midnight Mass. Big dinner with turkey and about fifty guests including all officers of the battalion. Showdown inspections all last week. Physical exams scheduled for Monday and Tuesday. The 12th having a rodeo in Abilene on New Year's day.

Raining very hard and the camp is a sea of mud. Out in the rain, mud and cutting wind every day. Basic training on the rifle this week and go on the range next week. Everyone up to the hospital for full physicals; walk around naked with twenty doctors examining everybody for everything. Tetanus shot in the left arm, vaccinated again in the left arm, typhoid shot in the right arm. A lot of replacements joined the company. D.O. & battalion runner this week.

January 1, 1944 and still raining. No sidewalks and the mud is deep. Nugent and Sutkaitus on guard duty all night and all day. Division review yesterday. The general and visitors from town on the reviewing stand. The band played. Not much of a meal today. Armored infantry noncoms raised in rank— all platoon sgt's., staff, up to T/Sgt; all three stripes up to S/Sgt.; cpl's. up to buck.

Out on the rifle range the first week of the month. Still raining and very cold. Rain turned to sleet and snow. Stayed out on the range in all of the bad weather.

Thursday, January 13, moved out on a 20 mile hike at 0630. The wind blowing a gale from the north. Heavy sleet falling. Road covered with ice. Wearing field jackets. Spent three hours at the theater in the afternoon, watching "The Battle of Russia." Sutkaitus, Nugent, Staples, KP Friday. 30 caliber machine gun range Saturday morning.

A 20 mile hike the week of the 17th. In the pits on the Transition Range all week. Down in a pit 6 x 4 x 7', raising and marking targets. Nugent and Sutkaitus the bazooka team for the 1st squad, 2nd platoon. Company received the new 57mm anti-tank guns. Night problem and hike scheduled for the coming week. Rumor— the infantry battalions to be sent to different camps; one to Camp Perry, one to Camp Edwards (a P.O.E.), and the other unknown. Movies showing in camp—"Song of Russia", Miracle of Morgan's Creek", and "The Lodger".

Week of the 24th, H company ran platoon problems. Assaulted a hill, fired live ammunition. Sutkaitus and Nugent usually out as scouts. Four men from the company picked to take Army Ground Forces test. Crawl through barbed wire, reconnoiter a 3-mile
area, measure angles with field glasses, etc. Out at night and run a compass course in the dark and observe from an O.P. Battalion guard duty Thursday night. Rumors—first 10 armored divisions alerted. 11th and 12th armoreds, replacements.

The month of February began with a 5-mile hike (double-time) in 45 minutes with pack and rifle. Capt. Beach leaves for advanced school. Company goes through the Night-Infiltration course—200 yards, crawling under barbed wire with machine gun fire overhead. A new major assigned to the battalion. Squad and platoon problems run. Weather turns very cold. Lunch in the field out of mess-kits. Those who carry carbines, up early Sunday to fire on the range. Pit detail for others.

Out on a night problem from 2000 to 2300. No hot coffee in the kitchen when the company got in. Forty men at a time reporting to the dentist. Reported the size of each piece of clothing we have. Platoon problems being run with live ammunition. As soon as furloughs are over training begins all over again. Nugent and Sutkaitus off to Fort Worth on a three-day pass. Reported over to the chapel for the baptism of Darnell's baby daughter. Nugent and Mrs. Rick godparents. Sutkaitus, Ringwelski, Sparta and Stephen Chew in attendance.


Company went through the Close Combat course—Walk through the woods alone, with 15 rounds of ammunition, fire at targets as they pop up along the way. All furloughs canceled until the 21st of March. Quite a few that are up for furlough are on the P.O.M. list. About 40 P.O.M.'s shipping out. Big rifle inspection, in ranks by the company commander. Three-day problems in the field.

On March 26, 62 new men joined B/56, (from ASTP units or the Air Corps). The camp is overcrowded, as are the mess halls, huts, movie theaters, etc. Fired the carbine on the range. Everyone fires one weapon besides the primary one. Pulled prison guard on Sunday. Battalion guard Friday night and Saturday. Noncoms moved out of the hutsments. S/Sgts. and up moved into a hutment of their own and now eat at their own table.

Ran the battalion firing problem on the 20th and 21st. Dug in Monday night and laid barbed wire. No blankets and it rained during the night. Attacked the next morning with the artillery throwing 75s and 105s overhead, hitting the hill being attacked. Ran through the fires and smoke on the hill. 20 mile hike after coming off the problem.
April- B/56 out on a two week bivouac. Weather turned very cold with strong winds. Up at 0500 every morning. Demonstration of road blocks and how to blow them with Bangalore torpedoes. Put up barbed wire. Moved to another bivouac area. Middle of the month it turned very warm and windy. B/56 was picked to represent the battalion in physical training tests- 30 pushups, 300 yard dash in 45 seconds, obstacle course, carry a man on your back for 75 yards, a four mile forced march in 45 minutes. Ran a night problem with the engineers. Mine fields and booby traps. Easter Sunday, fell out and policed the area. Men leaving and returning from furloughs.

April 19, ten men from old H company chosen to take the Expert Infantryman test. Those who pass wear a blue enamel badge with a silver rifle in the center and trimmed in silver. Also, $5 additional pay per month. Previous training required in: combat in cities, close combat, transition firing, etc. Ten stations set up in the field with an officer at each. Bayonet course, first- 175 yards long and must be covered in 75 seconds, stabbing 10 dummies and going over and under several obstacles. First Aid, 2nd station; followed by Field Sanitation, Camouflage, Protective Measures for Small Units, Military Discipline, and Scouting and Patrolling. Last station, Proficiency with the rifle. Crawl 170 yards, fire on first target (300 yards), crawl a short distance further and fire on 2nd and 3rd targets.

25 mile hike, began at 0400 and finished at 1130. Got very hot by mid-morning. Saturday, inspection of huts and in ranks. Saturday afternoon, fell out for mass athletics. Time to change into suntans. Only three issued, and they get dirty very fast. Wind blows sand through the cracks in the walls of the hutsments. Sutkaitis and Nugent off to see "Hellcat Holiday."

Seven day platoon problem, tactical both day and night. Each platoon operating on its own, cooking its food on small gas burners. Food issued: cans of meat and vegetable hash, chili con carne, bread, jam, eggs, bacon, vienna sausage, canned corn and peas, coffee, etc. Walked over one hundred miles in the seven days, all at night. Slept from 0400 until 0600. Fought only at night. 80 rounds of blanks in cartridge belt.

Bartoleme and Nugent sent out to contact the enemy at 2230 one night. Missed the enemy and lost contact with the 2nd platoon. Walked all night and the next morning. Finally found the 2nd platoon at 1500 Saturday afternoon. Continued the problem Saturday and Sunday. Rained very hard Saturday, Sunday and Monday. No tent and no change of clothes. Slept on the cold, wet ground without blankets. The area full of rattlesnakes. Killed about fifteen. At least one guy bitten. Two halftracks overturned with injuries. The last night of the problem, walked 15 miles through the mud and cold without a break. Reached camp at 0130, the middle of the night. Lined up for inspection of rifles, packs and faces. A 2nd
Lt. walked up and down the ranks with a flashlight, checking everyone's face to see that they had shaved. 25 physical defectives being transferred out of the company.

First week of May 1944, Ringwelski and Nugent on KP. Out on the range and fired the Thompson sub machine gun. Training on 50 caliber machine gun, hand grenades, bayonet—repeating all of the training from Camp Campbell for the third or fourth time. Sniper's school begins on the 9th. One officer, two non-coms, and six enlisted men from each company. Nugent from the 2nd platoon. 0800 to 1700 every day for a week. Colonel Evans the instructor. Fire the '03 Springfield with telescopic sight. Ringwelski off on furlough. Most of the ASTP guys leave on furlough. Sutkaitus due back from furlough.

Finished sniper school but will go out one day each week. Turn-in the 2nd platoon radio. Division checking all of the company's equipment. Captain Beach returned from school. Nugent off on furlough the 22nd.


Division moved out on Monday, June 12 for a problem to check combat readiness. Crossed the IP at 1500. Fighting the 99th Infantry Division. Very hot. Long lines of vehicles—tanks, halftracks, M-7s, M-8s, Peeps, Self-propelleds, trucks, etc. Clouds of heavy dust. The first night B/56 had 42 patrols moving through enemy lines. Hagen, Sutkaitus, Nugent, Bartolome got lost and walked all night. Caught up with the company the next day. The Camp was inspected after the Division moved out and found to be very dirty. Inspectors ordered the Division to return to Camp (how many miles) and GI everything that didn't move. Long lines of vehicles head back to Camp in heavy clouds of hot dust. Hours spent scrubbing everything but the roofs of the buildings. The Division became known as "The Housecat", or "The Mop and Broom Brigade."

see: Phibbs, Brendan. The Other Side of Time. c. 1987, Little Brown. PP. 60-64.

The next day was Infantry Day. The company stood out in the hot sun and listened to some general talk. Then back out into the field. The attack started at 2330. Nugent and Sutkaitus carrying the radio, one half weighed 45 pounds, the other 40 pounds. This in addition to pack and rifle. Walked all night then walked and fought most of Friday. Division told that it had flunked the test when it returned to Camp and would have to take it again.
Dry-run of the Division problem the last week in June. Back to Camp Saturday noon and cleaned equipment the rest of the day. Sunday, July 2, stood inspections and continued to clean equipment. Inspections on Monday. Nugent acting communications sgt. during the dry-run problem. Kept eight radios going and laid telephone wires. Rode with the company commander in his peep. Laid wires from LOD to RL-1, RL-2 up to RL-6. Middle of the night and the tanks kept cutting the phone lines. Crawled back along the wires from each platoon, without a light, until the breaks were found. Spliced the breaks in the dark. Tanks came crashing through the brush all around us in the dark.

Ten men unfit for combat shipped out to service units.
Rumor- France in 90 days.

Motor March to the Camp Bowie reservation. Nugent and Ringwelski pitched a tent together. Weather nice Monday but Tuesday turned cold and started to rain and blow. Huddled around a fire Tuesday afternoon. Up at 0500 every morning. Wednesday, morning still cold. Saw a demonstration of road blocks and how to blow them with bangalore torpedoes. Wednesday night, a night problem. Thursday, strung barbed wire. Moved out at 0230, full field packs. Ringwelski and Nugent carrying the 95 lb. radio, advanced until 0130 in the morning and hit the LOD. Artillery laid down a heavy barrage with shells passing overhead. Flashing lit up the whole countryside. Shells landing 150 yards in front of the company. Machine guns firing on either side. Attacked again at 0200 and kept going through the night and the next day until 1430. Very hot, no food since Wednesday. Everyone out of water. Finally got a little water and one can of "C" rations. Rained all night, and everyone got wet. Too cold to sleep. Attacked again the next day.

Left Camp Bowie at 1630. Followed the backroads which doubled the distance back. Drove all night over the dustiest roads in Texas. Reached Camp Barkeley at 0430 in the morning. Showered and started cleaning equipment. Inspections all day.

Temperature 113 degrees and no shade. Suntans wet with sweat. KP for Nugent this morning, but taken off and put on Infantry Guard duty tonight with Staples and Ringwelski. Situation normal, SNAFU. Company swam at the camp pool from 0800 until 1100. Beer party scheduled for B company in Abeline. Eight men from the company picked to go to Fort Bliss to fire the 50 caliber machine gun.

Beer Party lasted until 0200 in the morning. Not enough women to dance with. Some enterprising studs drove over to a local dance hall (called gonorrhea race track by the troops) and brought back some women. Taxi drivers selling bourbon at exorbitant prices. Nugent, Staples and Ringwelski drank a few beers. Loaded the more inebriated into the trucks and arrived back at camp at 0230. Back up at 0530. Big POM inspection. Half of everyone's clothes declared unserviceable and ripped up. Friday and Saturday the company ran an exercise with the tanks. Hotter than hell.
August 1944. Eight men from the company left camp at 1800 one evening for Fort Bliss to fire the 50 caliber machine gun. Rode down in a Troop Sleeper train. Got a good nights sleep the first night, but nearly froze to death the next morning. The train went through Sweetwater and Sierra Blanca and rolled into Camp Donna Anna, New Mexico (west of El Paso and Fort Bliss) at 1600. Camp not very well settled. Slept in squad tents. PX not very well stocked. No mess hall. Five men from B Company were in one tent with S/Sgt. Peischl from the 1st platoon in charge. Every unit in the Division sent someone down to fire. Stayed for a week firing the 50 caliber every day.

Rumors—Fort Knox as Staging Area for the 12th. The 56th to be transferred to the 9th Armored at Indiantown Gap, Pa. Swimming for the company almost every morning. POM (Preparation for Overseas Movement) inspections everyday. Also being given instructions for emergerencies in combat. Nugent and Sgt. Seifert laid out the company's radio equipment for POM inspection. The company watched the training film, "The Battle of China."

Made out Change of Address cards. Several poker games going on in the hut most of the time. Not much else to do. Loaded boxcars with our equipment. Married men can't leave the post. Wives come out in the evenings. Yesterday was a day off. No one has any money. Spent the day in the library and then did laundry. They've stopped publishing, "The Halftrack", and "Hellcat News".

One guy from the company shipped out with the Advance Party. Will be allowed to take cameras and radios overseas but there are none to be had. Nugent pulled prisoner guard for 15 hours. General Brewer left the Division and there was a farewell review. Major General Greene, formerly 3rd Armored Division, now commanding. Lt. Col. Ingram left the battalion and Major Cunningham commanding the 56th. Told to take all division insignia off of our ODs and turn them in. Will wear suntans on the train and take off insignia at the POE. Everyone reported to the dental clinic.

Been raining steadily for 4 days. Butts Manuel and inspections every day. Physical inspections scheduled. Old clothes to be turned in.
Recollections— 1943/44.  

Chapter 9

Two things that were SOP (standing operating procedure) during training, both at Camp Campbell and Camp Barkeley, digging foxholes and slit trenches and "taking your distance."

Everyone carried an entrenching tool on their cartridge or pistol belt, either a pickaxe or a shovel. The first thing that you did on a tactical problem, when you stopped moving, was to start digging. Most of the time you dug a foxhole, two feet square and six feet deep. Usually you never got it that deep. When you needed cover in a hurry, you dug a slit trench; six feet long, two feet wide and at least a foot deep.

Digging was never easy. Your hands became very sore. The ridge of the palms of your hands below the fingers became covered with blisters. Soon you had blisters on your blisters. Eventually the ridge became covered with callouses. For some reason rocky terrain was never a good excuse for not digging. On one problem, near Brownwood, Texas in the hot summer of 1944, a 1st Lt. stood and watched the 1st squad, 2nd platoon, B/56, try and dig into nearly solid rock for most of one night. He would not allow the squad to move one foot in any direction.

"Take your distance! We don't want one shell to take out two men." On motor marches—"Vehicles, take your distance, we don't want one shell to take out two vehicles." When the column stopped on motor marches, the command was, "first echelon maintenance!" The drivers dismounted and checked their vehicles. Usually, during extended order drill and on problems, when you could light up a cigarette, we would drop down close together to talk. Some officer or senior noncom would yell, "Goddammit, take your distance!"

There were times when you were assigned to a particular detail away from the company area. The kitchen usually fixed sack lunches. They could have given you "C" or "K" rations, but for some reason didn't. The one particular detail that sandwiches seemed to be SOP for was the "Transition Range." On this detail you climbed down into a hole about three by four feet square and six feet deep. You raised a cardboard silhouette target, and the troops fired at it from 300 or 400 yards. You then lowered the target, marked the holes with black pasters, then raised it again so that the score could be recorded. The temperature was usually about 120 degrees down in the hole.

The sack lunch consisted of two sandwiches. Each slice of bread was about an inch thick. One sandwich had a large chunk of rat-trap cheese and the other a large piece of red stringy meat we called horse cock. No butter. One canteen of water to wash it all down and to last all day.

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Chapter 9.

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One thing that was lacking in the military, at all times and in all places, was privacy. You had none. Bunks were three or four feet apart. In some barracks there were double bunks with another guy either above or below you. If you snored, everyone in the barracks knew it. Whatever peculiar idiosyncrasies you brought with you from civilian life, soon, the whole squad and platoon knew them. You could then be teased unmercifully. Your only recourse was to make friends fast.

The lack of privacy in the barracks was nothing compared to the lack in the latrine. Open showers, no stalls, with maybe ten shower heads and a crowd of men all trying to shower at once. Much shoving and yelling. Wash basins were lined up along a wall, with more shoving and yelling as everyone tried to shave and brush their teeth at the same time. The urinal troughs along the other wall had signs posted over them giving orders or advice relating to smoking and VD. "DON'T THROW CIGARETTE BUTTS IN THE URINAL." "SHE DOESN'T TELL YOU SHE HAS IT!"

Along another wall, across from the wash basins, were the toilets, out in the open, maybe ten, no stalls. You had best be quick about your business or you might get shoved or pulled off if someone was desperate. Many guys adjourned to the latrine after mail call to read their letters. Usually there wasn't much traffic then and they could sit on the toilet and open their mail undisturbed.

Out in the field, when nature called, you could go behind a tree and dig a small hole with your entrenching tool. However, whenever you were in bivouac, you dug a slit trench, six feet long, a foot wide, and two or three deep. The dirt was piled on one side and a shovel left to push the dirt in. A small tree branch was stuck in the dirt, and a roll of toilet paper left on it. It was bad enough squatting over this trench, with your pants down, in front of everyone, in all kinds of weather, but, when it rained or snowed and the ground got muddy and slick, one misstep and the consequences were unthinkable.

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The week at Camp Donna Anna, New Mexico, firing the 50 caliber, was six days of blistering heat in the desert sands. Standing inside the rings on the platforms, firing at sleeve targets towed by WASP pilots. Those lady pilots got very upset because we were leading the targets too much. They screamed down over their radios, "tell those stupid GIs to stop shooting up our tails!" I suppose we were hitting the rudders and stabilizers of their planes pretty often.

There was a half of an oil drum, filled with water, beside each platform. When the barrels got hot, we unscrewed them, and threw them in the water. Firing was not like the short bursts which we had fired at Camp Campbell. Here we held down the trigger and hosed the sky in a steady stream. We put in new barrels and checked head space with a nickel.

S/Sgt. Peischl had a run in with a 1st lieutenant who was not from B/56. One day he asked Peischl why he hadn't shaved. (Although I hadn't shaved either, and he didn't say anything to me). Peischl said that he didn't have any razor blades. The lieutenant said, "By God sgt., when you don't have a razor blade, you find a piece of broken glass and shave with it.

When we weren't firing the 50 caliber, we were cleaning it.
Chapter 10.

recollections-

The language of the troops during World War II was a mixture of old and new military, of frustration and anger, of hatred and contempt and of deprivation and want.

It was occasioned most of the time by the U.S. military and was directed at them and at American civilians not at any Germans or Japanese. It was understood by most recruits that the military would subject them to a certain amount of chicken. But there were times when the chicken was laid on with a trowel. One also had to put up with obnoxious types who didn't shed their worst traits when they put on a uniform.

Usually the first response to anyone who hassled you was, "blow it out." You could add, "your 'B' bag." Or, "your 'A' bag." These were canvas bags in which you kept your off season or civilian clothes.

After learning to field and detail strip the M-1 rifle, the retort was embellished by adding parts of the rifle, e.g. "blow it out your stacking swivel," or, "blow it out your trigger-housing group," or, "blow it out your barrel and receiver group." The possibilities for this expression were endless.

"GI" stood for government issue. Mostly applied to a soldier in the U.S. Army. It was not a compliment. To the military you were a serial number, a piece of equipment, to be used to complete a job. Just like all other government issued supplies and equipment.

"GI" was also used as a verb, e.g. "to GI the barracks" meant to scrub and clean them, usually for inspection. The "GIs" was the diarrhea.

"My aching back" was the response to any orders or assignments which didn't seem very rational. Later on this became, "My aching GI back." After we got to England it became, "My bloody, aching GI back." It really meant, "Oh God, not again." Or, "We just did that." Or, "How about a few minutes rest before we continue this crap."

OCS Material. Comic Books. This was what officer candidates had to read at officer candidate school in order to become 2nd lieutenants. Officers and gentlemen.

90 Day Wonders. Graduates of OCS.

2nd John. 2nd Lieutenant.

By the Numbers. In order for everyone to learn routines together and quickly, the Army taught you to do them by the numbers. "on the count of one, do this; on the count of two, do that; on the count of three, ..." and so on.

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recollections-

Let's Get These Troops Out of the Hot Sun. Usually yelled by someone standing in a line, waiting for the next order, or for any instructions to get things moving. It could be the chow line, shortarm line, the line at a movie. It was usually snowing, cloudy, raining, late at night or early in the morning before sunup.

Section Eight. Mentally Incompetent. The Army's classification for people who were crazy. When anyone exhibited strange behavior, the question was, "what are you bucking for, a section eight?" Many times the guy probably was. If he was, it was a bad gamble. He could just as easily end up in the stockade as with a discharge.

Goldbrick. To look busy or concerned, when you were actually relaxed and doing absolutely nothing, was usually referred to as goldbrick. One who did this was a goldbricker. Some guys were so good at getting credit for doing nothing that they were called goldbrick artists.

TS. Tough Shit. Anytime anyone complained about anything, the response to him was "TS", or, don't tell me your troubles I've got troubles of my own. Go see the chaplain. He'll punch your "TS" card for you.

SOL. Shit Out of Luck. Anytime things didn't turn out the way you thought they should, or you didn't get something that you wanted, you were SOL.

Sad Sack. Originally, Sad Sack of Shit. One who couldn't maintain the Army's standards, whether it was: an unclean or unpressed uniform, a messy footlocker, not being able to keep cadence when marching, not carrying out a detail quickly and correctly, and so on.

SNAFU. Situation Normal All F***ed Up. Anytime you had to hurry to get someplace and then wait for hours for anything to happen. Anytime you had to repeat training or an exercise because the senior officers weren't happy with the way you did it the first time. Anytime they postponed a ten-minute break, a furlough, a day off. Scheduled training in the middle of the night.

F***. As James Jones said in his book World War II, every other word uttered by a GI was f***. It had nothing to do with sex. It was not used to irritate civilians or anyone else. You may have had certain standards of speech when you entered the service. You might have a college degree. You might have spent your youth in a house full of females. Nevertheless, by the end of Basic Training, every other word that you used was f***. It was the one WORD that expressed all of your rage, anger and frustration.
Many times it began when someone became irritated with you and yelled, "f*** you!" Many guys had a quick response. Fred Payne always replied, "You'd like to." Vic Challen responded with, "It'll take ten dollars and a white man."

Individuals, groups, organizations, assignments, etc., all were prefaced by f***ing. e.g. "That f***ing noncom.", "Those f***ing officers.", "This f***ing detail." Or, "How come you f***ers can't find another f***ing squad to do your dirty f***ing details just one f***ing time."

**Short-arm.** Short-arm inspection. Once a month, early in the morning, the day after pay-day, you fell out for penis inspection. With a helmet liner on your head, shoes on your feet, and nothing but that heavy, rubber raincoat covering your body, you went up to the day-room (activity room) where the whole company (250 men) got in line. At the back of the room, sitting on a folding chair, and wearing a white coat, was an MD with a flashlight in his hand. Standing beside him with a clipboard was the 1st Sgt. You stepped up to the medic, unsnapped and opened the raincoat. Then the medic said, "Skin it back and milk it down." If you had syphilis or gonorrhea the whole company knew it. Then the medic looked in your pubic hair with his flashlight. If you had the crabs, it was announced for all to know. You reported to the dispensary where they gave you some Blue Ointment, told you to shave off the hair and smear the ointment all over the area. Then everyone in the company sang:

"Put on that old Blue Ointment
To the crabs disappointment
It will kill them all in a day.
Though it scratches and it itches,
It will kill those sons a bitches
In the good old fashioned way."

If you had VD and missed any training time because of it, they docked your pay. No sick leave for VD.

Irwin Shaw gave the best description of short-arm inspection in his novel, *The Young Lions*. A new recruit is heard to say:

"This army pays more attention to a man's tool than a Spanish bride on a hot night on the equator. I been in this army twelve hours and they looked at it three times already. Who do they expect us to fight, the Japs or the field hockey team at Vassar?"
WW II ROLE OF
CAMP SHANKS RECALLED

The Journal News of Rockland County, N.Y. (7-12-86 edition) contained an article pertaining to the ceremony at the Piermont Pier in remembrance of the thousands of troops who departed from that point to go overseas in the service of their country.

The simple ceremony early Friday morning recalling the hundreds of thousands of soldiers who boarded troopships at the Piermont Pier during World War II was in sharp contrast to the massive Liberty Weekend party just past.

Local dignitaries and other casually dressed guests gathered around a floral wreath and the plaque marking the sacrifices of the soldiers who passed over the pier. A sprinkling of representatives from area posts of the Veterans of Foreign Wars stood by as an honor guard.

Anchored offshore, the 533-foot maritime training ship Empire State offered a symbolic backdrop for the observance, stopping for an hour on a voyage from New York City’s harbor to Albany and that city’s tricentennial celebration.

Camp Shanks, in nearby Orangeburg was a major staging point for the U. S. Army. “World War II was not fought in the history books and hundreds of thousands of GIs waited right here where you’re standing to fight it,” observed Maritime College humanities professor and Piermont resident Robert Sennish, who led the ceremony Friday. “For many, this pier was the last home soil they touched,” Sennish said, solemnly describing the spot as ‘sacred ground’.

Above taken from an article prepared by George Walsh, Staff Writer for the Journal News. Those of us who left that pier can still remember our feelings as we departed from our homeland to participate in a war far away from those we loved.

Memories, memories, are all one has left when the years have rolled around. But, we will never forget those who left their native soil and did not return. They were the real heroes.
1944 September

We moved out of the huts, with everything we owned stuck in duffel or barracks bags, and straggled into the fieldhouse where we would sleep on the floor during the night and then go back over to the huts to give them a final scrub-down.

We loaded up in the troop sleepers (they looked like boxcars), an aisle down one side and rows of three wide bunks. The middle bunk was folded up during the day forming the back for the lower bunk as a seat. There were long lines through the cars at chow time back to the kitchen car. And we tried to keep our balance as we rocked, and swayed back to our seats with a mess kit full of food in one hand and a hot mess kit cup full of coffee in the other. We had steak one night but it was as tough as shoe leather. We took turns standing guard at each end of the cars during the day and through the night. We had to dismount at Wichita, Kansas for calisthenics (the old side-straddle hop) along the track. We went through Kansas City in the middle of the night, east south of Chicago, through Port Huron and over into Canada. We rolled past Niagra Falls and then on down to Camp Shanks.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of 56th AIB by Elmer Bright, Hq 56th'

On 7 September 1944, the 12th Armored Division departed Camp Barkeley, Texas for one of the Ports of Embarkation in New York to catch a boat ride to the European Theater of Operations. The route we took was not direct by any means, passing through Chicago and then into Canada before we arrived at Camp Shanks on the 10th at 1110 hours.

An interesting thing happened in Chicago. Somehow, a few of us were up in the steam engine cab, when we stopped for a short time. One of the guys there was Bill Harridge, a Tank Company Commander in the 714th Tk Bn, whose father was the well known William Harridge, President of the American Baseball League for many years. Bill decided to get off the train, find a pay phone and call his father, which he did. However the engineer got the word to move out and no Bill Harridge sighted...We started to move just as he came in sight and he ran to catch up to the train when we hauled him in with very little time to spare.

That train must have been the biggest gambling casino ever on wheels. One could get into any type of game desired in every car in that train; poker, blackjack, gin rummy, craps or you name it. For three days the games went on day and night. I even ventured a few bucks in a few hours of poker."

Camp Shanks. I think we got hit by the edge of a hurricane that year. It seemed like it was raining all the time. At night we walked guard duty outside of our barracks up on a hill.
Down the hill on the streets below us, units marched by in total darkness, on their way to the trains which would take them to the troop ships. It rained hard most nights but as they moved along most units sang, "Roll me over in the clover, roll me over, lay me down and do it again."

We moved through the chow lines in the mess hall with troops from most of the allied nations in their varied uniforms. The juke box in the PX was playing, "I'll be seeing you" and "Till then."

We got twelve hour passes to New York City. There were eight or nine of us from the 2nd platoon, B/56, including Challen, Hagen, Rackow, Staples, Nugent and Sutkaitis. Rode the Elevated and the subway and stopped off at Times Square and Forty Second St. Tried to make a long distance call to Kansas City but the operator cut me off. I must have mentioned the 12th and New York. Charlie Staples said he had been in New York City many times and would gladly serve as our guide. (We shouldn't have trusted him). He led us directly to the Bowery. We wandered in and out of several dives and finally ended up at the South Shore, where three or four of our party got tattooed. And so, back to Camp Shanks.

It was the middle of the night and raining hard when we fell out to board the train. With a duffel bag, a couple of barracks bags, a musette bag and an M-1 rifle, we were probably carrying over 100 pounds on our backs. It was a very long march to the train. When we got aboard we were packed in like sardines in a can. We tumbled off of the train and onto the ferry. Climbed off of the ferry onto the dock where the Empress of Australia awaited us.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of Elmer Bright'."

We stayed at Camp Shanks from the 11th to 18 September doing all the processing necessary for overseas shipment. Of course, there were many leaves to go to the Big Apple while we were not alerted for shipment. However, the day finally arrived when the gates were closed and no more leaves or passes out of Shanks.

I have a Government Request for Transportation Voucher which requests the Erie Railroad to furnish Capt. Elmer E. Bright and 709 others at lowest rate the following from Camp Shanks, N.Y. to N.Y. City via Erie-Jersey City- thence ferry to North River Terminal- good in coaches only,' I don't know who the 709 others were but I do know that we all arrived to board HMT Empress of Australia, the ship which took the King and Queen to Canada in 1939. We departed Camp Shanks on the 19th and boarded the ship where the crap and card games took up where they left off at Shanks."
1944

September

Bare light bulbs lit up the dock and the Red Cross ladies were passing out doughnuts. We struggled up the gangplank with all of that equipment on our backs. When we got up on deck, someone asked, "where is the 2nd platoon, B/56 billeted?" And the reply was, "down on 'E' deck." And someone else asked, "where the f**k is 'E' deck?" And the answer was, "below the water line of course, where else would they put the 2nd platoon." And someone else said, "if a torpedo hits this baby we won't have to worry about drowning."

And it was a hell of a long way down those stairs to "E" deck. It was hot down there and we had on our wool ODs. We were supposed to sleep in hammocks and it took a long time to figure out how to sling them up and tie them. After we did and got up in them, it seemed like everyone had somebody else's feet in their face.

The next morning when I stepped out on deck I got dizzy and almost fell forward on my face. Made my way over to a stairway and sat down for about five minutes. When I stood up again, I had my sea legs and wasn't bothered by sea sickness the rest of the trip.

Probably three-fourths of the 56th spent the voyage hung over the rail heaving up everything but their socks. Many of them were sick most of the trip. If the motion of the ship didn't make you sick, that food the English crew served, sure as hell would. They served only two meals a day. Breakfast was usually Polish sausage with sauerkraut. The PX had only English candy, cookies and soda pop. The smell of that soda pop would almost make you vomit.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of... Elmer Bright'

The accommodations on that ship were not first class; Cruise Type. Eight other officers and I occupied the suite where the king stayed. Compared to the enlisted men's quarters a compartment on "E" deck which was the eating and sleeping quarters for 60 men and it was about 40 ft. square. There were hammocks slung above the eating tables for 20 men, thin pads to be laid on the tables for 20 men and pads for the other 20 men to sleep on the floor. Each compartment had two large steel buckets to get the garbage the Limey cooks provided for meals. It was awful. The men reported the ship's crew was selling sandwiches to the men for $2 - 3. This was known as Lend-lease with the British. As is usual in the British Army or Navy, the Officer's Mess was much different. It was rather good."

Taking a shower in the salt water always left you feeling clammy. It certainly wasn't refreshing. You wondered whether it was worth the trouble. Felt like scrubbing yourself down with sandpaper.

If you laid down on the deck (no deck chairs on troop ships) to get some nice, cool, fresh air, you got beat on the sole's of your feet with a club and told not to use your life jacket as a pillow.
Ch. 11.

recollections

1944

September

There was a smoking room on the main deck. It was an interior room with a blackout curtain over the door. After dark you were supposed to do your smoking in there. But, anytime you pulled the curtain aside, there was a cloud of smoke that you could cut with a knife. There was a piano in one corner of the room. The room didn't look any larger than twenty by twenty feet. If three-fourths of the 56th were in there smoking, you really didn't have to light up, just inhale everyone else's smoke.

The sea air wasn't very good for M-1 rifles. You had to oil it frequently to keep it from rusting.

Many of the 2nd platoon were heard to remark that the "Empress of Australia" had most probably been used as a garbage scow out of Sydney, before the war.

Someone said that this convoy was one of the largest ever to leave the states. There was a large ship off to our northeast, most of the way, and the word was that there was a large contingent of WACs on board. Some of the more enterprising studs were always discussing the possibility of trying to swim over there.

We had this one particular screwball in the platoon who had been transferred in from the 4th Armored, sometime at Berkeley. He drove everyone nuts with his idiotic questions and senseless chatter. One day standing at the rail I heard Lt. Feeley say to T/Sgt. Darnell, that if old K happened to go overboard some dark night, no questions would be asked. It didn't happen.

Before we disembarked at Liverpool, we had to stand a regular short-arm inspection, and no one could figure out the reason for that, since we had been at sea for ten days, and there sure as hell weren't any women aboard this ship. Then we had to put our arms over our heads so the medics could check under arms for lice. And then we had to bend forward so that they could check the hair on our heads. We couldn't figure what the bloody English had been hauling on this tub to make it so lice infected.

Someone said that Patton had requisitioned all of our vehicles when they were landed in France. We were detoured to England and when we sailed into the Irish Sea on our way to Liverpool we found that the Irish Sea was really a very dark green.

"'Advance Detachment' by Don Turney

...I wasn't too surprised when 1st Sgt. Nixon yanked me out of the chow line and asked me if I wanted to go on the advance party. After he relaxed his hammerlock it wasn't too many days till I was riding a freight train guarding vehicles. I think there were 12 of us plus one officer. Six of us would be scattered in different cabs on the flat cars and the other six would be in the caboose. We would change places when we could. Eating was a problem and the trip took 7 days,
ending at Bayonne, New Jersey. From there we went to
Fort Hamiltonin Brooklyn. We were there for 3 days
and shipped out on a small merchant marine ship
(Marine Eagle). I think we left Sept 1, 1944 and
landed Sept. 15th at Cherbourg. It was a good size
convoy and after landing I was to learn my brother
was in the same convoy. There must have been about
800 GIs on this boat and the boys from the 12th were
issued MP armbands. We had to guard something below
decks. No one said what it was (probably a ton of mon-
ey for DeGaulle).

Upon landing we were taken to a transient camp and
spent a week or so there. We then went to another
small town and set up our 2 man pup tents plus a py-
ramidal tent and our vehicles started to arrive. Our
job was to guard them. I think we lost 2 jeeps which
was pretty good when you consider how many officers
were looking for wheels. Again we were away from the
main party but we did mess with them and were able
to see some movies somebody got via a moonlight re-
quisition. We had much free time as we would only
pull 4 hours guard duty each day. We got along good
with each other but there wasn't much to do. We went
for walks looking for chestnuts, souvenirs, etc. We
ran across some narrow guage railroad tracks hidden
in the woods that were probably used by the Germans
to launch V-2 rockets to England. Occasionally we
would visit small towns, visit the Red Cross in Cher-
bourg, several times we would see many German PWS
being shipped to the US. They also announced public
hangings of GIs but we didn't care to attend. I had
high school French and I could converse fairly well
with the natives. I won't incriminate myself but I
will say we always had calvados and wine. We didn't
need all that gasoline anyhow. I remember one time
a Frenchman got stuck in a mud-hole. We made a deal
with him to pull him out for a bottle of good wine.
We hooked up a halftrack to his frame and yanked him
out. He was a little upset because he thought his
truck shouldn't go that fast. Personally the French
didn't impress me too much as an ally. We stayed in
that area about 2 months. I think it rained every
day.

Finally we rejoined our companies sometime in Novem-
ber. I had a lot of mail waiting for me. I hadn't
received any since leaving Texas.
Ch. 12.

recollections & diary.

1944
October

We strapped on our cartridge belt, hefted up our duffel and barracks bags, steel helmut on the head, M-1 rifle on the shoulder and we struggled down the gangplank. It was dark and had been raining. The streets were wet and slick. The cobble stone street led off and up a steep hill and we moved up it in platoon formations. Some lst lieutenant couldn't make it and he sat down on the curb and cried.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of ...Elmer Bright'

The ship arrived at Liverpool and docked at 1630. Some officer spoke to all the officers upon arrival and his last statement was: "Tomorrow we will land on the coast of France." This was the 2nd of October and we were to remain in England for 39 more days. We left the ship at 0115 in the early, early AM and boarded trains at 0145 to go to Hungerford where we traveled by cattle trucks to Camp Membury, arrived at 1520 and were billeted in tents surrounded by mud. We were in the neighborhood of Oxford but had little time to attend classes since we only stayed 3 days."

We stayed in large squad tents and the first meal that I remember that the kitchen crew fixed was Spanish rice. It wasn't too long after we finished eating that I got the shakes. I shook all over. I couldn't stop shaking. I laid down on one of the canvas cots near the entrance to our tent and shook some more. Ringwelski piled blankets and overcoats on top of me and I still shook.

Suddenly I felt the urge to heave and I jumped up and ran around the tent and threw up. I vomited. I heaved up everything but my shoelaces. Then I staggered back to the cot, threw myself on it and passed out.

The next morning I woke up feeling fine. The rest of the company looked pasty-faced and limp. About midnight, they had all gotten the GIs, and had spent the night running to the latrine. Someone said that the cooks hadn't rinsed the soap out of the pans they served the rice from.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of ...Elmer Bright'

We left Membury on the 5th of October and traveled to Camp Pennings near the historic Tidworth Barracks, permanent type brick building. Our Infantry commander, Col. 'Bull of the Woods' John Evans thought his doughboys should learn to be miserable and we were quartered in tents, in England, in November. We were issued extra blankets for sleeping outdoors and it was cold! There was lots of infantry training."
Ch. 12.
recollections-
1944
October

We headed for Tidworth on the English train, with about six of us to each compartment. Ringwelski and Kasner, leaned out of their respective compartments, and shouted insults at each other all the way to Tidworth. We stayed in squad tents and it was cold. We found out how cold every morning trying to take a leak in that open air latrine, digging through all those layers of clothes, hopping from one foot to the other, and praying to God we didn't wet ourselves.

We didn't think we had been allotted enough coal to keep our tent warm enough. The first meal that we ate was boiled potatoes and that red, stringy, tough horse meat. There wasn't any gravy, butter or seasoning. The meat—everyone remembers what we called that. The colonel was standing by the door of the Quonset hut, mess hall, checking everyone's plate to see that we had eaten all that we had taken and making sure no one threw anything in the garbage pail. I think he made us eat the potatoe peeling.

The 1st squad, 2nd platoon soon solved the coal and food problem. Ringwelski volunteered for night fireman in the kitchen. He told us to come down to the back door of the kitchen (a Quonset hut) about midnight. We crept down without arousing anyone, and Ringwelski passed out gunny sacks filled with bread, fruit cocktail, other sundry rations, and a sack of coal (which seemed to be in short supply in this camp). We crept back to our squad tent with all of our loot, and all in all, except for the damp cold and fog, lived fairly well at Tidworth.

On our marches through the English countryside, we discovered sugar beets. However, we were warned to stay out of the fields, since the Germans had dropped butterfly bombs, and all of them had not exploded.

The English roads were narrow and winding, and the Americans had trouble remembering the rule of the road and the right side to drive on. Probably a good number of poor English citizens were mangled by large American trucks careening down those narrow country lanes.

We went in to the Red Cross rooms at Tidworth and ate doughnuts and drank coffee and listened to the radio. Here we were introduced to the English meat pie. We had first been offered them by English Red Cross girls, when our train stopped on the way from Liverpool to Tidworth. We expected good old American fruit pie, and were somewhat disconcerted to find chunks of meat and vegetables under a pie crust instead of fruit.

We got a pass to London and stayed in a flat in Upper Barkeley street. The rooms were rather large with double bunks. The English maids wandered in and out while we dressed and undressed. We rode on the Underground, visited Charing Cross, Trafalgar Square, Whitehall, Waterloo Bridge, etc. We walked around London in the blackout and Englishmen kept popping out of doorways, chirping, "wanna buy a torch?" We were approached by a "lady of the evening" and when she quoted her price, Rackow said, "I'll take trupence worth" and then ran his hand down her thigh and gave her a coin.
Some of us were sent as an advance party to a town called Mere, where the 11th Armored was supposed to stage when it landed. We hadn't been paid yet, and we didn't have any money and there was nowhere that we could get credit. We were out of most rations, including, worst of all cigarettes. Those were the worst nicotine fits that I ever had and I would have committed any crime for a cigarette. We cleaned up the barracks and the area at Mere and reported back to Tidworth.

Before we crossed the channel, we were told that the battalion surgeon needed to speak to us. The whole battalion fell out one day, and the battalion surgeon stood above us on a platform. We expected a grisly talk on some of the horrible wounds we might receive in combat. Instead, the surgeon stood up there and yelled, "Men, look out for some of those French whores. They can give you some terrible diseases."

We were told that we would be given a rigid physical exam before we crossed the channel. We couldn't figure what more they could check that they hadn't checked already. Turned out to be a short-arm inspection and a shot in each arm.

1st Sgt. Nixon taught the guys in B/56 how to ask, "Will you sleep with me tonight, mademoiselle?" in French. I think he did time in France during the first World War.

Boarding the train at Tidworth, for the channel steamer at Southhampton. We were lined up in full combat gear, waiting to board. Ringwelski had a large cardboard box in one hand. 1st Sgt. Nixon bellowed, "Ringwelski, what in the hell have you got in that box?" And Ringwelski said, "cookies, cake and doughnuts." 1st Sgt. Nixon yelled, "where the hell do you think we're going? Get rid of that goddam box."

Loading equipment and supplies before we crossed the channel, someone asked what the mattress covers and white boards were for. And one of the noncoms said, "the mattress covers are to bury you in, and the white boards will make the crosses they put over your graves."

"Excerpts from 'Diary ...by Elmer Bright'"

...most men got to see Stonehenge at Salisbury, the pubs at Andover and of course London was a big attraction. We all surely remember Piccadilly Circus and the nightly attractions which paraded around the square in complete blackout.

We were to remain at Tidworth Barracks until Armistice Day, 1944 when we finally received word that the Division was going to France the next day. We boarded trains to go to Southhampton, and then by ship across the English Channel."

"Daily Log, B/56, from Steve Pedrett-Maintenance section arrived in Southampton, England, Nov. 9. Nov. 9 to 12, on L.S.T. 503 for six days, chow was good, slept on tank deck. Good trip. Arrived in Le Harve, France, Nov. 13."
Chapter 13.
recollections-

On the day we crossed the channel, very few people were up on deck. Ringwelski and I were walking around on the port side of the bow. The fog was so thick that you could cut it with a knife. All of a sudden, out of the fog on the port side, the bow of another ship (an oil tanker and higher than ours) swung in at us and tore a goodly number of lifeboats off of that side. Some 1st lieutenant went running below decks, yelling, "everyone stay calm, we've just been hit by another ship, and lost most of our lifeboats." The guys below decks were either sleeping or playing cards. They ignored the lieutenant and we crossed the channel without further incident. A week or two later, a sub sank a ship in the channel and an infantry division lost a battalion.

Since there wasn't a dock at LeHavre, we had to disembark by going down the side of the steamer on ropes. It must have been 30 or more feet down and we had at least one hundred pounds of equipment on our back, and our M-1 rifle on our shoulder. The LCIs (Landing Craft Infantry) were bobbing around like corks below us, the ocean water was churning, and we were trying to time our drop so that we landed in the LCI and not in between the hulls of the ships where we would have been ground into hamburger.

The LCIs dumped us out on the beach in the rain. The French civilians of Le Harve threw rocks at us and spit at us. The RAF had bombed and strafed them the week before. We never did find out what connection they made between us and the RAF.

We loaded up into open trucks and rolled along in the rain to a large muddy field near Auffay. We buttoned shelter halves together (the last time to my knowledge that the 56th erected tents) and pitched our tents. Someone found some straw which we scattered on the muddy ground inside the tents.

Someone from battalion heard our bitching, and remarked that the colonel had to sleep in a house without any windows. We told them that that really was too bad, but the house had wooden floors and walls, so he must be a hell of a lot warmer and drier than we were.

That evening, Rackow, who had some high school French, volunteered to reconnoiter the countryside and see what he could scrounge up. (Rackow was not the scrounger that Ringelski was, but Ring didn't speak any French). He was gone a hell of a long time, but finally wandered back. He said the family at the farmhouse had invited him to stay for supper. He had a bottle of something called Calvados which he passed around to the squad. I took a swallow and my throat locked on me. It felt like someone had hit me in the adam's apple with a ball bat.

We did get some good French bread but someone ruined the market by paying above the going rate

55
"Excerpt from 'Diary of ...Elmer Bright'

We left Tidworth Barracks on foot carrying our gear. Walked from 0745 until we boarded a troop train at 0902 for the trip to Southampton. On arrival we boarded HMS Cheshire for the cross-channel trip to France. I don't remember much about the voyage, except with all the English Channel to sail in, we had a collision with another ship and knocked a few lifeboats off the side of the ship. The noise was a hell of a lot worse than the actual damage, but you can imagine the thoughts of torpedoes and other things that rookies like us could imagine.

After the overnight trip, we disembarked onto an LCT (Landing Craft Troops) and at 1500 we hit and I mean HIT the beach at Le Harve. I had a bet with the Bn. Cmdr., Col. Ingram on the Army-Notre Dame game, played that day. He gave me the Irish and 25 points. When we landed I asked a sailor who won the game and he said, "Army 55-0." Nuff said. It was pouring down rain and the whole area bombed out. There was hardly one brick upon another for as far as one could see.

The transportation for us was lined up. When we saw open top cattle trucks it was a real shock. We were herded on the trucks to either stand or sit on the floor for the long trip to Auffay, France. Bivouac area was a muddy field and we heard this was a pig sty but the pigs were taken in the house and we were given their field. Since the kitchens had not caught up to us we were issued canned rations. It seemed that all the cans contained Vienna Sausage. Once we were issued whole chickens to cook over open fires. Our first barbecue in France! SMG Karika's morning report indicates "High morale", but he always said that. Remained in this area from the 13th to the 17th of November cleaning equipment, drawing crew-served weapons, drawing halftracks, jeeps, trucks, kitchens (finally) and shaking down for combat.

The battalion departed the Auffay area on the 18th of November and closed in on Bacqueville at 1830 hours. The Battalion Headquarters was set up in a French Chateau which was almost empty but it was under roof and in pretty good shape. The units undertook a rigorous training schedule while the Battalion Staff was trying to figure out where we were going to operate in which army, 1st, 3rd, 7th, or 9th. At one time the Bn. Cmdr. went into the 9th Army area for a briefing along with other commanders from the Division and we all thought that's where we would end up.
Thanksgiving Day it rained. The EM of B Company stood around in a heavy downpour fishing soggy turkey, etc. out of rain-filled mess kits.

"Excerpt from 'Diary of... Elmer Bright'
The 25th of November was Thanksgiving Day and the kitchens were issued turkey, cranberry sauce, and the other trimmings for a turkey dinner. Our headquarters mess really went all out and fed us a superb meal.

We stayed in the Bacqueville area until the 29th and moved out in a Battalion Convoy at 1210 hours. We arrived at the famous WW I city of Soissons at 2315 hours after covering 129.2 miles. We stayed overnight in Soisson and again hit the road at 1138 on the 30th Nov. En route we passed through the city of Rouen where Joan O'Arc was burned at the stake, and also Rheims, the famous champagne city, where no one as much as saw a drop of the bubbly. After running 95.4 miles we arrived at Liont at 2010 hours on the last day of November 1944. Again we stayed overnight and left the following day, 1 December, 1944, to travel to the famous crystal and glass blowing city of Baccarat. I personally had never heard of Baccarat and its famous glass, but many of the married guys were shipping the stuff home and I thought there was plenty of glass in America without shipping the stuff home.

We billeted in a French garrison and the plumbing was rather strange to us. The latrine consisted of a concrete fixture with foot marks and a hole between the foot marks. We finally figured that the correct method for utilizing this thing was to squat over the hole and let nature take it's course. Oh yes, there was a flushing feature to this contraption.

We spent some time going back and forth from Battalion to Combat Command B near Luneville, the 7th Army Hq., which was the army to which we were finally attached.

On the 6th of December we were alerted to move out in the direction of the sound of the guns. Everyone knew the next move would bring us that much closer to the combat zone. It was getting colder and colder with each passing day. When we finally moved out it was damned cold. We left Baccarat early in the morning and arrived at the town of Rohrwiller at 0800 after moving 34 miles. As soon as we arrived in this vicinity near a large French house we were asked to come into the house and bring a doctor. We didn't know if this was some kind of a trap so a group of us and our great
Doc Zimmerman were led into the basement of the house with drawn weapons to find a group of people surrounding a woman on a pallet on the floor. Immediately the Doc told us the woman was giving birth to a baby boy.

Our first encounter with the French in the combat zone was a real surprise. Of course at this time the sound of artillery fire became the noise which was with us for the rest of the war. We were in reserve at this time and remained in Rohrwiller another day. Our next move was 17 miles. We closed in at 2219 after moving for 6 hours in approach march formation."
B Co., 56th, attached to 714th Tank Battalion on December 6. Canvas covers on all halftracks. On the night motor march Rackow decided to sing, "Over There." The 1st squad, 2nd platoon was 'on edge', and 'up tight.' Ringwelski, Rackow, Thornsburg, Hulery, Shor, Nugent and others were under the canvas. Rackow wouldn't finish the most important line of the song. He sang, "And we won't be back." He wouldn't sing, "Til' its over, over there." And the squad yelled, "Finish the goddam song, Rackow, finish the goddam song."

December 9, B/56 detached from 714th, CCB, and assigned to 23rd Tank Battalion, Combat Command A. Catholics of B/56 received General Absolution from the Catholic chaplain. I don't know that it made any of us feel any better.

"Daily Log, B/56, from Steve Pedrett.
...December 9, received orders, moved off for the attack 1225. Attacked at 1500. Axford (1st platoon) wounded by mortar fire at 1600.

December 10, battalion and B company CPs established on hill 290. DO meeting at 0230. Capt. Cowan killed. Capt. Fortenberg wounded when peep hit mine. 0900 company hit by artillery barrage. Chavez killed. Bersanini and Brozoski wounded. Nugent wounded by same fire. Several 23rd officers and men killed or wounded. Battalion moved to Rohrbach, France at 1200. Then northeast toward Bettwiller. A.T. platoon moved up to support rifle platoons.

December 11, under artillery and mortar fire all day. Attacked at approximately 1100. Four tanks knocked out. Colonel Meigs, 23rd, C.O. killed. Capt. Lang's tank knocked out.


December 16, B company rejoined the 56th."
"As witnessed by Capt. V.L. Thorp-

On 9 December 1944 in the vicinity of Rohrbach, France in northern Alsace, the 23rd Tank Battalion, Combat Command A, commanded by Lt. Col. Montgomery C. Meigs, was engaged in action.

Early in the morning of the 9th, Col. Meigs received orders to commit the battalion on the direct fire mission from the flank on the village of Bining and the German military barracks within the village, while a reinforced infantry battalion was assaulting the village frontally. Staff and company commanders were assembled at approximately 0800, at which time a very detailed plan and order was issued by the colonel.

At approximately 0930, the colonel, with Capt. Thorp, his Communication-Air Officer, went forward in the colonel's tank (M-4 with 75mm gun) with the first wave of tanks to the firing position. Lt.Col, Meigs chose an ideal position on high ground to observe and direct the firing and movement of the battalion. Enemy artillery and mortar fire was received continuously. Never once did the colonel close his turret hatch. He would just duck his head when an enemy round would land near the tank and then be right up again to observe the action of the enemy and his own forces. The mission was successfully accomplished with the infantry battalion moving in and occupying the objective that afternoon.

At approximately 1700, leaving Capt. Thorp to consolidate and organize the night defense for the front line troops, the colonel returned to headquarters for orders. The area was heavily mined so the colonel went on foot.

(B Company, 56th AIB, joined the 23rd, late afternoon of December 9).

Colonel Meigs received orders at Headquarters for an assault on the Maginot Line just north of Rohrbach early in the morning of 10 December.

Plans and orders were issued by Col. Meigs at the rear Bn. C.P. at 0300. He slept for approximately one hour. At daybreak he rode to the forward C.P. in a light tank. He joined Capt. Thorp and in his own tank moved out with the first wave of tanks toward their objective.

(B Company, 56th AIB, was riding the backs of the tanks. Three or four men up and behind the turret of each tank).

Because of difficult terrain, their progress was slow. By 1500 in the afternoon the Maginot Line was gained and approximately a dozen pillboxes that were lightly held were taken.
Heavy enemy artillery and mortar fire was encountered at that time. An attempt to move beyond this position drew heavy direct anti-tank fire from well-concealed enemy positions forcing the assault wave to withdraw to defiladed positions. Col. Meigs received authority to reorganize and hold position for the night and prepare to attack again the following morning.

One attached GI who was following Col. Meigs' tank that afternoon was hit in the legs by an enemy artillery round, during a heavy barrage. Col. Meigs, on seeing this, stopped his tank, dismounted, picked the soldier up, and with the aid of Capt. Thorp, placed him on the back deck of his tank. He ordered his driver to move to the cover of a large pillbox, where he personally administered first aid and morphine. The wounded GI was evacuated, later losing both legs, but he lived, due to the action of Col. Meigs.

Col. Meigs left for headquarters at approximately 1800, returning to the forward position around 0400, 11 December. Order personnel were soon assembled in a large pillbox that was used as a forward C.P. Even though the colonel had not slept or rested for three days, he was still very much alert. His plans and orders were very detailed and easily understood. The weather was not favorable for an attack at the planned time of 0600, so authority was received to delay the attack until 1030.

The Line of Departure was a railroad track running along the top of a ridge with very little cover. The Germans evidently had the ridge zeroed in with 88mm guns from well-concealed positions, for as the first assault wave of tanks reached the line of departure, the first three tanks were hit and disabled.

Col. Meigs called for the companies to hold up and try and locate the enemy gun positions. He and Capt. Thorp moved to a hull defilade position with the lead tanks and began to observe toward the village of Bettwiller, a thousand yards on the right flank. The colonel soon picked up the flash of a gun there and ordered Capt. Thorp to notify the Company C.O. to fire smoke on the edge of Bettwiller and for the assault tanks to withdraw to cover. He then told his driver to back up, at which time the tank was hit in the turret by an enemy 88mm round, killing Col. Meigs instantly.

Col. Meigs, never once during the action showed any fear or excitement, meeting all situations very calmly.
"Vic Challen, S/Sgt. Squad Leader, 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon, B/56. 'remembers- Challen and a member of his squad were following one of the tanks of the 23rd Tank Battalion on December 11. When the Germans began shelling the 23rd and B/56, Challen and his squad member tried to use the tank tread indentions in the mud behind the tank as slit-trench cover. Shrapnel hit Challen in the thigh and the butt and the kid with him was badly wounded in the legs. The tank in front of them began to back up. Challen grabbed the kid and rolled with him out from behind the tank. The kid lost his legs. Challen stayed with the company for a week, but his wounds became infected and he had to be sent back to the hospital.'"

"Bob Beach, C.O., B/56, letter to HCN-
...we were attached to the 23rd Tank Battalion and before it was over the Tank Battalion lost 16 tanks and the Bn C.O., Lt. Col. Meigs.
After we were with the 23rd and our next engagement, we lost four or five men. I went up to the top of the hill where they were and got the wounded back to the aid station. I went back to the company and talked to 1st Sgt. Nixon and told him who was dead and wounded,... I had trained them since they were recruits..."
Nugent recalls --

"On the morning of December 9, B Company, 56th, rolled out of the woods and onto the road, on its way to join the 23rd Tank Battalion. Everyone was singularly quiet and as the long line of halftracks rolled past 1st Sgt. Nixon, we were close enough that I could see tears running down his cheeks.

Our halftrack broke down out on the road, so the rest of the company passed us, while Bower (driver for the 1st squad, 2nd platoon) got out and tinkered with it. By the time we rolled again, the company was out of sight. Bower took a wrong turn in the road and we ended up in the middle of a street of a town that hadn't been liberated yet. We called old Bower and all of his ancestors every dirty name we could think of but he got us out of there in one piece.

By this time of day the weather was fairly pleasant, a little cool and brisk, but not too uncomfortable. We cut off down a road, across country, looking for the rest of the platoon. Our halftrack broke down again on the top of a hill. There weren't any trees and we stood out on the top of that hill like a sore thumb. A battery of French 75s off to our right opened up firing over our heads. We decided that the Krauts would soon be throwing something at the 75s, so we left Bower to repair the halftrack and we cut across country on foot. No one mentioned mines but we sure as hell should have thought about them.

Late in the afternoon we caught up with our 1st platoon and some tanks from the 23rd Tank Battalion. We were assigned a couple of tanks to outpost for the night.

Throughout the night we could see buildings in the town, burning from shelling earlier in the day. No sign of any Krauts in this area, although one of the guys in George Bator's squad (1st platoon) told us that Axford had been hit by some mortar fragments. The first Purple Heart for B Company?

After dark the tankers buttoned up inside their tanks, and we started walking our two hour shifts. The temperature went down fast and it got bitter cold. We spent our two hours off guard duty trying to sleep up on the backs of the tanks, behind the turrets. That steel was probably twice as cold as the ground. We may have dozed occasionally, but we really didn't get much sleep. I hadn't been this cold since basic training at Camp Campbell in the winter of 1942/43.

Tankers and infantry began to move around about 0800 the next morning, Sunday, December 10. Some of us chewed on cold, hard D ration bars. No hot coffee. George Bator passed out fragmentation grenades to everyone and we hung them by the handles from the rings on the suspenders of our cartridge belts.
The fog was like pea soup. It settled down over us like heavy, cold and wet, clumps of cotton. You couldn't see five feet in the distance. The 1st and 2nd platoons of B/56 climbed up on the backs of the tanks. S/Sgt. Curt Hagen, Walt Hulery, Ed Thornberg and I were together crouched down behind the turret. The 50 caliber machine gun swung freely in its mount on the tank turret, since the tankers were inside buttoned up.

At about 0955 the fog began to lift. Hagen told me to man the 50 caliber since I had had special training on it at Fort Bliss, Texas. I stood up and put the sling of my M-1 over my head and across my chest, leaving my hands free.

The 23rd Tank Battalion moved out in a line-of-skirmishers, across the open field toward the town in the distance. I hung on to the 50 caliber to keep my balance. My hands were numb from the cold, even though I had on gloves. It was cold. Bitter, biting, dead-of-winter cold.

We did have on long underwear. Shirt and pants were wool OD, our winter dress uniform. We wore a wool sweater (Red Cross gift, not GI), an unlined field jacket, and a wool knit "go-to-hell" cap under our steel helmet. We had on canvas leggings, over the tops of the shoes and up to the top of the calf of the legs. Canvas leggings became stiff as a board when wet and frozen. Around the waist we had a web cartridge belt with ten clips of eight rounds each of 30 caliber, AP ammunition. Across our chests we had two cloth bandoliers with ten additional clips, making a total of 160 rounds, with an extra clip already in our M-1.

We had a canteen of water on the right rear of our belt and a first aid kit on the left rear. The kit contained Sulpha pills, Sulpha Powder, and a Carlisle dressing. On one side of the belt we carried a bayonet or trench knife and on the other an entrenching tool—folded shovel or pickaxe.

The fog was very nearly gone as the line of tanks, with B/56 clinging to their backs, moved out across the open field. I looked off to my right and saw a peep with two guys in it go bouncing along between our tank and the next one. Suddenly it disappeared. Must have taken a direct hit.

Loud noise and confusion all around us. Explosions in front of us and explosions behind us. I suddenly felt very strange. Had I been hit? I didn't feel any pain, but something wasn't right. I didn't see any blood. The line of tanks continued to move across the open field.

If I was hit there were certain things that I was supposed to be doing. Basic Training, Camp Campbell 1942/43—"when you're hit, swallow two Sulpha pills, sprinkle Sulpha powder on the wound, and bandage the wound with the Carlisle dressing."
Almost panic. My fingers are so numb from the cold, that I can't unsnap my first aid kit. (We never had a dry-run on first aid during the cold winters in Kentucky and Texas). The line of tanks continued to move across the open ground. I still don't feel any pain and there is no sign of blood.

I decide that I had better get some help, and I turn to ask Hagen to give me a hand with my first aid kit. Hagen is already on his feet evidently sensing that something is wrong. When I opened my mouth I heaved a mouthful of blood all over the front of his field jacket. I thought his eyes would pop out of his head. Then I realized where I had been hit. In the neck.

Again, I remember basic training, Camp Campbell 1942/43—When someone is hit, leave them lay, the medics will be along and tend to them. The rest of the squad, keep moving forward. Hagen and I had been together since 1943. And then—Hagen, Thornberg and Hulery are pounding on the turret of the tank with the butts of their M-1s. The tank stopped. Two of them grabbed me by the arms and the four of us jumped to the ground. Blood is running out of my mouth and down my chin onto my jacket. Blood is coming out of the side of my neck and covering my shoulder. I would give anything for a drink of water and a cigarette. They laid me down on the ground.

Within seconds, a Peep drove up and a 1st lieutenant, M.D. jumped out yelling, "sit him up before he bleeds to death." Almost panic again. I am dying. I feel as if someone had punched me in the solar plexus and I tried to suck in some air. I spun away from there in a large, clear, plastic bubble, in a vacuum, all alone. And I'm back at St. Peter's Grade School, 1930, 2nd grade, bible history class—a drawing on a page of the text book of Jacob's Ladder ascending up into the sky and the Almighty standing at the top in the clouds, waiting.

That 1st lieutenant, M.D. is by far the coolest, most efficient man on that battlefield. He said that he was out looking for a place to set up the battalion aid station (23rd?). He was probably out sightseeing. By 0930 that morning he should have had a Silver Star. If he survived the day at the pace he was going he deserved a DSC. He stopped my bleeding, bandaged up my neck and head, gave me shots of tetanus and morphine, put me in his Peep and sent me back down to the ambulance.

The ambulance was sitting out in the open on the side of a hill. Two medics sat me on the tailgate and began filling out a tag on me. Dog-tag information, time of day, geographical location, etc. They tied it on the front of my field jacket, beneath my chin where it was soon covered with blood running out of my mouth and down off my chin. I was going to bring the matter to their attention, but the morphine was taking effect and the matter really didn't seem that important. They soon got into an argument as to whether to take me back or wait for a full load. They decided to wait for a full load.
1944

December

About this time the Krauts decided to resume shelling everything in sight. The ambulance crew crawled underneath their vehicle for cover and left me sitting on the tailgate. The morphine didn't give me the urge to move, so I sat there calmly analyzing everything that was happening.

After the shelling had let up, a Peep rolled up with two guys on stretchers on it. One had a leg wound the other had been shot in the gut. The ambulance crew stuffed them into the back, propped me up in one corner, and we went bumping off down the road.

The Division Aid station was in an old French barn. A captain in a bloodstained smock opened the door. The medics had me sitting on a stretcher and had carried it up to the door. The floor inside was covered with GIs with every kind of wound imaginable. The other two wounded from the ambulance were taken into the barn. The captain looked at my wound and shook his head. He motions for the medics to stick me back in the ambulance and head further back to the rear."

JN

SEE SUPPLEMENT VIII. December 10, 1944 -

ARMY HOSPITALS

1944/45

116th Evac, Sarrebourg, France
70th Station. Mirecourt, France.
Hospital Train. Sarrebourg to Mirecourt
3rd General. Aix. (north of Marseille, Fr.)
Hospital Train. Mirecourt to Aix.
"U.S. Dept. of the Army. Historical Division.  
United States Army in World War II.  
The European Theater of Operations.  
The Lorraine Campaign.

The 4th Armored Division Drive from Domfessel to Singling.

During the morning of 5 December the 35th Tank Battalion and the 53rd Armored Infantry Battalion gained a bridgehead across the Eichel... The 37th Tank Battalion passed through the bridgehead to begin a dash in the direction of Bining... Although Bining itself was not important, the little village controlled the entrance to Rohrbach-Bitche, an important communications center and barracks area... the possession of Rohrbach was essential to cutting one of the main road and rail routes for German escape to the east. Rohrbach lay across the line of retreat for the Germans being driven out of Forêt de Montbronn.

Since the ground was too soft to allow movement across country, Colonel Abram's tanks started out along the main highway leading to Bining... The enemy had prepared for such an attack and had massed the artillery of the 11th Panzer Division and 25th Panzer Grenadier Division to cover the road. Colonel Abrams, therefore, turned to a secondary road with the intention of wheeling near the little hamlet of Singling and outflanking Bining from the west. Actually the Singling area was as dangerous to tanks as the Bining approach, for the former lay among the works of the Maginot Line and was under the guns of German batteries emplaced on the hills to the north. About a mile south of Singling the leading tank company lost five tanks simultaneously to direct hits. Daylight was ending, the 37th Tank Battalion had lost fourteen tanks to enemy guns and mud during the move north, and artillery and infantry were needed; therefore Colonel Abrams withdrew out of range.

Abrams, ... impressed with the danger involved in making a wheel toward Bining... while the enemy still held Singling, requested permission to attack Singling and at least neutralize that village before continuing the advance on Bining... Reinforced on the morning of 6 December by the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, a field artillery battalion, and some tank destroyers, the two remaining medium tank companies of the 37th moved in to bring Singling under fire.

The village was defended by the 1st Battalion of the 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which even at reduced strength totaled more rifles than the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion could muster. In addition, enemy tanks and assault guns were at hand to intervene in Singling and a large number of German guns were located on the high ground to the north.
1944 December

Finally the town of Singling was an organic part of the Maginot Line; its periphery was dotted with bunkers, pillboxes, and gun emplacements. It soon became apparent that Singling and the covering guns on the hills could not be neutralized by fire alone. Colonel Abrams ordered up the armored infantry - which had been earmarked to take Bining - and a fight ensued for the possession of the village. When night fell a company of armored infantry and a company of tanks had a foothold in Singling, but it could not be retained under the very muzzles of the guns on the hills, and the task force withdrew....

At 1815 word reached General Gaffey that the 12th Armored Division would begin relief of his tired and weakened division the next morning.

'The decision to relieve the 4th Armored Division followed General Eddy's letter of 2 December to General Patton in which he suggested that the XV Corps had a narrower front than the XII Corps and had divisions in reserve, one of which could replace the 4th Armored Division. After General Patton and General Patch agreed to this exchange the commanding generals of the XII and XV Corps met at Penetrange on 6 December and arranged the details of the relief. The 12th Armored Division was in effect loaned to the XII Corps, but the Corps boundaries remained unchanged; as a result the division operated in the XII Corps zone under XV Corps command... On 10 December Generals Haislip and Eddy made the following arrangements: the 12th Armored Division will attack with the 26th Infantry. Division 'if going looks easy'; 'if the 44th (Infantry) Division 'gets up' the 26th Division, the 12 Armored Division, and the 44th Division will make a co-ordinated attack to penetrate the Maginot Line.

The fighting strength of the 4th Armored Division had drained away perceptibly as its tanks were destroyed and its veteran infantry and tank crews were reduced in action after action. (The armored infantry, of course, suffered high casualties. On 2 December the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, had a rifle strength of 160 and the 52nd had only 126. Company B, 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, received 128 replacements for losses between 9 November and 6 December. Tank losses also were severe. ...During the latter part of 1944, training at the Armored Replacement Training Center had deteriorated and few replacements were being turned out).
24 December, patrols sent out and aggressive enemy patrols repulsed. Christmas Day the 56th received a determined enemy attack. The Germans were in plain view as they came out of their foxholes, wearing long green overcoats. The wind was bitter cold. Division artillery, directed by front line observers, used previously planned fire plans. Infantry mortar platoons also registered on the enemy. A/56 was hit on the right flank by the counterattack but repelled the attack by 1100. B/56 was hit about 1200. B/714th moved up to assist in repelling the attack. The 56th was under artillery fire all day.

German patrols infiltrated throughout the whole Corps front, one night, capturing troops from each division. A small group from C/56 was surprised at night in the converted stable in which they were quartered. The enemy patrol quickly conducted their prisoners toward the German lines.

B/56 received orders to withdraw at 2100, 26 December. Sgt. Clifford was killed when the pin of a fragmentation grenade, which he had in his raincoat pocket, came out. The pistol belt around his waist made it difficult to pull anything out of the slash pockets of the raincoat. Company moved out at 0200.

Elements of CCB were relieved at the front by the 100th Infantry Division, fresh garbed in combat winter clothing, a type which the 56th still lacked. The 12th moved into Corps reserve.

The first really big snow of the year fell on the 26th. B/56 held a ceremony for those killed in action on 28 December. The Division remained in concealed bivouac, continuing maintenance, reorganization, and rehabilitation. CCB moved from Kirrberg to Dieuze on the 29th. The Division was alerted to move on three hours notice, on Corps order, to counter-attack from its assembly area.

On December 30th, the 12th went into Seventh Army Reserve. The XV Corps could call on the 12th to counter-attack (with three hours notice) in the direction of Benestroff-St. Avold; or to move to the vicinity of Fenetrange, prepared to counter-attack in the direction of Fenetrange-Druilingen. The 12th was further committed to move on 12 hours notice, under Seventh Army Orders, to the XXI Corps.
Chapter 15
12th History.

1945
January

HERRLISHEIM-

1945. January. The general over-all situation in the whole
Seventh Army sector: The Germans counter-attacking all along
the front, launched four offensive efforts in the Seventh
Army area at once. The first of these was near the fortress
of Bitche, the second in the Hardt Mountains near Reipperts-
willer, the third on the Alsace Plain near Hatten and Ritters-
hoffen, and the fourth in the Rhine Riverhead near Herrlis-
helm and Gamsbheim. It was against this latter mushrooming
Bridgehead that the 12th moved in January.

Early in the month the size, quality, and intentions of the
Germans who had effected crossings near Gamsbheim were not
definitely known. The 94th Mechanized Reconnaissance Squad-
ron of the 14th Armored Division had been running a counter-
reconnaissance screen through this area. This operation con-
sisted of sending out motorized patrols periodically to check
each town in the assigned area. When one patrol went out and
failed to return, another was dispatched. It was learned that
the Germans had infiltrated by night across the Rhine in small
boats, gaining a foothold in Gamsbheim and Herrlisheim. Higher
headquarters apparently was convinced that this force was small,
of very inferior quality, and that its mission was merely to
occupy the ground that the Allies would give up in their antic-
ipated withdrawal to the Vosges Mountains.

On January 6, the 12th was alerted for action. Col. Bromley's
Combat Command B was ordered to Hochfelden. CCB arrived at
Hochfelden the following morning after an all night trip over
icy roads. Two days later the rest of the Division moved to
Hochfelden; the 92nd Cavalry was relieved of its counter-re-
connaissance screen mission; and 12th liaison officers with
the infantry divisions were recalled.

At Hochfelden the 12th was ordered to remain in Corps reserve
and maintain a reconnaissance screen along the Corps' south
boundary from Wasselone to Weyeraheim. The division was also
to be prepared to counterattack on two hour notice any enemy
penetrations from the north towards Soultz and from the east
towards Bischwiller.

Combat Command B, composed principally of the 714th Tank Ba-
tallion and the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, was attached
on January 7 to the 79th Infantry Division which was fighting
in the Bischwiller, Weyersheim, Drusenheim area near the Rhine
River. Combat Command B moved out for Bischwiller, where it
was to establish a command post in preparation for the forth-
coming attack on Herrlisheim.
The infantry moved, in the early morning of January 8, to Kurtzenhausen, and the tanks to Weyersheim. The 56th less its C Company, but with B/714th attached, was designated Task Force Rammer. The 714th, with C/56th replacing its own B Company, was designated Task Force Power. Upon reaching these towns, both units received word that they would attack Herrlisheim from the north, jumping off at 1000 hours from an area just west of Rohrweiler. B Company, 119th Armored Engineers, was attached to the attacking force to clear any mine fields encountered, and also to build or repair such bridges as were necessary to keep the attack moving.

On the night of January 7, intelligence estimates placed the number of Germans in the Drusenheim-Herrlisheim pocket at between 800 and 1,200. These figures were to prove entirely too low. The enemy force ran well into five figures. The units, identified later, were the 10th SS Panzer Division; the 35th, 119th, and 2nd Panzer-Grenadier Regiments, plus elements of the 553rd Infantry Regiment with battle groups. It was also known that enemy anti-aircraft flak protection was heavy, making it difficult for friendly planes to spot enemy positions.

At 0800, January 8, Task Force Rammer (A & B, 56th with B/714th) moved out, leaving Kurtzenhausen for Bischweiler, in order to reach the southwestern edge of Rohrweiler by 1000. The first part of Task Force Power (A & B, 714th with C/56th) reached its assembly area at 1100 hours, dismounted from the halftracks and dug in. Mortar fire was falling close by, along the western edge of Rohrweiler.

At 1430 hours the infantry (A & B, 56th) jumped off with B/714th following A/56. B/714 was at its full strength of 17 medium tanks. The mortar platoon of Headquarters Company, 56th set up its 81 MM's behind some houses in Rohrweiler. The assault gun (75 MM howitzer) platoon, 56th, went into position at the edge of a wooded area near Rohrweiler. During the first two days they fired spasmodically into Herrlisheim and some wooded areas, mostly for harassing purposes.

In the meantime the 714th had deployed around Rohrweiler in preparation for the attack, being careful to take cover, where available, to avoid direct fire. D/714, with five light tanks to each of three platoons, was to evacuate the wounded and to haul supplies.
C/56, part of the Power Task Force, was at its full strength of 251 officers and men. It had the initial mission of moving east of the area between Rohrweiler and Herrlisheim to protect the attacking 56th's east flank. Once Herrlisheim was taken, C/56 was to move south, passing along Herrlisheim's eastern edge, continue on to capture Offendorf and, eventually, to effect a junction with the French from Gambisheim. Some of the first casualties were suffered when C/56 sent a platoon to reconnoiter an area just beyond the Zorn River from La Breymuhl, the latter being only a small group of buildings containing machinery for regulating the flow of the Zorn into the Moder River. Everyone called this group of buildings the "Waterworks." This platoon rounded up some prisoners, but enemy fire killed four men and wounded several others.

While this brief but torrid action was going on, the tanks of C/714, in the fields to the west, were spotted by the enemy and drew a heavy mortar and artillery concentration. Despite this fire, they were able to throw a couple of rounds at some German vehicles racing along the Drusenheim-Herrlisheim road. The mortar squad of the second platoon, C/56, suffered six casualties as it caught this thick barrage upon reaching the field.

The bridge at the waterworks was out, a condition which prevented tanks from moving in with the infantry, and consequently plans had to be revised. The 56th was ordered to attack alone from the north. Under the revised plan, tanks of C/714 and A/714 were to take up positions west of the Zorn River, just outside the town, and provide fire support for the assault. For about one hour before dusk, which came at about 1630 hours, the tanks were able to put intermittent fire in that area. This fire, however, had to be gradually reduced when the ammunition began to run low. ...before darkness set in... the tanks pulled back and established a perimeter defense in which they spent a quiet night.

The revised plan of attack called for A and B Companies of the 56th to enter the waterworks, cross the Zorn River, and continue southward to Herrlisheim. An enemy 120 MM mortar barrage caused three casualties in B/56, including the company commander, Captain Burnett Beach and T/Sgt. Jim Gulley. They were both wounded by the same mortar shell. Captain Beach was hit in the right calf, right knee, right arm and neck. Gulley was hit in both knees. Lt. John Casner took charge of the company. Numerous 88 MM rounds were fired into the waterworks, but ricocheted off and caused no damage. Artillery was still being interdicted on Purple Heart Lane as more units came up to cross over the Zorn. The concentrations came at approximately 10-minute intervals, but one never knew when they were about to land. These concentrations caused many casualties and a lowering of morale. Artillery concentrations continued to fall all around La Breymuhl night and day.
Ch. 15
12th History.

As the infantry crossed the Zorn the night of January 8 and 9 and tried to dig in the frozen ground, some of the men suddenly noticed a group of about 30 Germans moving toward them over the flat ground, silhouetted against two burning buildings in the background close to Herrlisheim. S/Sgt. Charles Peischl (B/56), who was given a field commission later, said, "They had no formation, were talking loudly, and suspected nothing, because I could see the two leading men of the party, one with a burp gun on his shoulder and the other with two boxes of ammunition, nonchantly walking straight towards me." The enemy was so close that word could not be passed of his presence. However, all of B Company must have sighted the group about the same time, for they quickly stopped digging and took up firing positions along the ground. They seemed to sense the element of surprise that was in store for the Germans and, therefore, held their fire. When S/Sgt. Peischl noticed that the German who had the ammunition boxes was slowly putting them down, apparently suspecting that something was amiss, and was about to pass the signal back to the other Germans, Peischl opened fire on him. That was the signal for all of B Company to begin firing. Two light machine guns caught the Germans in a cross fire, while the men heaved hand grenades and emptied their rifles. Some Germans escaped towards Herrlisheim, but 12 bodies were found the next morning.

Later that same night all units of the 56th were ordered to return to the waterworks, which now held all four infantry companies of the 56th, plus L Company of the 314th Regiment, 79th Division. Defensive positions were occupied. About 0330 shelling and movement were heard outside in the darkness, while the sound of approaching track-laying vehicles was heard. Mortar shells landed inside the courtyard of the waterworks, driving away those on outpost there. Then a group of Germans came up through an orchard to the eastern side of the courtyard wall of the waterworks and tossed over concussion hand grenades, which caused little damage. The 56th retaliated by lobbing their own grenades back, and they also picked off a few of the enemy who ventured around the wall.

At this point two or more German tanks came up on either side of the road on the Herrlisheim side of the waterworks and began to shell the top of the building, which housed the Zorn's waters. Fortunately, the tanks were unable to bring their fire any lower because of a seven-foot stone wall in front of them. A tank round was fired into a bridge site where the 40th Engineer Combat Regiment had been attempting to install a Bailey Bridge so that the 714th tanks could cross the Zorn and move southward. Private Robert L. Scott of the machine gun platoon, 56th, volunteered to leave the building and enter the courtyard to knock

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out a tank which was creating havoc there. Except for some Germans talking, everything was quiet in the darkness when Scott squeezed the bazooka trigger. The first round failed to go off. In the stillness, with the tank practically at arm's length from him, the clicking of the trigger seemed to make a terrible noise. Undaunted, Scott ran back into the waterworks, picked up another bazooka, reached the tank again, and this time disabled it. His only wound was a slight nick caused by a mortar round hitting in the courtyard as he was returning. Shortly thereafter the second tank lumbered up and it pulled the other one back toward Herrlisheim amidst 12th artillery fire. It was now about 0500 hours, January 9, and many German voices could be heard. More men were put in the waterwork's courtyard, but they were forced to move back into the building when enemy hand grenades continued to come over the wall.

Throughout the night and early morning, light tanks evacuated the wounded from La Breymuhl. Three tanks made a total of ten trips back and forth between La Breymuhl and the 56 aid station at Rohrweiler. There was room for only one tank at a time to load the wounded, for each tank had to move in an alley-way between two buildings, while the remaining two tanks waited their turn on the other side of the bridge. No tank ever came out with fewer than four patients, and each always succeeded in negotiating the ceaseless, murderous artillery and mortar fire falling all around, "Purple Heart Lane," Miraculously, none of the wounded was hit again, including those who were unable to walk and who had to lie in the open on top of the tanks, thereby being subjected to constant flying shell fragments. The tanks caught the effect of several indirect hits which came, fortunately, only when the wounded were not on them.

The firing at the waterworks did not abate with the coming of morning, January 9, though the enemy tanks had gone and many of the Germans surrendered when exposed by the light. However, a substantial portion of them withdrew to prepared positions. Although plans had been formulated, some time around midnight, for an attack at dawn, it did not get underway until nearly noon, because of the morning-long firing and the intermittent surrender of Germans. At daybreak, some Germans were observed moving along the road and were picked off.

On numerous occasions, on the morning of January 9, the infantry was ready to move out for the push on Herrlisheim, but each time they would spot some enemy who drew their fire or others who wanted to give up.
At 0730, January 9, the mortar platoon of the 56th under Lt. Leo Mulligan, contributed more friendly fire to bewilder and soften the entrenched enemy, firing several hundred shells into the area east of La Breymuhl. Shortly thereafter Lt. Mulligan and three other men went into the waterworks in search of a closer observation post from which to direct fire into Herrlisheim, but they were unable to find one. While returning to their original post the group encountered a heavy enemy concentration along "Purple Heart Lane" which killed Pfc. Gordon Turnquist and wounded another man.

The 494th Armored Field Artillery Battalion had been placed in direct support of CCB's 'Power and Rammer' task force. The 494's 18 self-propelled 105 howitzers, mounted on M-3 medium tank chassis, were put in position along the eastern edge of Bischweiler. From 0600, January 8 to 0630 January 9, eight missions were fired, representing a total of 521 HE M, 48 rounds and LL WP rounds. Many of these rounds were fired on German tanks and infantry west of the Zorn river. In the afternoon harassing fire was placed on the western edge of Herrlisheim. About 0430 the next morning a barrage was directed along the northern edge of the town. A heavy concentration was laid along the southern edge of the waterworks.

During the night plans had been drawn for the attack to continue on Herrlisheim, C/56 reverted from the 714th to the 56th, B and A companies of the 56th were again to be the lead units. B company was to jump off at 0605 hours, January 9, and was given ten minutes to move out of the waterworks; after this interval, A company was to start, coming up abreast of B company's west flank. Both were to be at the north edge of Herrlisheim by dawn and immediately begin a push to take it, each clearing its respective sector to the south. B company was to cross to the east, over the stream running into Herrlisheim, while A company remained on the west side. C/56 was to mop up in the rear, after moving to the town as closely behind them as possible. The original plan for C company to continue on to Offendorf with B/714 was necessary because blown bridges prevented tanks from crossing the Zorn river.

Capt. Lehman was told to take his B/714 tanks across a Bailey Bridge which was to be ready at the waterworks. The tanks were to follow the infantry down the general axis of the road out of La Breymuhl to Herrlisheim, giving them as close fire support as possible. The other medium tank companies of the 714th would be in the fields west of Herrlisheim, firing into it in front of the oncoming troops. In case the Bailey Bridge was not finished, B/714 was to have the same assignment. It was this alternate plan which Capt. Leeham had to follow, when, upon checking the bridge at 0400 hours, he found it to be out. No attempts were being made to set one up, owing to enemy activity. Completion did not take place until 1600 that day, January 9.
On the morning of the attack, January 9, the third platoon of A/714 rejoined the company on the left of the second platoon, having been relieved from attachment to the 92nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Lt. Col. William Phelan, CO of the 714, ordered it to move as close as possible to the Zorn river in order to cover the area to the east and northeast. The platoon then spotted German machine guns and tanks which were opening up on the infantry emerging from La Breymuhl for Herrlisheim. "But the third platoon could not return the fire because B/56 was passing directly in front of us," explained Capt. Robert Harrington, CO of A/714.

Just prior to this, the first and second platoons, A/714, moved down to the curve of the Zorn river, west of the town to provide direct fire into its southern half. This fire would be lifted when the infantry entered. Having no knowledge of what the situation was near the Stainwald Woods, to the far east, where some movement was seen (French forces were supposed to be coming up from that area). Capt Harrington had his first platoon arch around to face the south, and the second on its left flank to face Herrlisheim and curve northward, forming a "U" shape.

Just before A/714's movement to fire into the town, the tanks of C/714 had gone forward to their approximate positions of the late afternoon before, with the same fire mission, that of neutralizing the enemy in Herrlisheim for the infantry's advance. That morning they captured about fifty Germans who were retreating westward from the outskirts of Herrlisheim. Along with the attached assault guns, one of which had to be pulled out because of gun trouble, the tanks of C/714 fired slowly into the town, gradually moving their fire down as B/714 advanced in front of them and the infantry neared the northern edge of Herrlisheim. Shortly thereafter they had to cease firing completely when B/714 took up positions in their lines of sight. After this event, A/714 cut down below both tank companies and set up inside the river's bend.

About 1030 hours, B/714 began its movement from the vicinity of La Breymuhl to the area just west of Herrlisheim, where it could support the infantry's attack, keeping pace with the infantry on the other side of the Zorn. Since the first platoon had the 76mm guns, it remained in position, firing to the east in defense of the other two platoons as they leapfrogged southward. The latter platoons moved a section at a time as close to the western edge of the river as possible. They did no firing until they came close to their positions due west of town. There, however, they let loose with machine guns at the enemy who were in foxholes all about them along the west bank of the Zorn. There was also a pillbox in the vicinity. About 25 prisoners quickly surrendered, and the pillbox proved to be empty.
The second platoon's tanks, B/714, were on line facing to the south, their machine guns firing heavily in that direction, from which came the sound of German small arms fire. At the same time the third platoon swung around directly at Herrlisheim, sending 35 HE rounds into the southern end of the town, for it was not known just how far the infantry had advanced into this portion of the town.

As B/714 took up its firing positions and the infantry entered the town, they lost contact with each other. Lt. Col. Ingram, CO of the 56th, told Capt. Leeham that he did not know the location of the German infantry in Herrlisheim, and for Leeham to reconnoiter the bridge at the southwest edge of the town. It was over this bridge that the 714's tanks hoped to cross into town, thereby providing sorely needed help for the 56th, now fighting for its very life in Herrlisheim proper. But this bridge had been badly damaged by the enemy. At about 1600 hours, January 9, Capt. Leeham went to see if the Bailey bridge had yet been installed at La Breymuhl and, happily, found that it was passable. Whereupon Lt. Col. Ingram ordered him to move his company over it and into Herrlisheim at once.

It was now dusk, and up to this time no fire, other than from small arms, had been received by the 12th tanks in the field. They had been resupplied with ammunition, food and water. Suddenly enemy tanks and anti-tank guns in excellent defilade behind the main road running southwest of Herrlisheim opened up on all three of the medium tank companies. The tank of Lt. Manders, C/714, was hit and set ablaze, but the crew escaped without injury, except Manders, who sustained a broken leg. Immediately afterward, C/714 tanks received a concentrated barrage and began backing to the rear, moving continuously with only their fronts facing in the direction from which the fire came, in order to present the smallest possible targets. At the same time, they returned fire, but found it impossible to hit any of the well-hidden German guns and tanks below the road embankment, with only their muzzles partly protruding.

B/714's tanks encountered heavy fire as they started to move up to La Breymuhl to cross the Bailey bridge. One tank went up in flames, one man being killed. As they progressed toward the waterworks, the tank of Lt. Charles Hisinger was knocked out and two of the crew killed. A third tank was hit and set afire shortly thereafter, but all of the crew escaped injury. Then a fourth tank caught it. All of this occurred in a matter of minutes, and while the tanks were moving broadside. "All of the tanks were like ducks in a shooting gallery, unable to maneuver in the field out of enemy range, because they were hemmed in a pocket between two canals, the Zorn and Kesselgraben," lamented Capt. Leeham. The company withdrew to Rohrweiler to reorganize, where it caught some mortar shells, which killed one man and wounded another.
A and C companies, 714th tried to cover B company's withdrawal, laying down a smoke screen and firing, though with little effect, at enemy gun flashes. While B company was being pounded, five A/714 tanks began backing away. Four of them were hit, but not permanently disabled, as all were later repaired. All of the 714 tanks withdrew to reorganize, setting up a perimeter defense. Capt. Charles Clayton, CO of C/714, received word that some time before morning a bridge would be erected over the Zorn river which his tanks were to cross. However, this bridge was never built. During the night of January 9-10, plans were formulated for the 714th to attack Herrlisheim the following day with B and C companies.

B company, 56th, left La Breymuhl on January 9 with its platoons well dispersed in open squad columns. Immediately after the first led off, it was greeted by machine gun fire from the southeast. No one was hit and the shooting stopped as the company began to pivot in a long skirmish line. Almost immediately a heavy 120 mm mortar concentration rained down upon the company. Since they were beginning to move out into the open field, they suffered an extremely heavy toll of casualties. Lt. Floyd Van Derhoef, who had come up during the night to take over the company commander's duties, was injured, and Lt. Casner once again took over.

The decimated ranks of B Company doggedly pushed on and reached two stone buildings, when their advance again was halted by enemy machine gun and small arms fire coming from a clump of trees at the very edge of Herrlisheim. To escape this steady hail of lead, the company veered off in a southwesterly direction, but the fire continued to follow the men into the open field. It did not cease until they reached a gulley. "As we got close to the gulley, our own mortars threw white phosphorous rounds all about my first platoon," commented Peischl. An anti-tank guncrew of three Germans was captured. At this point, less than half of B company's personnel was on hand, owing to the terrific loss in killed and wounded incurred by the company since it had left La Breymuhl.

While B/56 was taking this beating in its advance toward Herrlisheim, light tanks of D/714th were kept busy evacuating the wounded. One tank was knocked out by 120 mm mortar fire while waiting to cross the bridge at La Breymuhl. Crews from six light tanks performed magnificently amid the shells bursting around them. All but the drivers went into the fields to bring back the wounded, improvising stretchers with broken rifles and blankets. According to Capt. William Zimmerman, 56th AIB medical officer, the light tanks saved the lives of 65 soldiers.

As A/56 moved out from the waterworks, a few minutes after B/56 and the heavy machine gun platoon, 56th, it too was met by some mortar, small arms, and machine gun fire. However, by comparison with the others, the men of this company suffered very lightly. After it came alongside B/56th's west flank, extending in a skirmish line almost to the Zorn river, its members found that the fire was not so intense in that sector, and they proceeded to move
The first platoon was closest to the river and captured eight prisoners along its banks. The second platoon was east of the road, its west edge guiding on it and maintaining contact with the first. The third, in reserve, followed both assault platoons, prepared to mop up in town behind them. A little more than half way to Herrlisheim, the company halted and waited for B/56 to come up. During this halt the second platoon captured three German burp guns in a draw. Then A/56 received orders to enter the town, while the 714th's tanks were firing into it from the field across the river. The men advanced in the same formation as before, encountering some small arms fire, intending to secure the northwest part of Herrlisheim and then continue southward through the village.

Around noon, January 9, the 56th ordered its C Company to leave the waterworks for Herrlisheim. The troops made it through the fields, drawing fire all the way, in record time. They entered Herrlisheim at about 1430 hours without ever having halted, suffering only two casualties from shell fragments, despite having been in the open and subjected to intense fire, including some rockets ("Nebelwerfer," or "Screaming Meemies").

About two hours before this when A/56 had entered the town and found its SCR300 and 509 radios would not function, a contact party was sent to B/56. This trip, however, was unsuccessful, for B company was still encountering heavy trouble in its sector of the field. The first four corners at the western edge of Herrlisheim had been designated previously as four separate phase lines. Upon reaching each line, A company was to radio this information formation to the battalion CP in Bischweiler, which would, thereby, be informed of the progress being made. The phase lines were also established as prisoner of war collecting points. But the platoons were never able to make contact with the rear areas. A similar situation was to develop for B and C companies. Because no tanks were able to get into town that day or night, the 56th AIB Headquarters and CCB Headquarters were completely out of contact with their infantry units in Herrlisheim until the following morning, January 10.

A/56 began to move through the streets of Herrlisheim, clearing the houses as it proceeded. The 40-man second platoon started first, entering the northern tip of the town and working from the westernmost north-south road to the next north-south street. The first platoon, composed of 35 men, entered just below the second platoon, moved down the same road, but cleared in the opposite direction; that is to the west. One squad would leap-frog past the next in examining the houses. While a few stood on guard outside a house, others went to the rear door to check the outhouses. They fired into the open windows to force any snipers therein to keep their heads down. The men then kicked doors ajar, investigated the basement and second story and moved all civilians to the ground levels. These platoons
captured very few prisoners, for their missions as assault platoons required them to move through much of Herrlisheim as quickly as possible. Many enemy machine gun and anti-tank positions, with excellent fields of fire, had been set up in this sector, but their crews had fled.

When the second platoon of A/56 reached the first east-west road, the third came in with 19 men and worked sideways to take in the areas of both platoons. In order to mop up effectively, the 56th had to check every nook and corner to flush out the Germans. The searchers yelled into dark cellars for anyone hiding there to come out. One cellar, given the hand grenade treatment, netted 16 prisoners. Many tables were found set for dinner, with hot food on them. Further down the street the men spotted an enemy machine gun in a house, called for 60 mm mortar fire on it, and knocked it out. That was the only light mortar fire employed during the entire operation, because observation across the creek in Herrlisheim was impossible.

A/56 hadn't gone very far when it came face-to-face with a Mark IV tank, firing 88 mm rounds, plus machine guns. After a half hour the tank withdrew. As they began to move, they encountered six German paratroopers in a house, killed three of them and wounded another. The turret of another Mark IV was spotted. As they began to move toward the creek, three more tanks were spotted moving south on the Drusenheim-Gamsheim highway.

All the infantry units were encountering trouble at this time. German tanks infested the town, and no 714th tanks had yet been able to get across a series of blown bridges. Units were also losing contact with each other. Snipers were taking their toll. The enemy never dared to snipe at groups, but picked off individuals on numerous occasions.

About 1600 hours, January 9, A/56 units asked for more ammunition and called for artillery fire by map coordinates on enemy strongpoints across a creek in Herrlisheim. A/56 was not expected to cross the creek in Herrlisheim until B/56 was in its appointed place to give it support, but B/56 was in desperate straits, having suffered a great loss of manpower, and being without communications or heavy fire support. A/56 withdrew to the northwestern tip of Herrlisheim and prepared to defend the town. In its new position, A/56 moved into a three-sided box formation, so that it could best repel any attacks.

B/56 entered the town about half an hour behind A/56. The time is still January 9, the second day in the battle of Herrlisheim. Merciless pounding by artillery and mortar fire had thinned the ranks of B/56 to 35 men. By this time, about 1500, it had become badly disorganized and had only its light machine gun squad and a few riflemen, at whom enemy machine gun fire kept hammering. One GI who attempted to return the fire with a light machine gun was blown apart by an 88 mm shell. After counting people

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Lt. Casner ordered his men to pull back, to be replaced by C/56. B/56 moved into one house; and after other members of the company straggled in, the total personnel reached 36. Dusk was now setting in. Capt. Francis Drass of A/56 was placed in charge of all infantry in Herrlisheim. He ordered B/56 to defend its present position during the night and not advance until the following morning (January 10). B/56 later expanded its holdings to six houses when the anti-tank platoon joined the company. After Lt. Casner was badly wounded by mortar shell fragments outside the B/56 command post, Lt. Henry Hilgert took over the command.

Up to this time the mortar and artillery fire near the 56th had been harassing. But now the shelling began to grow heavier, setting a company command post on fire. After 1900 hours, the concentration lifted, and Germans began to infiltrate into areas held by the 56th.

C/56 also set up a defense near the other infantry companies, and established fields of fire and listening posts. Light tanks of D/714, which had managed to get into Herrlisheim to evacuate 56th wounded, helped with prisoner evacuation.

That night Battalion Headquarters, 56th AIB, tried to send a radio-equipped patrol into Herrlisheim to contact the infantry and bring out information as to troop strength and dispositions. When this detachment reached the bridge at Herrlisheim that spanned the Zorn, the men saw a dozen Germans manning a machine gun in the snow. They immediately racked the area with "grease guns", killing ten of the enemy. The party also questioned two prisoners, on whose persons were found K-rations and Camel cigarettes. When questioned by Capt. Elmer Bright, 56th intelligence officer and leader of the patrol, the prisoners reported that the 56th AIB in Herrlisheim had been wiped out. At this point approximately 33 GIs who had escaped from the northern edge of Herrlisheim and were hiding in the fields along the Zorn river, came over to the patrol. They claimed that all friendly troops in the town had been cut off and surrounded. The patrol decided to turn back to Bischweiler, since burning buildings were now illuminating the area. The intelligence brought back by this patrol threw the 56th AIB command post into confusion. Capt. Clyde Maddox of Headquarters company, 56th, was ordered to round up all available men for a rescue party, but CCB caused this plan to be canceled.

Throughout the first night in Herrlisheim, the infantry companies were in constant trouble. Cut off and with no communication with the battalion, they were subjected to German combat patrol raids, some of which concentrated on setting fire to the houses occupied by the 56th. Orders were to shoot at anything that moved outside, and no one was to leave their house. The infiltrating Germans were difficult to identify in their white capes, which blended with the snow-covered ground.
The Germans never let up with their burp gun and machine gun fire at B/56. As S/Sgt. Peischl explained, "The Krauts seemed to have a system of first firing at a building with tracers to mark it, and then blowing it up with a bazooka or AT gun. Some might have been doped up, for they would come right up to our doors, open them, and yell 'Komm heraus!' We wasted no time in knocking them off."

Enemy mortar concentrations continued to knock out 56th machine guns, snipers took their toll, and German hand grenades came through every window. However, with the coming of dawn, enemy efforts at infiltration ceased.

The 494th's artillery support was stepped up during the night and the following day.

At 0200, January 10, the tanks of B/714 were ordered to cross the newly built Bailey bridge at the waterworks and move to Herrlisheim immediately. Their mission was to contact what infantry remained in the town and have them withdraw under the protection of the tanks.

Just at daybreak the tanks entered the western edge of Herrlisheim and began trying to locate the infantry. One German tank was knocked out at point-blank range. The tankers shouted for the 56th, but they were afraid of stepped out, owing to their experiences of the previous night. Many figures were seen running in the opposite direction—Germans.

An unidentified GI finally led the tankers to A/56; the situation was explained, and all tanks pulled up in the vicinity to protect the infantry. The tanks sent a message to CCB stating that the cut-off units had been found, and asked for permission to leave, after expressing the belief that they could not hold the town. The request to withdraw was refused, and the tanks were ordered to remain in the town.

During the day, light tanks brought in supplies for the 56th and evacuated the wounded. Fog was thick much of the time. On the first trip one light tank was hit and the driver killed, but the remaining four tanks continued on to Herrlisheim and returned. These tanks made three trips in and out of Herrlisheim and were able to evacuate most of the wounded. During the fourth trip back, at about 1400 hours, the tanks drew heavy anti-tank fire which prevented further assistance. The first tank made it back to Rohrweiler in good shape; the second came in burning; the third was knocked out; and the fourth had to return to Herrlisheim.

Early that same morning the engineer company, B/119, received word that it would move down into Herrlisheim, to be used as infantry in alleviating the situation of the 56th. Ammunition, small arms, machine guns, mines, bazookas were quickly gathered. All three platoons at full strength of 45 men each, reached Herrlisheim safely and immediately established a "beachhead." Artillery, mortars, and machine guns opened up as the engineers
moved over the footbridge at Herrlisheim and tried to knock it out.

Throughout the day it remained unsafe for any of the infantry to venture out of the houses they had occupied during the night. The companies held their positions during the day, since the Germans still covered the numerous alleyways which criss-crossed all through northern Herrlisheim. Wire crews and runners were under constant sniper fire.

After Lt. Col. Ingram of the 56th had reached Herrlisheim and plans had been formulated for the attack to continue, CCB sent in Lt. Col. Phelan, 714th, to take charge of activities in the town. He entered Herrlisheim at 1300 hours, approved plans for the impending attack, and included the engineers and his tanks to support it. C/714 tanks were now in Herrlisheim, and German bazooka men and snipers had infiltrated all about them, knocking out two.

Up to the time that the C/714 tanks arrived in Herrlisheim, there had been only sparse harassing artillery and mortar fire. From then on the tempo increased, reaching a crescendo at 1340 hours, the same time that an artillery concentration from the 494th AFA began to land in nearby Stainwald woods. All tank hatches were fastened to protect the tankers from artillery and mortar shells, but the infantry didn't fare so well. Heavy enemy concentrations on infantry positions in the town reduced total 56th personnel to about 150.

The command post in Herrlisheim had to be moved several times because of the number of wounded on the floor. The latest CP, in a house, received direct hits, wounding Lt. Col. Phelan and a number of other officers and men. Even the roof was knocked in. The attack was never able to get under way because of the high casualties among the infantry and the steady stream of enemy mortar and artillery shells coming in until dusk. Requests for reinforcements, medical supplies, and evacuation of the wounded were sent to CCB. Efforts at dropping medical supplies from a Cub plane had to be abandoned because of fog.

With the approach of darkness that second night in Herrlisheim, CCB units established a defense for another night. Tanks were dispersed alongside houses, with fields of fire covering the streets, in the event that German tanks ventured about. Plans were formulated for a withdrawal if one should be ordered. At 2000 hours word came through from CCB for all units to withdraw from Herrlisheim as soon as possible. Orders, however, were issued that no withdrawal would take place until all wounded including a German officer, had been evacuated. Tanks evacuated every wounded man; although one tank was knocked out, no casualties resulted.
The withdrawal was carefully organized. In order to keep noise at a minimum, motors were not started until the tanks were ready to leave. A friendly artillery barrage came down on schedule, and under its protection the troops withdrew from Herrlisheim. The night was so dark and the fog so thick that the infantry had to hold on to one another's belts as they moved in a close column. The mist and bitter cold intensified the suffering.

All units reached the other side of the Zorn river within less than one hour after movement began. The enemy was apparently unaware of the withdrawal, for it was completed without loss and without being shelled. The infantry companies dug defensive positions all along the canal, not only to stem any possible German drive toward Bischweiler, but also to prepare for future attempts to take Herrlisheim.

The rest of the division now was sent in to clean out this German bridgehead. The attack began in the early morning hours of January 16. CCB although exhausted and shot up, attacked to the east to establish a bridgehead in the vicinity of Rohrweiler. CCB and CCA renewed their attacks the following morning. CCB tried to extend its bridgehead across the Zorn river. It made slow progress because of heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and small arms fire.

CCB renewed its attack on January 17, but made little headway against stiffening resistance and heavy artillery fire. An attack the next day also failed to make much headway. Also, the command was still very weak in manpower, having had no replacements for the troops lost in the initial attack on Herrlisheim.

All 12th elements withdrew from the vicinity of Herrlisheim during the night of January 18/19, setting up defenses along the west side of the Zorn river. Several enemy counter attacks along the division front that night were repulsed.

During the night of January 19/20, the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division took over on defense, with two regiments where the 12th had attempted to attack with two battalions.

Gene Jaeger, S/Sgt. 1st platoon, B/56 was only a short distance from Delbert Darnell, when Darnell raised up and was torn apart by a German machine gun. Darnell had been platoon sgt. of the 2nd platoon and had been given a battlefield commission the previous day and assigned to the 1st platoon.

Jaeger said that you were never sure who was in charge. He and Charlie Peischl were pinned down so they decided to call for smoke to get out of there. Jaeger fell into a hole full of ice water up to his waist. He was rear guard when the company fell back and he became separated and fell in behind a column of men who suddenly began speaking in German. He dropped back and away from them quickly. He finally stumbled into C company's CP but when challenged for the password, he didn't know it. He finally did convince them that he was from B/56. He was wounded when he crouched in a shell hole and a large piece of shrapnel hit him in the shoulder.

Sgt. Hatteburg, squad leader, 1st platoon, was in a foxhole one dark night at Herrlisheim when two guys jumped in with him. He didn't know either one. A grenade landed between his feet and went off but didn't even scratch him. However, it ripped his overcoat to shreds. He got out of the hole and started toward one of our tanks but ran into two Germans. He shot them in the legs.

"3rd General Hospital, north of Marseilles, France, toward the end of January, 1945. Sitting on a cot in one of the wards, chain-smoking cigarettes one evening. Five guys wandered in still dressed in their dirty ODs and field jackets. They all sat down and lit up. They asked what outfit I was from. I said, "B/56." They exchanged strange glances and then asked how long I'd been in the hospital. I told them, since December. They said that they were from C/56, and that B/56 had been wiped out at Herrlisheim. I felt like someone had kicked me in the groin. They got up and moved away. I sat there all night long, numb and dazed, chain-smoking cigarettes. 240 men, dead and gone, just like that. I sat there through the night, and their faces moved past me, and I wouldn't admit that any of them were dead.

John Nugent"
Division headquarters moved from Hochfelden to Ittenheim on January 25, and the same day the entire division closed in that area. Movement was accomplished under hazardous road conditions, caused by the severest snowstorm yet experienced in France.

The last days of the month found the division making plans for counterattacking against Hoerdt, Gamsheim, and Kilstett, as well as continuing maintenance, rehabilitation, and drawing new men, vehicles, and supplies. Brief combat training was given the new reinforcements.

B/56 moved from Wingersheim to south of Tructersheim. Went out on a CCB exhibition problem the afternoon of January 30. On the 31st PX rations were distributed and everyone was paid. Training schedule was continued on February 1. Weather became warmer and the snow started melting.

On February 4 the Division moved toward Colmar, arriving there just after its liberation by the 28th Infantry Division and French forces. B/56 was committed to action outside of Colmar. The company remained in the line throughout the day and casualties were light.

The afternoon of February 4 CCB launched an attack toward Sundhoffen. The attack, consisting of drives by two task forces progressed slowly under heavy enemy artillery fire. CCB managed to reach the north edge of Colmar Woods, where orders were received for the entire division to attack south from Colmar, combat commands abreast, coordinating the advance with the 28th Infantry Division.

Three task forces from CCB continued the attack during the afternoon, taking subordinate objectives in conjunction with the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th Division. Pockets of by-passed Germans were successfully routed in each town.

B/56 moved from Colmar to Oberherghem on 5 February. One platoon detached enroute to flush Gueberschwarz. Company encountered sniper fire in one small village and was forced to set the church steeple on fire. 7 February, B/56 moved by motor convoy to defensive position at Gueberschwarz. Casualties during the recent action were Pvt. Gill (a recent replacement) and Sgt. Astour killed.

Since attacks of the 28th Infantry Division had been going so well in the direction of the Rhine, the 12th was informed that it would not be committed further in this action and was ordered to block the passes leading from the Vosges Mountains.

8 February the Division was ordered to the St. Avold area, in Lorraine, with the mission of relieving the 10th Armored Division of maintaining a counter-reconnaissance screen south of the Maginot Line and east and west of the Sarre River.
B/56 moved to Cites-des-Charbomuages on 12 February and followed a daily training schedule. Weather clear. Placed on 3 hour alert on February 16. On the 18th, weather rainy, training schedule continues. 20th to the 22nd, several men wounded at Herrlisheim return to the company. 23 February, company moved by motor convoy to relieve C Company on protective screen. B Company CP located in Baumisdorf. Platoons located in nearby towns running constant patrols and giving hourly reports.

During the last half of February, Combat Commands alternated in maintaining a three-hour alert status for possible movement to repel any enemy counter-attacks. The division conducted maintenance, rehabilitation, small arms and artillery firing, and small-unit training.

B/56 remained on recon screen from February 25 to 28.

March 1, B/56 moved by motor convoy to Cites-des-Charbomuages. Battalion billeted in same area. Passes to Paris, Nancy, and Brussels were available in limited numbers. Three days plus travel time allowed. Some men wounded at Herrlisheim continue to return to duty in small groups. Captain Beach returned to duty. Captain Gagliardi transferred to battalion staff.


The raffle deple (replacement depot) must have been unique to World War II. I doubt that any army had used it before and certainly none has used it since. It may have existed only in the ETO since I never heard any reference to it by guys who had served in the Pacific. It was probably the closest thing to a German Concentration Camp that any one else ever came up with.

The one at Epinal, France was probably a good example of all of them. It was in what seemed to be old French army barracks. Old stone buildings, dirty and dank. Dirt floors and wood frame bunks to sleep in. There wasn't a comfortable place to sit at any time. The food was "C" rations, stew or beans. They did warm it up. The place was damp cold all the time.

We spent our days sitting by a half of an oil drum, which was two-thirds full of gasoline, cleaning M-1 rifles. Everyone had a cigarette hanging from his mouth. As careless as some of those guys were with lighted cigarettes, its a wonder the whole place didn't go up in flames.

It was difficult to determine who was in charge of the place and the activities and routines. Most of the time it was hundreds of GIs milling around when not cleaning M-1s. The green replacements just over from the states were headed for some unit which wouldn't care when and how they got blown away.
A few days in a place like that, and anyone would have gladly transferred out to Devil's Island.

Succor finally arrived in the form of a halftrack from old B/56. Two guys were aboard, Sampson from the third platoon, I had known since basic at Camp Campbell, but the other must have been a replacement who had joined the company after I had been hit. So I climbed aboard and off we went in the direction of the company. They had given me a replacement M-1 at the reppele depelle (which looked the worse for wear) and I hadn't had a chance to fire it. Going back into combat with a weapon which you don't know does not leave you with a good feeling.

There wasn't much left of old B/56. Captain Beach was back and Nixon was still around. Of the old platoon sgts., Darnell and Rick had been killed at Herrlisheim. Charlie Peischi, who had been a s/sgt. with the 1st platoon at Herrlisheim, was now a 2nd lt. and platoon leader of the 2nd platoon. Many of those that I had gone through basic with at Campbell were now senior noncoms or had been given battlefield commissions. Of the old first squad, 2nd platoon, Sutkaitus was driving a halftrack for another squad and Hagen was about to be sent to the rear with hearing problems caused by concussion. Ringwelski had been wounded in late December and never rejoined the company. We had had to leave Staples behind in England with a broken foot, but that had healed and he was now back with the platoon.

I was assigned to Vic Challen's old squad, the 2nd of the 2nd platoon, and Howie Toms was now squad leader. Howie had been in the 1st squad hutment at Camp Berkeley. Fred Payne was back with the squad after having had a grenade go off between his legs in late December. The medics had repaired him to their satisfaction and sent him back to the front. I had known Fred since basic in 1942/43. CK was still with the squad. Roy Learned I had known at Berkeley. Paul Baquet, I didn't remember, but would not soon forget. The rest of the squad I truly didn't know.

The days were spent policing up the area (picking up trash and junk that Napoleon's Army had thrown away 150 years before), close order drill, manual of arms, extended order drill, and other mindless activities from basic training days two years before back in the States.

Each squad was quartered in a house and we were supposed to eat at a central mess house. The food wasn't really all that good, probably 10 in 1 rations. Our squad leader fancied himself a pretty good chef, and as I remember, he was. When he was sgt. of the guard he always gave a grocery list to the guy he put on post at the mess hall. The only one who objected to liberating these rations was our halftrack driver who screamed that he would be courtmartialed if caught stealing food. The squad leader changed his mind by pointing a 45 at his head.
"Excerpts from... 'Diary of Elmer Bright' 
March of 1945 saw the 56th AIB in reserve near the French coal mining city of Cite de Carbonnage. I hope some of you remember the best thing about that area. At the entrance to the coal mine there was a huge, hugh room with what seemed like 30 ft. ceilings with ropes and pulleys suspended from the ceiling with hooks on the end for miners to hang their street clothes while wearing their mining work clothes on the shift. At the end of the shift all miners would strip, hang the dirty clothes on the hooks, take a shower and go home. When we found this place it soon became the favorite place for us to take a shower in a warm place with plenty of hot water. I sure hope many of you got the opportunity to avail yourselves of this luxury. I really don't remember if the companies made shower runs to this place. I do seem to remember there always seemed to be enough cognac, etc. to go around."

One of the few times that B/56 got to take showers was in early March. We mounted up in the halftracks and rolled along until we came to an open field. Down the center of the field was a long tent. We dismounted and lined up at the upper entrance to the tent. We stripped down to the bare skin and threw our dirty, scum-encrusted uniforms and underwear in stiff piles on the ground. Standing there, shivering and shaking, we waited for a signal and then double-timed into the tent, about seven or eight men at a time. There were wooden planks running down the center and an overhead pipe with shower heads pointing down. We were each given a small bar of soap, and all of three to five minutes in the shower. Then, out the other end. After drying off we were issued all new clothes, from underwear on out.
Race to the Rhine won by G32.
A task force made up of Co. B, 71st Tank Battalion and Co. B, 56th AB, reached the Rhine River at 2330 (11:30 pm) on March 20. The task force took some prisoners, by-passed opposition, and killed some Germans.

On March 20 at Enkenbach, the force attempted to get onto the autobahn leading to the Rhine, but was held up for ten hours by stiff resistance. That night, however, the force found a passable route and reached the roadway at 2200.

From here to the river the opposition was small arms and antitank fire from Krauts dug in along the highway. Burning ammo dumps were evidence of a retreating enemy. The force had spent three days and three nights on the road after jumping off at Lorsch.

The force was led by the second platoon of B/56, with Lt. Charles Peischl, platoon leader. The halftrack of the second squad, Howie Toms, squad leader, was the lead vehicle.

"From: 'The United States Army in World War II. The European Theater of Operations."
"The Last Offensive.
"...As a result of a visit the Supreme Commander paid the Third Army commander in late morning of 16th of March, Patton asked General Eisenhower for another armored division, the 12th, then in Seventh Army reserve, and Eisenhower agreed..."

"Excerpts from... 'Diary of Elmer Bright.'
At some point around the middle of March we received orders to paint over all our unit bumper markings and we moved north to become part of General Patton's Third Army. Before we arrived in his Army, however, all officers received a memorandum with the following information: All officers in the Third Army will wear
their insignia of rank in plain view on the front of their steel helmut, and all officers will wear a necktie as part of their uniform. Any infraction of either of these rules will result in a $100.00 fine. Old George Patton wanted all officers to know they were now in Patton's Army. This, not having any unit markings on halftracks, tanks, jeeps, scout cars, etc. was the reason for our being known as the "Mystery Division" in the newspapers at home."

B/56 climbed aboard their halftracks in the middle of the night, and started the ride north to the city of Trier, where we would turn east and head for the Rhine River looking for a bridge. 80 rounds of thirty caliber ammunition around our waists and 80 more in bandoliers across our chests. "K" rations in our musette bags. There wasn't much left of old B/56, but there we (2nd squad, 2nd platoon) sat in the back of the halftrack, on those cold steel seats, with one OD blanket facing each other with our M-1s between our knees.

The night was pitch black, and the drivers and car commanders attempted to follow the vehicle ahead by the cat's eyes on its rear lights.

Fred Payne, our car commander, suddenly let out a yell, "Look at all the dead bodies. There are piles of dead bodies all along the road." This got our driver so rattled he ran the halftrack into a tree. All of the squad yelled, "Jesus Christ, nobody wants to hear about dead bodies. Knock it off." Except for an occasional report on what he could see, by Fred, the rest of the ride was uneventful. Although bouncing up and down on a cold steel seat in the back of a halftrack, on an all night ride on your way to being maimed or killed is bound to leave certain indelible memories.

A cool, sunny morning in mid-March. We had moved through the 94th Infantry Division and were ready for a wild ride down the roads heading east, looking for a bridge, intact, across the Rhine. We were up on the top of a hill and the road ran east and west in the valley below. The halftracks and tanks of the 56th and B/714 were waiting for the command to move down the hill and onto the road. I was sitting up on the side of the halftrack, getting ready to open a can of cold C-ration stew. Most of the squad was made up of replacements. I had probably been introduced to them, but I couldn't remember any of their names. (And there had been a time at Camp Campbell, in the late winter of 1942/43, when I had known the name of everybody in H Company, all 250 of them). One of the replacements was sitting up on the other side of the halftrack, strumming a guitar and singing, "Don't Fence Me In." I had never heard the song before. About all that was left in this squad from the old 2nd platoon was Howie Toms, Fred Payne, Roy Learned, CK and myself. Howie was standing in front of the halftrack with a German rifle in his
hands. He took it by the barrel and slammed the stock against the ground. The damned thing went off and a round went whistling up past our heads. Jesus Christ, Howie.

I opened the can of cold stew, got my spoon out of my mess kit, and had a spoonful halfway to my mouth when I heard artillery off in the distance. I started to shake. I couldn't move the spoon up to my mouth. My teeth chattered. My body shook all over. This was the first time that I had heard artillery since I had been hit. I couldn't stop shaking. I broke out in a cold sweat. I didn't want anyone else to see me shaking, but they all seemed to be concerned with their own problems. It finally passed. I lost all interest in eating. I threw the can over the side and slid down into the halftrack. If this was going to happen every time I heard artillery fire it was gong to be a long ride east.

We stopped at the edge of a town, after dark on the first night. I drew first round guard duty. I think that Roy Learned also drew first turn. The rest of the platoon went off to find some place to sleep (most likely a barn with some hay in it). Before they moved off, the platoon sgt. told us to stay awake, as some krauts had slipped into the 45th Division motor pool the night before and had slit some throats.

Roy and I sat up on the edge of the halftrack and I was manning the 30 caliber water cooled machine gun. We needed some sleep and a hot cup of coffee. I knew that I was going to have trouble staying awake. Sure enough, I dozed off and then jerked awake, certain that a knife was making a pass at my throat. I must have dozed off a dozen times during those two hours, and then jerked awake expecting to see krauts with knives, all around me. Before the two hours was up the platoon was back. And the order came, "mount up; turn 'em over; move 'em out; second squad, second platoon take the point." "Jesus Christ, not the second squad again?" The line of halftracks moved out to the road in the dead of night and headed east.

"United States Army in World War II. The European Theater of Operations. The Last Offensive.

'With the added weight of the 12th Armored Division..., General Walker's XX Corps made... spectacular gains.

By midnight of the 19th, the 12th Armored was across the upper reaches of the Nahe river and had gone on to jump a little tributary of the Nahe, more than twenty-three miles from their line of departure of the day before.' "

'The 10th Armored stood no more than six miles from Kaiserauern. Two of the infantry divisions... mopped up behind the armor.'

'In the XII Corps, the 4th Armored on 18 and 19 March failed to regain its earlier momentum... partly because the Germans with their backs not far from the Rhine stiffened. In the two days, the 4th advanced just over 10 miles beyond the Nahe."
...the newly committed 11th Armored...on 18 March raced twenty miles to the Nahe river at Kirn. The next day the armor atreaked another nineteen miles to the southeast, reaching a point as far east as Kaiserlautern.

When combined with the drive of the 12th Armored on the north wing of the XX Corps, the 11th Armored's rapid thrusts tied a noose around what remained of the enemy's XIII and LXXX Corps.'

'...American armored spearheads appeared without warning, seemingly over every hill and around every curve,... American planes wreaked havoc from the air,... Highways were littered with wrecked and burning vehicles and the corpses of men and animals. Roadblocks at defiles and on the edges of towns and villages might halt the ...onflow of tanks and halftracks temporarily, but the pauses were brief....'

'...German commanders, still denied the authority they begged to withdraw behind the Rhine, continued to build up new lines and to shift units here and there....'

'Events on 20 March... In late afternoon contingents of the 90th Division, on the left wing of the XII Corps, arrived on high ground overlooking Mainz and the Rhine. A short while later troops of the 4th Armored fought their way into Worms.'

'Both the 10th and 12th Armored Divisions of the XX Corps still had to emerge from the wooded hills of the Pfälz onto the Rhine plain, but they would be on the plain by nightfall of the 20th.'

'The divisions of the VI Corps had been probing the pillbox belt less than twenty-four hours when General Walker, leaving the task of gaining the Rhine to the 12th Armored Division and of actually capturing Kaiserlautern to an infantry unit, turned the 10th Armored Division south and southeast into the Pfälzer Forest....'

'The 12th Armored meanwhile was approaching the Rhine near Ludwigshafen.'

'In desperation the Luftwaffe during 20 March sent approximately 300 planes of various types, including jet-propelled Messerschmidt 262's, to attack the Third Army's columns.'

"Excerpts from: 'Diary of Elmer Bright'"

We jumped off on the attack from Trier and headed for the Rhine River. In the Back Tracks of the February issue (HCN) it is noted the 17th reached the Rhine River at 0100 on 21 March and elements of CCB had reached the river at 2330 on 20 March which was 30 minutes earlier? It just so happened that the so-called elements
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of CCB was the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, the FIRST unit of the entire Third Army to reach the Rhine. We had raced down the Autobahn all night to finally enter Ludwigshaven on the Rhine.'"

It was the second squad, second platoon, B/56, CCB, leading the Third Army east on the Autobahn, heading for The Rhine River, late on the night of March 20. Task Force Fields consisted of Companies A, B, C, Hq's, and Service of the 56th; plus B Company of the 714th Tank Battalion and 1 platoon of Engineers. The second squad of the second platoon of B/56 was and had been the point. No one knew what was ahead of us or on either side. German units were retreatting toward the Rhine and trying to get across. The second squad was dirty, hungry, tired and scared spitless.

Most of the squad were half asleep with their M-1s between their knees when the halftrack lurched. We had either hit something or something had hit us. Our driver jumped out of the halftrack and left it careening around on the road. We figured we had either hit a mine or the krauts were firing at us from across the river.

Howie Toms and Fred Payne went out the front of the halftrack. The rest of the squad in the back was trying to go over the left side which was tilted up in the air. However, Baquet was standing in the back and holding onto the 30 caliber air-cooled mounted on the side. Whenever one of the squad tried to go over the side, Baquet pushed out on the back of the mg, swinging the barrel in and knocking us back into the halftrack. The squad was a tumbled mass of flailing bodies, trying to get upright and trying to go over the side before the halftrack took a hit or exploded. Most of us had lost our helmets. We all expected heavy firing to commence at any time.

Someone finally knocked Baquet away from the 30 caliber, and we went over the side and dropped to the road. Roy Learned had managed to keep his helmet on and when he hit the road he fell into a hole head first. His helmet saved him from any bumps or bruises. It was pitch black, no lights of any kind. No noise, except for the sound of our boots hitting the road as we ran back along the line of 2nd platoon halftracks which had been following us. We climbed aboard the other halftracks and waited for developments.

Our halftrack had come to a stop without any discernible damage, and so we dismounted and climbed back aboard our own vehicle.

"Excerpts from: 'Diary of Elmer Bright'
We were ordered to pull back from the river and happened to halt near a large factory where there were many Polish displaced persons working. In the S2 section of the battalion Hq. there was a communications sgt. named Henry
diary, recollections—JN, diary, The Last Offensive.

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Figurski who spoke the language. The Polish workers informed Henry this was a fruit canning factory and there were large stores of canned peaches, pears, plums and other fruit locked away under the buildings. So we proceeded to remove the locks and remove cases of canned fruit. Everyone enjoyed the fruit to the fullest extent, but, it had been a long time since we had eaten such sweet fruit in syrup. You can imagine the result of this binge and what it did to our digestive systems. The latrines were visited more frequently for the next few days."

B/56 pulled back into the factory area and parked its halftracks around a large messhall. After checking out the inside of the messhall, we decided that we would rather sleep on the tables for a change, since we had been trying to sleep sitting up in the halftracks for four days. Although rather hard, the tables felt good when you stretched out on them. A short time later all hell broke loose.

The goddam Luftwaffe had decided to strafe us. Machine gun and cannon fire was coming down through the roof of the mess hall, right down between the tables. We rolled off the tables and double-timed outside. Everyone that could, climbed up in a half-track and manned a machine gun. The noise in that place was enough to wake the dead. I don't think that we hit any of the German planes, and they didn't do any damage to us.

And for breakfast— a small can of processed meat product, cold, with three hard crackers, topped off by a Fleetwood cigarette.

"Excerpts from 'Diary of Elmer Bright'
Our real mission as a division was to find an intact bridge over the Rhine for General Patton who was itching to get a bridge like the Ninth Army had gotten at Remagen before it was blown. I think the closest that we came was at Speyer when we heard the bridge being blown when we were a very short distance away. The Germans had left a lot of troops on our side of the river and we had quite a fight to finally capture Speyer."

"The United States Army in World War II. The European Theater of Operations. The Last Offensive.

General Beyer's LXXX Corps (German), transferred from the Seventh Army (German) to plug the hole from the north alongside the Rhine, had hardly anything left to prevent the 12th Armored Division from driving southward from Ludwigshafen toward Speyer. By nightfall a column of the 12th Armored stood only six miles from Speyer.
"To forestall a second Remagen, the Germans by 19
March had blown all Rhine bridges from Ludwigshafen
northward. Of the three that remained upstream, the
southernmost, at Maximiliansan was destroyed on 21
March when a round of American artillery fire struck
a detonator, setting off prepared demolitions. A
second, at Speyer, was too immediately threatened
and too far removed from the main body of German
troops to be of much use to any but the defenders
of Speyer itself. It would be blown late on the
23rd."

"A History of the 12th Armored Division.
CCB and the 92nd Rcn. were ordered to attack Speyer,
a city of approximately 50,000 population on the
Rhone.

On March 24 CCB cleared Speyer after a rough fight."

B/56, dismounted from the halftracks and moved out from the road and
into the open field, in a line of skirmishers. We could see the
spire of the cathedral of the city of Speyer in the distance, and in
between some industrial plants and a railroad embankment. It was a
morning in late March, sunny and bright, and at the moment very quiet.

We hadn't advanced too far when most of us decided that we were going
to be too warm, so we stopped to take off our field jackets. This in-
volved removing two bandoliers of ammunition from across our chests,
and a heavy cartridge belt and suspenders, before we could unbutton
our jackets. We had some volunteers who double-timed back to the half-
tracks with the jackets. After getting the cartridge belt and bando-
liers back in place, we started to move out again.

The krauts evidently decided that this would be a good time to start
shelling us. The platoon halted and we unsnapped our entrenching tools
and started digging foxholes. The ground was rather soft and sandy, so
we were making fairly good progress. However, the shelling increased
in intensity, so we squirmed into our shallow holes. I heard Charlie
Staples, off to my left, yell, "the Lord protects drunkards and fools,
so I'm doubly protected." Someone remarked that one of the platoon
leaders was suffering from concussion and had been taken back to the
Aid Station. I didn't see or hear of any other casualties (at least
for the second platoon) during this action.

The shelling let up, and everyone was up and we were ready to move
out again. And then I heard, "Nugent, out as a scout!" Jesus Christ,
why me? That was a low kick in the groin. Some other poor soul was
appointed as the other scout and we moved out, 40 yards in front of
the platoon and 40 yards from each other.

Rifles at port, we moved at a steady pace across the open field. God
damn, it was lonesome out there. No one had told us how far away the
krauts were supposed to be or what their strength was estimated to
be. I was scared spitless. Having been hit once before, I didn't re-
lish the thought of another wound, or getting maimed or killed.
recollections- JN

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Better get off the negative and start thinking positive. Camp Campbell, Kentucky, basic training 1942/43. When scouts move out toward the enemy, they will either be allowed to pass and the enemy will then open up on the platoon; or, the enemy will gun down the scouts and take their chances with the platoon. Which here? My mouth was so dry I could hardly swallow.

And then—three rounds went whistling past my head and I hit the dirt and rolled. Up and run forward ten paces, hit the dirt again and roll the other way. (How many times had we practiced that in training in the states). Look ahead for cover. I see a mound of dirt, a couple of feet high, about forty yards in front of me. I hope the platoon is moving up behind me. I don't hear any commands, and I'm sure as hell not aware of any hand or arm signals. Up and forward, hit the dirt and roll and then I'm close enough to the mound that I'm safe from rifle and automatic weapons fire. And now the platoon has moved up on a line with me.

I see the company runners and radio operators moving at a crouch, crossing in front of the platoon. I was hugging the ground, as flat on my belly as I could get. When I turned my head and looked up, I saw a solid sheet of rifle and machine gun fire going over our heads. I felt like a bug pinned to a board. I was almost afraid to breathe.

The next time I looked up there were blue streaks going over our heads. They were firing the anti-aircraft cannon at us. "0 God, get me the ______ out of here in one piece and I will never complain about anything again for the rest of my life."

Then ker-thunk, and I have just heard the first mortar fired at us. I know that I had better move before the third one comes in, because it will be right on us. Just as I hear the second one, I start to raise up on my elbows and knees to start running forward, I hear the platoon leader yell, "assault!" The whole platoon comes up as one and starts running forward, firing from the hip. I look off to my right and see the machine gun squad running forward and firing their air-cooled 30 calibers.

The guy on my left suddenly shifted his M-1 sling up onto his right shoulder and then clutched his left shoulder. Blood welled up between his fingers and covered his hand. The platoon sgt. must have seen him get hit, because he fell back and told him to take four krauts that we had flushed out, back to the rear and to get himself to the Aid Station. The last I saw of him, he was hopping along on one foot, kicking the krauts in the ass with the other, all the while yelling, "Mark schnell, you sons a bitches, mark schnell!" His left shoulder and arm were covered with blood.
And then, after firing my M-1 once, it jammed. This was the one I had been issued at the reppe depple. I hoped everyone going through there wasn't getting a rifle that would jam. This was the first time in two years that an M-1 had ever jammed on me. I couldn't pull the bolt back. Should I go back to the rear and try and find another one. No way. Its safer to stay with the platoon and pray that I get a chance to tear it down very soon.

Up and over the railroad tracks and then into the area around the factories. As four of us crouched at the corner of one of the buildings, a piece of shrapnel as big as your fist, bounced off the helmet of the guy next to me.

And then, out into the open, and into another area near another building. We saw a body on the sidewalk with a raincoat thrown over it. Someone said it was Lt. Willis from C Company. Evidently a kraut, out in the field between the factories and Speyer, had shot him. Along came Westmoreland, our resident Texan, dragging a German by the scruff of the neck, and yelling for a rope. He thought that this particular kraut had killed Lt. Willis and he intended to string him up. Luckily, no one had any rope, and some noncom relieved him of his prisoner. (Westmoreland was a tall Texan, with a drawl, who always made conversation about the rest of us in the halftrack by referring to us as dogfaces. I don't know why he didn't include himself in that category).

Since it was beginning to get dark, we outposted the area around the factories. The only food that anyone had on them was "hard as a rock, chocolate" D-ration bars. No hot coffee. It got very cold during the night, and since our field jackets were back with the halftacks, we spent the night in our shirtsleeves shivering and shaking. Some of the guys found what looked to be sheets of asbestos, and tried to wrap themselves in it. No one can realize what a treat it was to be able to smoke a cigarette in those circumstances. We cupped them in our hands so that the glow couldn't be seen.

Morning finally dawned. We were frozen to the bone. Dirty, hungry and scared spitless. No hot coffee. We wondered what the kitchen crew were up to. A mouthful of water from the canteen, a cigarette, and a few bites on the D-ration bar. Then the shelling resumed. Everytime we heard the shells coming in (sounded like a bunch of big freight trains coming at you), we flinched and ducked. Baquet stood out in the open with his hands on his hips, laughing at us, and inferring that only cowards flinched and ducked. Baquet was killed later in the spring.

We moved across the open field and into the streets of Speyer. The krauts who had been dug in, out in the field the day before, had evidently retreated during the night.

We moved down the street, house by house, kicking in the door (although if Baquet got there first, he usually sprayed the door with the Thompson submachine gun, which he had evidently liberated from some tanker), and then jumped inside to either side of the doorway. We then checked the house, room by room. I moved over to an inside door
March 1945.

kicked it in. It led down into a basement. I moved halfway down the stairs and then I could see a large open room, well-lighted, with about forty old people, sitting around the walls of the room on straight-back chairs.

They sat perfectly still. Not a move or a sound from any of them. No one looked at me. I looked around the room and didn't see anything unusual so I rejoined the squad back upstairs. We moved back out onto the street and on to the next house.

"Excerpts from: 'Diary of Elmer Bright'...
...When our Battalion Headquarters group entered Speyer we rolled up to a hotel and found a German staff sitting around a table ready to be served lunch. Naturally we took the staff prisoners and the 56th staff sat down and we ate the prepared lunch. We used that hotel as our BN. CP and living quarters for several days and the owner had a very well stocked wine cellar, which was enjoyed by the whole company."

"United States Army in World War II. The European Theater of Operations. 'The Last Offensive'.

Formal German evacuation of the west bank ended during the night of 24 March...

...the Saar-Palatinate had provided a remarkable example of offensive maneuver, particularly by the Third Army. It was also a striking demonstration of co-operation and coordination among units and their commanders at various levels, including air commands. There had been moments of confusion— in the XII Corps, for example, ambitious 5th Division units got astride the routes of attack of the 4th Armored Division, and on 21 March a column of the Seventh Army's 6th Armored Division got entangled with the Third Army's 26th Division— but in view of the number of units and the speed and extent of the maneuver, those moments were few...

In view of the success of the campaign, criticism of it would be difficult to sustain. Yet it was a fact nonetheless that the German First Army— and to some extent the Seventh Army— for all the losses, conducted a skillful delaying action to the end in the face of overwhelming strength on the ground and in the air and never succumbed to wholesale encirclement, despite a higher command reluctant to sanction any withdrawal. In the process the Germans had withstood the clear threat of a rapid drive by some unit of the Third Army or the Seventh Army along the west bank of the Rhine to trap the German First Army.

Those contingents of both German armies that did escape would have to be met again on the east bank of the Rhine."
"A History of the 12th Armored Division.

After a very short rest at Diedersheim for reorganization, word spread that ...(we) would cross the Rhine. The crossing was made on March 28, commencing shortly after midnight... the crossing, going over the pontoon bridge at Worms in the... darkness, with the burning skeleton of Worms' buildings growing dimmer in the overcast sky. Worms' quaint old tower-bridge lay demolished. ... Just north of it lay the Alexander M. Patch bridge (pontoon), concealed by smoke in the daylight and by darkness at night.

...To the 12th Armored Division fell the honor of spearheading the Seventh Army across southern Germany into the heart of the Nazi's vaunted National Redoubt.

...the 12th assembled at Lorsch overnight on March 28.

...the 12th was ordered to pass through the 3rd Infantry Division, ... CCA to seize Amorbach, ... CCB to capture Beerfelden, and then both commands were to advance to Wurzburg."

'The United States Army in World War II.
The European Theater of Operations.
The Last Offensive.

General Patch had ordered transfer of the 12th Armored Division to the XV Corps for exploitation.'
Operations followed a pattern where armored columns traveled toward their objectives until the infantry were forced to dismount and fight on foot. When heavy resistance was encountered, the tanks were brought up to soften up the town or other objective. Artillery support was rendered by the attached AFA battalion. The air liaison officer called in the AAF on targets. The infantry moved through towns, checking for snipers and strong points. If the Germans had withdrawn to the next town, the infantry remounted the halftracks and rolled through town to the next strong point. Supply trucks made daily trips to the rear for ammunition, fuel and food.

Task Force Fields attacked from the vicinity of Erlach on April 5 to take Kitzingen. Seized a partially damaged bridge and established a small bridgehead on the east bank of the Main River. From this bridgehead the TF attacked to the west and rapidly cleared several towns, and then returned to Kitzingen. On April 7 and 8, CCB went into assembly for repairs. The Division began reconnaissance in force to the southeast.

It seemed that around every curve in the road, as we headed east, there was a village or small town; and as we approached, all of a sudden air raid sirens would sound. The Germans were using the sirens to warn of approaching armored columns. Jesus, that sudden noise, scared the holy crap out of us.

One night, after we had halted for awhile, I was walking guard down a dark, deserted street, on the outskirts of some town; and a noncom came along and said, "stay alert, somebody spotted a "Tiger" over on the other side of town, earlier." Well if he thought that I was going to stand there and bounce 30 caliber rounds from my M-1 off the side of a "King Tiger", he was out of his cotton-pickin' mind. However, things remained relatively quiet the rest of the night. In the morning, as we mounted up, "2nd squad, 2nd platoon, take the point!" Jesus Christ, not the point again. Is this the only squad in the whole army that can ride point?

I never did figure out who decided what the makeup of a combat command task force would be. On that wild ride from Trier to the Rhine, it seemed that the five halftracks of the 2nd platoon of B/56 led the way most of the time. On the east side of the Rhine, it seemed to be a halftrack, then a tank, a halftrack, then a tank, and so on. Usually an armored infantry squad was the point.

And many times the column slammed to a halt when some kraut artillery opened up on us. And some officer would yell, "take a squad up the road and knock out that "88": And you prayed, "Oh God, not the 2nd squad again."
Another pitch black night with CC3 out in front of everyone and everything, all by itself, penetrating Germany on a very dark and lonesome road, and the 2nd squad, 2nd platoon was not the point.

Suddenly the column slammed to a halt, and the word came back that the krauts had knocked out one of our lead tanks, had turned it around, and were firing at us. And then we got the order, "dismount and outpost the tanks!" We slid out the backdoor of the halftrack, out from under the canvas cover, and into pouring rain and whistling shrapnel.

The road had crossed a small culvert behind us, and someone had taken cover under the road. Three or four guys decided to take cover down there, also. They made a hell of a racket sliding down, and the guy already down there, growled, "goddam it, keep it quiet, the krauts probably have machine guns trained right down this gulley."

I decided to take my chances with the shrapnel up on the road in the rain. No one in the 2nd squad got hit that night.

The situation at the head of the column finally got resolved, so we mounted up and headed east again into the dark and the unknown.

The column stopped late one afternoon in a small village. The German families were told to move out for the night and B/56 moved in. Although most of the Germans that we had encountered so far, swore that they weren't members of the Nazi party and were not sympathetic to it. However, we found scrapbooks and mementoes in the houses, with photos of everyone wearing the armbands or at Nazi parades and celebrations, living the good life in the Third Reich.

Staying in a house, after all those weeks in the mud and cold or in the halftrack, seemed like dreams come true. There was a drawback. The Germans kept goats in an open cellar, usually under the bedroom. The smell of the goats permeated the whole house. We moved back out side or into the barn.

The woman of this particular house had a flock of chickens. We all decided that after such a long period of deprivation we were entitled to a hot chicken dinner. Soon the yard was full of GIs chasing chickens and firing at them with their M-1s.

The next day the woman came back to feed her chickens. When she couldn't find them she reported the fact to the company commander. We denied having anything to do with the missing chickens. We never heard whether the lady was paid by the army and we never suffered in any way because of the incident.
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recollections- JN
1945. March/April

We met some resistance at another German town, and B/56 dismounted from the halftracks and moved into the streets. About half of the 2nd squad, 2nd platoon, moved down the side street of what looked like a quiet residential neighborhood, with brick-paved streets and sidewalks, and houses set back from the street. Iron-railing fences ran along between the yards and the sidewalks.

Shells started dropping about two streets behind us in the center of town. We dropped into a crouch and continued to move in single file up along the fence. The shelling continued, and suddenly, coming down the center of the street, were five nuns, with their long black habits and faces framed in white starched collars, and blithely ignoring the insanity going on around them. They were headed directly for the streets where the shells were dropping. We stared in disbelief until they passed from view, and then we straightened up and headed for the top of the hill on the double.

We reached a cross street, with houses and shops along it. We passed a shoe store, with one wall blown out, and there was a bunch of guys inside trying on civilian shoes.

We moved down the walks to the left. We hadn't seen any kraut military or even any civilians since we entered the town. We moved around behind the houses and through the back yards. Someone decided that we should check inside some of the houses, and the back door of the first one we tried was unlocked. The six of us moved into someone's kitchen. There wasn't a sign of life, but there was a freshly baked coffee cake on the table. We all had packets of cocoa powder in our jacket pockets, and we heated up some water on the stove and each mixed a cup of hot cocoa in our canteen cups.

We each cut a large piece of the coffee cake, and then sat around the room eating the cake and drinking the cocoa. The back door opened and a woman who looked to be in her forties, came in. She was startled, but did not look at us. She looked at the place where the cake had been and then glanced around the room. She never looked directly at any of us.

We had our helms off and our M-1s were leaning against the chairs. We hadn't combed or brushed our hair in weeks, had several days growth of beard and our field jackets and OD pants were dirty and stained and our boots were muddy. We had a cartridge belt around our waists and two bandoliers across our chests.

The German woman didn't speak. She began bustling around the kitchen, straightening things in the cupboard, and never looking at us or acknowledging our presence. We were probably the first American troops that she had seen. We didn't know what the German people had been told about us.

And then we heard noise from the street. It was time to return to the halftracks and roll again. So we put on our helms, picked up our M-1s, ran out the back door, down the street and through town to the highway where we climbed back into the halftracks. The column of tanks and halftracks roared off down the road to the east.
1945. March/April

We might as well have been on Mars, for all we knew about what was going on in the world. We didn’t even know what was going on in this particular campaign which we were fighting. We knew that the war was winding down, and nobody wanted to get maimed or killed in the last days of the war. (There were stories that some guys were shooting themselves in the arm or the foot).

But, no one was telling us what we were doing on this particular road at this particular time; aside from the fact that we were leading the whole Seventh Army into Germany, with die-hard krauts and "SS" in front of us, on each side of us and maybe even closing in behind us.

The krauts seemed to take perverse pleasure in shooting up American ambulances and kitchen trucks. Although, sometimes the kitchen crews weren’t following closely enough and took a wrong turn and went down a strange road and then disappeared. I don’t remember that our kitchen truck (B/56) served us a hot meal very often on this wild ride. We ate mostly "K" rations.

The column rolled into some open, level country, and as we arrived at the edge of a town, late one sunny morning, one of the guys dropped off the halftrack and headed up beyond the row of houses that lined the street. There was no resistance at this particular place, and white flags were waving out of the windows. We knew that we were being observed by the occupants of the houses as our task force moved slowly down the main street.

When we reached the other side of town, the guys that had dropped off earlier, rejoined us and climbed back aboard the halftrack. He had a pillowcase full of souvenirs which he had liberated from various houses. While the Germans were looking out their front windows, he was sneaking in the backdoors and helping himself to silverware, etc. In other wars in other times this was called looting. In the ETO in the spring of 1945 American GIs referred to it as liberating souvenirs.

On another sunny morning, as the column rolled down the road to the east, an "88" cut loose at us from the top of a hill. We slammed to a halt and fired back with machine guns. However, he was in hull defilade on top of that hill and could take his time picking us off.

But then, from down out of the sky, came a Republic, "P-47" Thunderbolt, firing his 50 calibers. That "88" crew forgot all about an armored column, so we took off down the road again.

A cold, gray morning, somewhere along a road in Germany. B/56 ready to move out. 2nd squad, 2nd platoon, take the point. Someone countermanded the order. Another squad from the first platoon pulled around us. As that squad pulled out from cover and onto the road, Wham! And a shell tore the right side off the forehead of a kid standing up in the halftrack. Blood and white bone. And that halftrack pulled back and another moved up to take the point.
On the last day of March, the British Broadcasting Company, in a
news broadcast, announced: "The U.S. Seventh Army's 12th Armored
Division, near Wurzburg, is the farthest Allied unit into Ger-
many at this time."

It had been two weeks since we had headed east out of Trier, and
this was the longest, wildest, scariest, goddam ride I had ever
been on in my life. I suppose Tennessee Maneuvers in the fall of
1943, had been some preparation for this, since we spent four
or five days a week, roaring up and down the back roads of Tenn-
essee, raising clouds of dust, and trying to sleep as we bounced
up and down on those cold hard seats in the back of the halfracks.

But this was hell. On top of the miseries of the body, we had the
terrors of the mind. There were die-hard krauts with panzerfausts,
and "88s", and sundry other fiendish weapons, lying in wait along
the roads and highways and in the towns, determined to maim or kill
you. And riding into this hellish unknown, day after day, turned
your guts into jelly, your nerves into wet spaghetti, and your
mind into a zombie-like trance where you reacted because you had
been trained to react.

One morning the second squad of the second platoon of B/56 was
relieved of the terrifying detail of riding the point. We were given
the job of riding shotgun on the Supply trucks. Back down the roads
to the Rhine, where they would load up with ammunition and gasoline
and then back to the head of the column again. This assignment was
almost as bad as riding point. We were way out in front of other
American units, and the countryside was full of marauding bands of
krauts. Five empty supply trucks and a lone halfrack would make
lovely targets.

The countryside was hilly with thick forests on either side of the
road. There were no sounds and no signs of battle on this road,
just the rumble of the trucks and halfrack as they headed back
west. No way to know what the drivers of the trucks were thinking.
But we were nervous and tense, besides being tired, dirty and hun-
gry.

And then, we saw a German medic standing by the side of the road
trying to flag us down. He said that one of our ambulances was back
up in the hills with some wounded. Howie Toms, squad leader of the
2nd squad, decided that we would go on up and check things out.
We drove up a winding road through the trees.

Suddenly we rolled out into a clearing. At the far side there were
four or five houses and an American ambulance sitting out in the
middle, empty, with it's back doors swinging open.

And then a woman came running out of one of the houses, and she yell-
ed at us, "Take me with you, I'm an American. I've been here since
1937." And somebody in the halfrack yelled back, "you been here
that long lady you can stay awhile longer. Besides we're full up, we
don't have any room."
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1945. March/April

And Howie said, "cover me" and he jumped down from the halftrack and ran over to one of the houses. We all clutched our M-1s and watched the houses and the clearing for any movement. Soon, Howie came running back, climbed aboard and said, "let's get out of here, there are wounded in there. We'll pass the word when we reach the Rhine."

So we roared back down the road, to the main road, and then went west after the supply trucks.

The trucks were loaded with ammunition and gasoline at the dumps at the Rhine and we made the trip back up to the column without incident. When the column was in sight, we let the supply trucks move on to join it, while we cut down a side street in this town. We were afraid that we would be invited to ride Point again, and we wanted to delay that pleasure for as long as possible.

Another bright and sunny morning, and CCB is rolling along at a pretty good clip, when one of the guys saw a rabbit hopping along out in the field. He fired the machine gun at it. We soon forgot about rabbits and stray German units along the road. Down out of the sky came a German Jet making a strafing pass at us. We knew that our Air Corps didn't have any jets so we were at the mercy of the Germans. Our halftracks were being followed by three 6 x 6s full of Negro troops who had recently been attached to the 56th. As the jet swooped down and made its pass at us, the Negroes peeled out of the backs of the trucks and ran for the ditches on either side of the road. The column continued to roll. Everyone in the halftrack was terrified, but no one said anything, except for old CK who was sitting across from me. CK started to whine, "we'll all be killed, we're going to die." He kept repeating this over and over. So finally I said, "shut your f----g mouth CK or I will smash in your teeth with the butt plate of this M-1.

Sunday morning, after sunup, early April, along the road outside some small town near Wurzburg. The halftracks of the 2nd platoon, B/56 were spaced out along the road. We were halfway through breakfast, standing around eating out of our mess kits. Along the sides of the halftracks came a GI. Although it was chilly, he didn't have a field jacket on. His helmet had a dent in it. His combat pants were torn. He had a trench knife on his pistol belt, but wasn't carrying a carbine or M-1. He stopped and then he said, "any of you guys that are fisheaters, fall out over by that halftrack in fifteen minutes. I'll be saying Mass. I'll give you General Absolution and you can receive Communion." So, dirty, unwashed, and unshaven we headed over and knelt down in the mud, heard Mass, had our sins forgiven and received Communion. Then we mounted up again and the halftracks and tanks headed east again. We hadn't known that there was a chaplain anywhere near us.
Howie Toms got hit in the upper thigh and Ron Weller and Fred Payne dragged him back to a safe area. Ron got a bronze star. However, Howie thought that it was Thompson who had dragged him back.

Later on Fred, who had had a German grenade go off between his legs in late December, was shot in the groin by a Kraut sniper.

Charlie Peischl (platoon leader, 2nd platoon) and Paul Baquet, thought that they were in a secure place one day when a round creased the back of Peischl's neck. As Baquet started to raise up to take care of that SOB, another round hit him in the cheek and ricocheted off of his teeth and up into his head.

After being wounded at Herrlisheim, Bob Beach was sent to a hospital in England. He rejoined B Company in March. Jean Norton, 56th battalion commander, asked Bob to become battalion S-3. Bob wanted to stay with B company, but a few days later, Sal Gagliardi was killed by a sniper and Bob became S-3. The day after the battalion crossed the Danube, Bob was wounded again and also promoted to major.

SEE SUPPLEMENT IX

ARMY HOSPITALS
1945

Air-Evac. (DC-3) Tauberbischofsheim, Germany to Bar-Le-Duc, France

1st General. Marseilles, France.
Hospital Train. Bar-Le-Duc to Marseilles

Hospital Ship Acadia. Marseilles, France to Staten Island, N.Y.

O'Halloran General Hospital. Staten Island.
Hospital Train. Staten Island, N.Y. to Brigham City, Utah.

Bushnell General Hospital, Brigham City, Utah.
April 10, CCB ordered to attack. TF Fields held up by hostile tanks and artillery fire at Klein Langheim. Renewing the attack on April 11, CCB advanced to the south and southeast, capturing eight towns, and by the end of the day task forces had fought their way to Markt Bibart and Altmannhausen. By April 12, CCB had taken Kautriestheim and Markt Nordheim. The defenders of Krassholzheim were surprised and the town taken.

Combat Command B launched an attack about noon on the 14th, but was held up by a blown bridge over the Aisch River. Company B, 119th constructed a treadway bridge near Dietersheim, and elements of TF Fields crossed and established a bridgehead. Passive enemy defense measures, including road blocks, trees dynamited to fall across roads, mines, and blown bridges offered the major hinderances to advance. Strong resistance consisted of stoutly defended road blocks (usually hidden "88's"), small arms, and artillery fire.

CCB completed the crossing of the Aisch at Dietersheim and continued southeast to Scheller and Kotzenaurach on the 15th. The mission of the 12th was changed on April 17, and Munich was given as the direction of attack. At daybreak on the 18th, CCB marched from the vicinity of Horbach to the vicinity of Dattenbach and sent a reconnaissance toward Ansbach-Feuchtwangen, with their change in mission to cut off escape routes for SS troops that were reported in the area. Elements of CCB entered Ansbach and had the town cleared by April 19, then moved to Feuchtwangen.

CCB reached the Danube at Hochstadt at 0435, April 22, after advancing from Feuchtwangen. They reached Durnhausen and Schlendorf where seven bridges were blown in their path. Task Force Fields was attached to CCA to assist in holding the Dillingen bridgehead. Enemy aircraft were active in attempts to destroy the bridge. After TF Fields reverted back to control of CCB, it began mopping up towns on the south side of the Danube. Elements of CCB also gave assistance to the 63rd Infantry Division near Leipheim on April 26. CCB then assembled near Burgau.

On April 27, CCB moved forward to Langerringeh and prepared to cross the Lech river following CCA. After crossing the river on a railroad bridge, CCB attacked Diessen with the mission of assisting CCA in seizing Innsbruck. CCB reached the vicinity of Weilheim. On April 30 they moved to the southeast until reaching Durnhausen and Schlendorf where seven bridges were blown in their path.
On May 2, 1945, G-3 issued instructions for CCA to go into an assembly area with CCB. On May 4th, orders were received from Seventh Army indicating that the Division would assume control of the Seventh Army Security Command in the vicinity of Heidenheim, Germany. The 12th moved to the new assembly area and the command post opened at 1600, May 5th.

The Division received orders on May 6th that the German Army Group on its front had surrendered and that all troops would halt in place.

V-E Day. May 8.

May 9 – Divisional units performed their duties in connection with the security mission, and also conducted extensive maintenance, rehabilitation and training in basic military subjects. Personnel sections of all units began getting the point score for possible discharge of all officers and enlisted men.

June – The 12th continued to perform its assigned security mission. The 12th was placed in Category IV of the redeployment plan. The Division was called upon to supply both officers and enlisted men to Category I and II units. Early in the month the Division was charged with the responsibility of discharging the German Army Aalen, or the 19th German Army. On June 6, 31 enlisted men left the Division for the States under the point system. 28 more followed on June 13.

July – The 12th lost its identity as a unit, as thousands of its men were transferred to other units, and new members from other forces came in as high point men for ultimate discharge with the 12th. Those in the latter category never acknowledged the 12th as anything but an outfit which they were to accompany to the States for discharge.

November – The 12th left Marseilles, France for New York. The 56th traveled on the Webster Victory.

December – The 56th Armored Infantry Battalion was inactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey on December 5th.
TABLE OF CONTENTS:

A Subject Index to the history of the 56th Armored Infantry, 1942 - 45; including activities and events; people, places, and things. Mostly as experienced and remembered by H/B Company.

Clothing, Winter. The ETO, 1944/45: Front-line troops fought through a large part of the winter inadequately clothed. Third Army reported in November that 60 per cent of its troops lacked sweaters, 50 per cent lacked a fourth blanket, and 20 per cent lacked overshoes in the proper size. Smaller percentages needed jackets and raincoats. The problem became most acute in December when the weather turned bitterly cold and damp.

- Food- Rations, Combat: C Rations- 6 cans, 3 containing meat combinations, and 3 containing biscuits, hard candy, cigarettes, and either coffee or lemon powder or cocoa. The 3 meals weighed 5 pounds. K Rations- Meat products or cheese in small cans. Other items (lemon, coffee, bouillon powder; biscuits, candy, gum, cigarettes) in a sealed bag. Each unit enclosed in an inner carton dipped in wax, plus an outer cardboard box. Others- D Ration, 5-in-1, 10-in-1.

Medical Service- First Aid procedures called for a wounded man, if able, to seek protection from fire, examine his injury and assess its severity, sprinkle it with sulfa powder, apply a dressing, and swallow his sulfa tablets. Then he was to get back to the aid station on his own or call for the aidman. Medics on the line confined treatment to the bare minimum needed to fit casualties for immediate further transportation; controlling bleeding, pain and infection; immobilizing broken limbs; and administering plasma.

Medics. 82nd Armored Medical Bn.-- It was found advisable to follow closely behind the combat units because pockets of resistance headed by SS troops would often ambush the rear of the columns. Ambulances were never sent out after 1700 hours (5:00 pm) no matter how serious the condition of the patients. At one point the ambulance haul was over 100 miles to the nearest Evacuation Hospital and all ambulances were on the road.

Supply-- Rolling spearheads require enormous quantities of gasoline, food, ammunition, and other supplies to keep rolling. In one 24 hour period the 12th consumed about 315,000 gallons of gasoline. The division lost only 29 trucks out of about 500 employed.

Trenchfoot-- General Hawley's blunt assessment, "The plain truth is that the footwear furnished U.S. troops is, in general, lousy." During October and November (1944) 11,000 trenchfoot casualties were admitted to the Paris general hospitals from the four American field armies. Trenchfoot is an injury, not an infection. Symptoms-- numbness, followed by swelling; then by intense pain; and in some cases, by tissue death, with gangrene.

Experiences of the wounded at Army Hospitals- Evacuation, Station, General and on Hospital Trains, during the winter of 1944/45 in the ETO. Further adventures of the wounded in the late spring and summer of 1945- Air Evacuation, Hospital Train, General Hospital, Hospital Ship 'Acadia,' Army Hospitals in the Zone of the Interior (the U.S.)
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WINTER CLOTHING -- The Case of the Winter Uniform. pp. 218-

Planning and decision-making in both the War Dept. and the
theater (ETO), as well as co-ordination between the two left
something to be desired.

A controversy eventually developed over winter clothing that
involved questions of both quality and quantity. Inadequacies
of the winter uniform in Europe on both counts were several
times brought to the attention of the public via the newspa-
pers. Critical articles appearing in January and February
1945-- particularly one in the Washington Post-- finally
evoked an angry blast from General Littlejohn, who charged
that a malicious campaign had been launched to discredit him.
The articles precipitated one of the most acrimonious intra-
service squabbles of the entire war., and finally led to an
investigation.

The Washington Post article had given due recognition to
such factors as the abnormal severity of the 1944-45 winter
in Europe, the unexpectedly high attrition of clothing dur-
ing the summer and fall, and the unfortunate habits of Amer-
ican soldiers regarding the proper fitting of clothing. But
the article struck a sensitive spot in implying that the the-
ater had placed its orders too late to ensure adequate early
winter protection against wet cold weather and that it had
failed to adopt combat-tested items recommended by the War
Dept.

U.S. forces had already experienced the distress of operating
without adequate clothing. In the winter of 1943-44 the Fifth
Army in Italy had found the then standard field uniform inade-
quate to protect its troops fighting in the mountains around
Naples.

The Quartermaster General had developed a simplified uniform,
based on the layering principle, and adaptable to combat wear
in cold wet climates, which the Army Ground Forces had approv-
ed for standardization. ...The items were sent to the Mediterr-
anean theater where they were tested on troops of the 3d Infan-
try Division ...who found the new uniform far superior to the
combination then in use and eventually equipped three divisions
as well as the Fifth Army, with the new clothing.

The main items recommended which distinguished the proposed
uniform from the one then in use were the M1943 sateen field
jacket, the high-neck wool sweater, the combat service boot,
the shoepac, and the leather glove with wool insert.... The
M1943 field jacket, a wind- and water-repellent garment with
a pile liner which could be worn over a jacket or sweater in
cold weather and which became the item of greatest contro-
versy, was initially well received, since it was to replace the
unsatisfactory 1941 Parsons jacket. But General Littlejohn
was not satisfied with the production figures which he was giv-
en and, lacking assurance that the new jacket would be deliv-
ered in sufficient quantities to dress units uniformly, stated that he would make no special effort to procure it.

While the theater quartermaster initially rejected the new M-1943 jacket on the ground of uncertainty as to its availability, other considerations appear to have influenced his decision. A new waist-length wool jacket, designed to replace the wool serge coat (blouse?) and to double for combat and dress, had been under development in both the United States and the theater for some time. Theater commanders, including General Eisenhower, desired a wool jacket resembling the one that was part of the widely admired English "battle dress," and General Bradley, in March, expressed his opinion that such a jacket, made of rough wool, would be warm enough to protect a soldier in combat without an outer jacket or overcoat. In any case it could be worn in cold wet weather under the loose-fitting M1943 jacket if this became available, and the theater now urged the War Dept. to adopt the type of wool jacket it desired. In mid-March 1944 it asked for 4,259,000 of these jackets to be delivered by the end of 1944. Early the next month, General Littlejohn obtained acceptance of the basic design of the new short wool jacket. The War Dept. notified the theater that it had settled on the design of the jacket and scheduled shipments of 2,600,000 the last quarter of 1944.

The War Dept. had never intended that the Eisenhower jacket, as the ETO model was later called, should replace the new M-1943 jacket. In May it informed the theater that the latter, worn in combination with the high-neck wool sweater, had been approved and was intended to replace the old Parsons jacket. ...The theater now made it clear that it did not desire the M1943 jacket,... and it called attention to an agreement...under which the old-type field jackets were to be supplied pending the initial deliveries of the new Eisenhower jacket.

The Quartermaster General forwarded a study...summarizing all the data then available. He left no doubt of his misgivings over the adequacy of the theater's proposed winter uniform, which consisted of the wool field jacket, the overcoat, and the raincoat; the raincoat he said, could not be considered a combat garment; the overcoat provided entirely inadequate protection against rain and wind, as had been amply demonstrated in Italy; and the combined weight and bulk of the raincoat and overcoat seriously impaired the mobility of the soldier. ETO-USA's rejection of both the 1943 jacket and the high-neck sweater, ..."would leave troops (in the European Theater) without any garment designed for efficiency in wet cold climates."

The theater on 1 June confirmed its earlier decision on the 1943 jacket, although it now decided to accept the high-neck sweater.
Officers in OQMG were disturbed over the theater's decision. Colonel Doriot pointed out that the winter climate of northeastern France and Belgium was similar to that of Italy, predicted a repetition of the experience of American troops in Italy during the preceding winter, if ETOUSA persisted in adopting a uniform which, in his opinion, had already been proved inadequate. Captain Founder likewise had emphasized to the theater quartermaster the point that the area in which US troops could be expected to be operating fell into the wet cold classification and warned that US troops would be improperly clothed unless such items as shoepacs, ski socks, and the woolen sleeping bag, in addition to the 1943 jacket were adopted. In view of ETOUSA's recent communications, however, the OQMG had no choice but to eliminate requirements for the 1943 jacket for the European theater.

On 20 June the theater startled OQMG with an urgent request for all available information on winter clothing for operations in cold wet climates. Colonel Doriot promptly forwarded the desired data. Nothing came of this exchange.

General Littlejohn held high hopes at first of getting the required quantities of the much desired Eisenhower jacket. But deliveries of both finished garments and cloth from the United States lagged from the start, and prospects of meeting the original commitment faded rapidly. Pending receipt of the new jacket he preferred to take substitutes, such as the obsolescent Parsons jacket and even the wool serge blouse, rather than accept the newer 1943 jacket, receipts of which, he claimed were already complicating his supply situation. Early in July he asked the War Dept. to ship the entire remaining stock of 479,000 of the old '41 jackets to the European Theater.

The chief quartermaster had also placed great emphasis, on the desirability of having a dressy uniform, and was hopeful throughout the summer that this requirement would be met by the new wool jacket. His concern led him to protest the shipment of trousers of a lighter shade which did not match the jacket.

The OCMQ expressed its confidence on 15 August that the war would not go into another winter. On that date it submitted a requisition to the War Dept. for winter clothing specially designed for severe cold for one field army—353,000 men— but purely as a precautionary measure and not in anticipation of any need arising from tactical developments.

The theater chief quartermaster had decided on the basis of an analysis of the climatic map of Europe that no special cold climate clothing would be needed. A comparison of the climatic map with the expected rate of the Allied advance showed that U.S. forces would not enter the "cold wet" area, beginning roughly with the Ardennes, until D plus 330, or May 1945. But the phase
lines on which these plans had been based represented the course of operations as expected before D Day and hardly constituted a valid basis for planning in mid-August.

More important than the tardiness of the mid-August order was its size, which appeared far too small to the OQMG. But when the War Dept. queried the theater and pointed out that the size of the requisition would result in production cutbacks, the theater on Sept. 5 confirmed the requisition. General Littlejohn expressed his own optimism at this time in a personal letter to General Gregory, in which he wrote: "You and I know that the serious fighting cannot long continue."

The confidence which these messages reflected was not confined to the office of ETOUSA quartermaster. Headquarters, Communications Zone, had asked all supply services to review their their requirements and prepare stop orders in anticipation of the expected end of hostilities. The chief quartermaster even took measures to control the issue of winter clothing to ensure that occupation troops would be the first to get it.

The halt of the pursuit in mid-September and the prospect of winter operations gradually dissipated the rampant optimism which had begun to influence supply policy. It was found that maintenance and replacement factors had been far from adequate. Now it was found that wear and tear had been much heavier than expected in units constantly on the move, and men had lost or discarded large quantities of individual equipment despite attempts to enforce supply discipline. It was estimated that the consumption of major items of clothing and equipment had been at a rate two and one half times that prescribed by War Dept. maintenance factors.

With this additional argument the ETOUSA quartermaster on 18 September placed the first of several requests for large quantities of winter clothing and equipment, asserting that he was now confronted with the necessity of completely reequipping a minimum of one million men, about 100,000 French territorials, and a large number of prisoners of war.

In the next two weeks the theater made an appeal for additional quantities of winter equipment, including blankets and sleeping bags. The shortage of blankets was especially critical, having been aggravated by the large number of prisoners (300,000 at the time). On October 10 the theater quartermaster indicated that an additional 500,000 men would have to be re-equipped within the next sixty days.

Much as it deplored the theater's resort to emergency requisitioning, there was little the War Dept. could do but attempt to meet what were apparently legitimate needs.
The OQMG suggested that emergency requisitions for large amounts of winter clothing would not easily be met on such short notice. It was pointed out that between 18 Sept. and 1 Oct. the theater had requested 850,000 overcoats after indicating in Aug. that it needed only 45,000 in addition to those previously shipped. At the end of July the theater stated a need for 450,000 overshoes for the remainder of the year, which, with those already in stock would have permitted issue to 75 percent of the troops. But in the last week of Sept. the theater had suddenly placed a demand for an additional 1,173,000 pairs. Calls were also made for 2,900,000 wool drawers and 2,500,000 wool undershirts over and above previous requests for 1944.

The War Dept. was able to fill the 18 Sept. requisition with little trouble, although it drained U.S. stocks in many items.

In mid-October the theater submitted the first of several recommended revisions of replacement factors and asked for approval of requisitions based on the new tables. ...The War Dept. refused to give blanket approval to the theater's requests for increases. Subsequent recommendations submitted by the theater in November and December were also partially rejected.

Deliveries made against the Sept. and Oct. requisitions were largely completed by mid-Dec. Meanwhile, receipts of the wool jacket, which the theater so ardently desired had not risen above a trickle. Production of the Eisenhower jacket had encountered one difficulty after another, and it became more and more evident in the fall that the War Dept. would not meet its commitments to deliver 2,600,000 by the end of the year. In mid-Sept. only 14,000 had been shipped against a scheduled delivery of 500,000 in that month.

The jackets eventually delivered to the theater were held in the United Kingdom, and no wholesale issue was made until after V-E Day. Whether the jacket would have served its intended purpose in the European theater was never determined. Experience in the Mediterranean theater later revealed that troops never regarded the jacket as a component part of the field uniform. They preferred to regard it as a dress item, to be worn on furlough or in rest areas, and for that reason also tended to fit it too snugly to be worn over the sweater.

General Littlejohn continued to omit the M1943 jacket from the list of acceptable substitutes. On 2 Oct. he asked for an additional 1,500,000 of the old Parsons jackets, but had to accept some substitutes, including wool serge overcoats. Troops expressed a strong dislike for the overcoat, frequently discarding it in fast-moving situations, and at the end of the month the chief quartermaster acknowledged that it was unsatisfactory as a combat garment and canceled his earlier acceptance of it as a substitute for the 1941 jacket. Faced with shortages in the wool jacket and the rejection of
the overcoat, the chief quartermaster now asked the New York Port for 800,000 M1943 jackets to meet deficiencies in all types of jackets to the end of 1944. The War dept. immediately assured him that practically the entire requisition could be filled.

Despite efforts to expedite the delivery of clothing called for in the Sept. and Oct. requisitions, front-line troops fought through a large part of the winter inadequately clothed. Third Army reported in November that 60 percent of its troops lacked sweaters, 50 percent lacked a fourth blanket, and 20 percent lacked overshoes in the proper size. Smaller percentages needed jackets and raincoats. The problem became most acute in December when the weather turned bitterly cold and damp. Frantic efforts were made to supply clothing which would provide the necessary protection. Uniformity and standardization consequently went out the window, for troops wore what was available, including arctic and limited standard items. Lack of a suitable outer garment led them to don additional woolen undershirts and socks.

United States Army in World War II.
The European Theater of Operations.
Logistical Support of the Armies.
V. II: September 1944 - May 1945.

Office of the Chief of Military History
Department of the Army.
By June of 1944 the Quartermaster Corps was issuing five major types of combat rations. The C ration, as developed up to that time, consisted of six cans (each of twelve fluid ounces' capacity), three containing meat combinations (either meat and vegetable hash, meat and beans, or meat and vegetable stew), and three containing biscuits, hard candy, cigarettes, and either soluble coffee, lemon powder, or cocoa. The entire ration (three meals) weighed approximately five pounds, could withstand a temperature range of 170 degrees, and could be eaten either hot or cold. Although touted as a "balanced meal in a can," the C ration was not popular.

The K ration was better packaged and, more popular, although this is debatable. As finally standardized it consisted of a breakfast unit, made up of meat and egg product, soluble coffee, and a fruit bar; a dinner unit, containing cheese product, lemon product and candy; and a supper unit with meat product, buillon powder, and a small D-ration chocolate bar. In addition each unit had biscuits, sugar tablets, chewing gum and a few cigarettes.

The ration was originally designed for airborne and armored units and for other troops engaged in highly mobile operations. It was well packaged, each meal's perishable component being hermetically sealed in a small can, and the other items in a sealed bag. Each unit was enclosed in an inner carton dipped in wax, plus an outer cardboard box, and the three packages were of convenient size to be pocketed. Both the C and K rations were individual rations and were intended to be used only for short periods of time when tactical conditions prevented better arrangements for feeding.

Experimentation begun before World War I had resulted in the adoption in 1939 of a supplementary field ration, the D ration. This was known at first as the Logan Bar, named for Capt. Paul Logan, who had developed it in 1934-36 while head of the Quartermaster Subsistence School. Its main component was chocolate, although it also contained powdered skim milk, sucrose, added cacao fat, oat flour, and vanillin. Strictly an emergency food, the D ration was intended to sustain men for only a very short period of time under conditions in which no means of resupply was possible.

Two types of composite rations known as 5-in-1 and 10-in-1 had also been developed, each unit containing sufficient food for five or ten men. These rations contained a considerably greater variety of food and were put up in five different menus. A sample 10-in-1 menu contained premixed cereal, milk, sugar, bacon, biscuits, jam, and soluble coffee for breakfast; ten K-ration dinner units; and meat stew, string beans, biscuits, prunes, and coffee for the supper meal. The 10-in-1's also contained a
preserved butter which, in deference to a well-known brand of lubricants, the troops quickly dubbed "Marfak No. 2." Considerable controversy over the adequacy of its caloric content attended the development of the composite ration. It was developed for use over longer periods than either C or K rations, for troops in advance areas that could not be served by field kitchens, and for troops in highly mobile situations. It was well suited for bridging the gap between C and K rations and the B ration, the normal bulk ration which was intended to be served over long periods of time in the field. The B ration was essentially the garrison or A ration without its perishable components.

United States Army in World War II.
The European Theater of Operations.
Logistical Support of the Armies.
V. I. May 1941 - Sept. 1944.
Washington D.C. 1953
MEDICAL SERVICE IN THE EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS.

Medics on the Line—By army policy medics confined treatment to the bare minimum needed to fit casualties for immediate further transportation; controlling bleeding, pain, and infection; immobilizing broken limbs; and administering plasma.

First Aid—Medical treatment of wounded soldiers began even before they reached their battalion aid stations. Casualties received first aid at or near the spot on the battlefield where they were injured administered either by themselves and their buddies or, much more often, by their company aidmen. Each soldier carried an individual first aid packet, containing field dressings and sulfa powder and tablets, and was supposed to know how to improvise and apply sprints and tourniquets. First aid procedures called for a wounded man, if able, to seek protection from fire, examine his injury and assess its severity, sprinkle it with sulfa powder, apply a dressing, and swallow his sulfa tablets. Then he was to get back to the aid station on his own or call for the aidman.

In practice, a large proportion of the wounded forgot to do, or could not do, any number of these things. Of casualties polled in COMZ general hospitals, for example, about one-third did not take their sulfa pills before they reached the aid station, claiming that they lacked water to wash them down; or were incapacitated by their injuries; or doubted the tablets usefulness. ...Hurt, frightened soldiers yelled frantically for the aidman even when only slightly wounded and capable of leaving the field under their own power. Many, in panic, further injured themselves, at times fatally.

Fortunately, comparatively few wounded men—only one in five, according to one hospital survey—had to give themselves first aid. Most found a company aidman at their sides within less than half an hour of being hit. Besides bandaging, splinting, applying tourniquets, administering sulfa powder and tablets, and injecting morphine, aidmen were supposed to fill out an emergency medical tag (EMT) for each casualty, providing the basic record of his identity and initial treatment.

Company aidmen had a deserved reputation for bravery but they complained that some of their heroics were unnecessary, the result of panic calls for help by the slightly injured or of poor judgment by line officers in sending out their medics under fire.

In the judgment of doctors farther to the rear, aidmen and front-line troops gave generally competent first aid, although they made a few persistent errors. Soldiers—whether medical or non-medical—regularly misused tourniquets. They applied them unnecessarily; left them unloosened for too long; and occasionally evacuated patients with tourniquets concealed by blankets or clothing, and hence not discovered until the limb was doomed.
Trying to prevent such abuses, the Seventh Army surgeon directed that the "sole indication" for applying a tourniquet should be "active spurring hemorrhage from a major artery" and that medics in the field or at battalion aid stations should note the presence of a tourniquet on a patient's EMT in capital letters.

With the morphine Syrette then in use, aidmen could overdose casualties, especially in cold weather when slow blood circulation delayed absorption of the initial shot and the patient received more at an aid or collecting station. To guard against such mistakes, front-line medics who did not fill out EMTs often attached their used morphine Syrettes to soldiers' clothing before evacuating them. In the First Army the surgeon recommended abandonment of the practice of sprinkling sulfa powder on open fresh wounds as an anti-infection precaution. Combined with the taking of sulfa pills, this treatment resulted in excessive doses, and it also made wounds generally dirtier without reaching the deepest portions most in need of prophylaxis.

From the place on the battlefield where the aidmen treated a casualty and marked his position, ETO divisional medical installations—and hence the chain of evacuation—stretched rearward over a considerable distance. By late 1944 battalion aid stations set up at least a mile behind the engaged infantry and armor elements, to reduce losses from artillery and mortar fire among essential, hard-to-replace doctors and technicians. Collecting stations usually took position about a mile back of the aid stations. Clearing stations remained 3 to as many as 15 miles behind the fighting line, to be free of the patient/disturbing noise and counterbattery fire danger or their own corps and division artillery.

The divisions had by late 1944, motorized their entire chain of evacuation. Since the Battle of the Hedgerows they had used collecting company ambulances, supplemented by trucks for walking wounded, to evacuate their battalion aid stations. By late autumn they routinely extended motor transport forward of the aid stations as well, whenever possible right to the place where casualties lay on the battlefield. Medics now used jeeps, belonging to battalion aid stations and collecting companies, in preference to litterbearers, for moving wounded in the forward areas. Fitted with brackets for carrying litters, these small sturdy vehicles could go most places men on foot could; they could accommodate two or three litters each, and as many ambulatory patients as ingenious drivers could crowd on board. One 4th Division litter platoon commander claimed to have hauled fourteen walking wounded on a single trip.

Armored Division surgeons used light tanks and tank retrievers to move their wounded over ground impassable to jeeps and regular ambulances. On one occasion the 5th Armored Division picked up casualties on the field in medium tanks when heavy shelling prevented any other approach to them. The Shermans maneuvered astride the wounded
men; then the crews drew the casualties up inside the tanks through the escape hatches in the bottoms of the hulls.

Divisions were insatiable consumers of medical manpower, especially when weather and terrain forced them to rely extensively on litter bearers forward of battalion aid stations. The task of litter bearing in such circumstances was both dangerous and exhausting, for the distances litter bearers had to traverse—often over rugged, wooded country—ranged from 1,000 yards to 4 miles. In the Huertgen Forest 16th Infantry bearers, according to the regimental surgeon, "would work until they were exhausted and then drop. A twelve hour relief and they'd be off on another seventy-two hour shift." A 4th Division enlisted medic made two 1,000-yard hauls after a glancing blow from a shell fragment had fractured his skull. Yet even the bravest and strongest men needed frequent rest, and litter bearers suffered a steady drain of casualties from enemy fire and mines. A few broke down emotionally.

...Rifle companies often had to draft combat soldiers from their own thin ranks to carry wounded at least part of the way to their battalion aid stations.

With so much first aid being performed on the field, battalion aid stations concentrated more on evacuating casualties than on treating them. ...Because the aid stations, for safety reasons had to keep their distance from the rifle companies, battalion surgeons often established small advance collecting points nearer the infantry. These typically consisted of an officer (frequently the assistant battalion surgeon), a few litter teams, and a couple of jeep ambulances. They gathered casualties and evacuated them to the main aid stations....To better direct evacuation, battalion surgeons, whenever they could, established telephone or radio contact with the company command posts. At night the telephone wires and sometimes white tape stretched along the ground, guided the rearward traffic of litter bearers and walking wounded. When casualties reached them, the surgeons and their enlisted technicians checked and replaced dressings, splints, and tourniquets and dispensed additional morphine. They filled out EMTs if company aidmen had not done so. They normally administered the first plasma the wounded received.

When casualties came through in large numbers, the aid stations, to get patients out quickly, suspended tagging the wounded and limited transfusion and resuscitation to the minimum required to keep injured men alive during the next stage of their rearward journeys. In the First Army, especially, "the rule was to sacrifice full resuscitation for early evacuation."

Field hospital platoons attached to division clearing stations worked on the most urgent emergency surgical cases. Evacuation hospitals handled the transportable severely wounded, the patients with minor injuries, and most of the sick. A convalescent hospital in each army relieved the evacuation hospitals of
nearly recovered patients and reconditioned them for return to duty. Improvised special facilities cared for soldiers with contagious or communicable diseases and venereal infections, as well as for neuropsychiatric casualties.

Surgical work in the armies centered in the field and evacuation hospitals. Field hospital surgeons spent their time operating on men with massive chest and abdominal injuries, severe compound fractures, and traumatic amputations. Their principle objective was to keep their patients alive and to place them in condition for further evacuation. Postoperative death rates in these installations ran between 12 and 25%, higher than in any other type of hospital, and reflected the all but hopeless condition of many of the wounded who arrived on their operating tables. All too common were cases such as the Ninth Army soldier who died twenty-four hours after surgery in the 2d Platoon, 53d Field Hospital: "S(hell) F(ragment) W(ound) multiple with complete amputation right foot; C(ompound) F(racture) left fibula, soft tissue wounds (right) thigh and left leg;...severe muscle damage, both legs..."

...In compound fractures, according to a Third Army Surgeon, "what we had to do was create a clean, organizizable wound out of an indiscriminately smeared up, messed up situation." Evacuation hospital surgeons, while they handled a large number of minor and moderately severe injuries, also encountered massive wounds, some of which gruesomely illustrated the macabre mishaps of modern combat.

Field and evacuation hospitals alike arranged their physical plants and streamlined their procedures for rapid reception, sorting, and treatment of a large volume of patients. Most units, whether in tents or buildings, tried to lay out their facilities so that a casualty would move in a more or less straight line from receiving through surgery to postoperative care and evacuation. Many by converting cots to work stands for litters, were able to keep a patient on the same stretcher from the time he came off the ambulance until he reached the postoperative ward. Hospitals, after initial episodes of confusion, learned to put their most capable officers in charge of reception and tirage. These officers quickly examined each arriving casualty and dispatched him to the shock, preoperative, medical, or immediate evacuation wards. In the shock and preoperative wards, doctors, nurses, and enlisted technicians, working with all possible speed, took the necessary resuscitation and stabilization measures and moved the patient to and from X-ray, Roentgenology constituted a perennial bottleneck when casualties were coming in rapidly, and hospital technicians taxed their ingenuity to the limit to expedite the taking and development of pictures. One unit, the 107th Evacuation Hospital, sent patients in shock to X-ray before resusciation, in the belief that a slight delay in starting the latter process would
be less harmful to the casualty than a subsequent interruption of it. Using such expedients, hospitals could process masses of casualties. On the night of 16 November, the 111th Evacuation Hospital, located at Heerlen, Holland, behind the Ninth Army, admitted 272 patients in four hours; its people examined, sorted, and placed under shelter more than 1 wounded man each minute.

Surgeons, nurses, and technicians worked in more or less permanent teams. A field hospital platoon with two attached teams could complete perhaps twenty major operations a day. A 400-bed evacuation hospital could keep eight to ten operating tables in action around the clock; the number of cases they turned out depended on the severity of the casualties then being received. In theory, surgical teams working twelve hours and resting twelve hours could keep up this pace almost indefinitely; in practice, the regimen quickly took its toll. During periods of heavy action the 9th Evacuation Hospital reported that "the staff was nearly always tired and too often lacking in sleep."

Inevitably, with surgery being done under forced draft, errors occurred. Surgeons, especially in hospitals newly placed in operation, debrided wounds improperly or inadequately. They neglected to split casts to allow for swelling and permitted too early evacuation of patients with abdominal wounds or severe vascular damage. The army surgeons and their consultants, who kept close watch on the quality of professional practice in their hospitals, labored continually to reduce the incidence of such mistakes.

Mobile army hospitals tried to evacuate patients within as short a time as possible after their condition was stabilized, the minor postoperative cases almost as soon as they recovered from the effects of anesthesia. . . . Evacuation hospitals sent off the majority of their patients within less than ten days; field hospitals, because of the severity and complicated nature of their cases, had to retain theirs for longer periods, a requirement that perennially conflicted with their need for mobility.

Getting a patient out of a hospital was itself a complicated task. "When a patient is said to be ready for evacuation, it is not just a matter of putting him in an ambulance... The patient must be made ready as far as clothing is concerned, then there are his valuables and his X-rays. The problem is increased when you have from one hundred . . . to two hundred patients, spread all over the hospital, ready for evacuation."
Each hospital developed its own system for sending off patients. The 110th, for example, used two enlisted men as evacuation clerks, with four litterbearers to collect evacuees from the wards. When the time came to move patients, the registrar alerted the clerks and bearers and the affected wards and sent the evacuation list to the offices in charge of patient valuables and X-ray files. Those offices packed up the appropriate items for each man for attachment, with his records, to his litter when the bearers brought him to a central point in the hospital. After a Red Cross worker made sure that each soldier had cigarettes, candy, and toilet articles, then litter teams began manhandling their charges into waiting ambulances.
82nd Armored Medical Battalion.

Theirs was the task of transferring casualties from the medical companies' clearing stations where the wounded were either transferred again to an evacuation hospital or given emergency treatment if need be.

And even though the medic is a neutral, protected by the Geneva Convention and denied the right to carry arms, the battalion lost four ambulance drivers, the kitchen crew of one company, and two others through strafing and sniper fire. There were also some men who were captured or wounded.

One 1st Lt. was killed by a sniper at Gaukonigshofen while driving a wounded German to the rear in his peep. Another Lt., who was later liberated, was ambushed and captured while on his way to a battalion aid station.

The most outrageous violation of their right to safety occurred near Kitzengen when a German pilot strafed the plainly marked medical tents of A Co., then with CCA, killing one medical officer and seriously wounding one officer and four enlisted men.

In combat, the battalion operated with one company assigned permanently to each combat command.

By employing the split-echelon system, the companies were able to furnish the commands with uninterrupted medical service regardless of how swiftly the spearheads rolled. One treatment station would remain in operation while the other leap-frogged forward; when the latter was set up the former would move forward.

Chief Warrant Officer Desmond, division medical supply officer, created a rolling drugstore, mounted on a truck, which was complete with cabinets and refrigerator fully stocked with medical supplies.
82nd Armored Medical Battalion.

The Collecting Platoon attached one ambulance to each of the forces prior to engagement in order to facilitate close liaison and rapid evacuation. The remainder of the ambulances were dispersed around the Ambulance Loading Post which was located two miles from the front line. All ambulances returning from the front stopped at the Ambulance Loading Post where the assistant driver dismounted. He then mounted a waiting ambulance and directed its driver back to the Battalion Aid Station. This practice was continued until all drivers became familiar with the routes forward. The ambulance haul from the front to the Clearing Station required from thirty to forty-five minutes in daylight and up to two and a half hours at night. Driving was quite difficult at night because of blackout regulations and fog. Drivers had to be relieved frequently because of fatigue and the necessity for having all men qualified as a good driver was very evident.

The Clearing Stations were set up in buildings which had ample space for the treatment of walking and litter wounded. Four operating teams and "set ups" were used. The operating teams consisted of one medical officer and two technicians each; the operating "set ups" consisted of a litter, operating table, plasma holder, and the commonly used equipment. During the course of the battle it was found necessary to move closer to the front line so one half the station was kept mobile. By moving the mobile section and half the personnel it was accomplished easily.

Many times during fast advances, casualties would be brought back to the moving column. The pre-designated surgical truck receiving patients that day would stop at the side of the road while the rest of the column would move on, except for one ambulance. After treating the patients, the surgical truck would regain its place in the column. In an armored division drive it was found that the casualties were light when the column moved fast and increased when the column slowed down. When casualties were heavy, the medics stopped in a town and occupied a large building with at least one large room. Schools, rail stations, beer halls, and barracks were ideal in which to establish a clearing station.

It was found advisable to follow closely behind the combat elements because pockets of resistance headed by SS troops would often ambush the rear of the columns. Consequently, ambulances were never sent out after 1700 hours no matter how serious the condition of the patients. At one point in the push across Germany, the ambulance haul was over 100 miles to the nearest evacuation hospital and all army ambulances were on the road.

In combat the never ending question of supply had to be solved. The 82nd solved the problem by an other innovation; establishing a medical supply dump at the Division Class I Distribution point. The dump, run by Medical Supply personnel, was placed in a 2 1/2 ton
truck, modified for its specific purpose by an enclosure of shelves and cabinets. These carried all emergency items such as plasma, morphine, splints, dressings, and ointments, normally used during armored operations. Medical supplies were distributed to the various unit ration trucks.
1945. Germany. The Spring.
82nd Armored Medical Battalion.
12th Armored Division.

"A" company started out the month with five of their cooks being captured while trying to bring food to men in forward positions. Then one of their treatment tents, clearly marked with Red Crosses, was strafed by the Luftwaffe, killing Captain John E. Edge and his patient on the operating table. Five enlisted men were wounded.

They then supported a task force heading into Schweinfurt, then on to Nuremberg. One of their MD's delivered a baby to a German woman at Neustadt. They then pressed on south toward Munich. Treated many German casualties about the 21st. Combat Command "A" had captured the bridge across the Danube at Dillingen... "A" company crossed it on the 27th. They closed out the month treating victims of a concentration camp near Kloster-Lechfeld.

"B" company started out the month... Lt. Edward Golden was killed by a sniper near Giebelstadt. A few days later a German patrol blew up their mess truck and scared the crap out of the company. Then they spent several days sweating out a German counterattack on a bridge over the Main River. Two ambulances were ambushed near Neustadt. The drivers and aidmen were captured and eventually liberated by American troops but the vehicles were gone forever. The last casualty of the war was Pfc Robert A. Dalton who was killed by the SS as he treated wounded near Holzheim on April 25-26....

"C" company on April 1, 1945... with a recon outfit that was the farthest east of any of the Allied troops on that day... we were surrounded. Don't remember if we had another "C" company ambulance with us or not, but... a German soldier shot one of the Recon Medics. Took a lot of wounded before the relief column finally broke through on the 4th... went back to Hoppferstat... the Germans launched a "screamin' meemie" rocket mortar attack. Went to the basement of the old house and got so scared ... laid on that cold, stone basement floor all night, shivering and shaking and no sleep.
Went forward to support the 17th infantry the next morning. April 5th was a bad day for "C" company. Lt. Bill Roark, Sgt Arthur Long, and Cpl. Tommy Rhodes were captured. On the 10th, Lt. Joe Pittari and Sgt. Fran Charpentier were wounded when their jeep ran over a mine. Lt. Pittari died. Saw Captain Campbell and Colonel Gordon hit by mortar fire. Gordon was evacuated quickly. Campbell stayed until he had treated a bunch of wounded in spite of a bad wound in his right arm. Crossed the Danube on the 24th at Lauingen. A medic from the 17th Infantry was killed by a sniper. The bullet holed the Red Cross on his helmet. Another sniper with an apparent sense of humor took pity on Sgt. Tom Finley and shot over his head and under him as he answered a call of nature... We hauled Kraut wounded every day.
Division G-4. Supply.

Rolling spearheads require enormous quantities of gasoline, food, ammunition, and other supplies to keep rolling, yet it is to the credit of supply personnel of the 12th that never once could a halt in combat be traced to the lack of any of these materials.

Judge this from the fact that in one 24-hour period the division and its attached units consumed about 315,000 gallons of gasoline.

Lt. Col. John M. Bradley, Jr., division G-4 during the 12th's five months in combat, was responsible for keeping supplies coming.

Observing that the battle of Germany was largely a "war of supply" in its latter days, Col. Bradley revealed that this fact, paradoxically enough, eased the supply problem for "fortunately, when you are going like hell, you consume gas at an enormous rate but you don't use much ammo."

Swift-moving spearheads, too, have a habit of outriding supply dumps, necessitating their almost constant movement. Col. Bradley made it a practice to keep dumps as close as five to six miles from the actual fighting zone and never more than 40 miles away.

But it was not unusual for the 12th to outrun Seventh Army's supply dumps. Once, when the army's gas and ammo dump was at Aalen in the last weeks of the war, the division was 150 miles away.

Division supply personnel also had to perform the mighty task of hauling "C" and "K" rations to feed the more than 70,000 prisoners and thousands of liberated displaced persons captured and liberated by the 12th. In addition, the flow of ordnance, clothing, and other equipment had to be maintained constantly.

And an amazing sidelight on the whole story of supply is that the division lost only 29 trucks out of about 500 employed in combat.

The, too there is the fact that the division forward dump, which handled gas, ammo, and food, operated smoothly with only one platoon of about 50 cargo handlers instead of the railhead company of about 200 men, called for in the books. As the average payload each day in combat was 712,000 pounds, it meant that each man handled about 14,000 pounds of cargo each day.
While commanders and surgeons alike thought of other things, American soldiers in the European Theater entered the winter fighting inadequately clothed. Disagreements in the hierarchy, errors fostered by the course of battle, and inadequacies in the footwear on hand contributed to the situation. The theater Quartermaster chief disagreed with the quartermaster general in Washington over the composition of the winter uniform. This circumstance, combined with optimistic midsummer expectations of an early end of hostilities -- led to delayed and insufficient winter clothing requisitions by the theater. Making matters worse, the armies during the pursuit gave low priority to the shipment forward of what cold weather clothing was available.

Winter foot gear was especially inadequate, in both quantity and type. American field shoes and combat boots were not waterproof, though a substance called "dubbin" was supplied to make them so. (General Hawley declared that dubbin was useless). Both forms of footwear could be laced tightly, as could a winterized rubber-soled boot called the shoepac. The theater Quartermaster did not have sufficient galoshes, and troops who received them often discarded them during good weather as an encumbrance. In December the theater cabled for 500,000 additional pairs of shoepacs over and above the 446,000 pairs already shipped and the 90,000 pairs that had been issued to Seventh Army. Production and transport problems, however, ensured that none arrived until mid-January 1945. Distribution foul-ups then imposed new delays. The emergency order of shoepacs did not reach the troops in great numbers until the problem of cold injury had ended.

Even men who received shoepacs, the most sophisticated form of winter footgear available to American forces, had difficulty using them. The tops were permeable to water; the rubbersoles wore out quickly in field use; most were too large; and the need to wear multiple socks and felt insoles made them unsuitable for men in battle.

Inside the shoepacs the soldier's feet were not ventilated and excessive sweating soaked the skin as thoroughly as if the wet had come from the outside. In time, a form of injury -- shoepac foot-- was named for the footgear; surgeons complained that sweating and maceration of the skin produced a foot which is as bad as any seen thus far, often bringing hospitalization for ten to fifteen days. When the victim returned to duty, the cycle then repeated itself... There was much to be said for General Hawley's blunt assessment: 'The plain truth is that the footwear furnished U.S. troops is, in general, lousy.'

In late November and early December 1944 many factors, large and small, combined to produce a crisis. Startled officers-- in the medical service, the supply chain, and the line-- learned first hand how winter could disable an army. Then the Germans launched their counter-offensive, and troops pinned down in the snow and mud suffered the equivalent of a major epidemic. Soon the Army faced the loss of what amounted to several divisions of front-line soldiers.
Reports in November painted a picture of radical discomfort for the riflemen. Heavy rains ran off over saturated ground, streams and marshes flooded, and the first frosts struck at men who were almost never dry or warm. In the Third Army, men waded rather than marched, fought in deep mud, and tried to rest in water-filled foxholes. Vehicles churned roads into sloughs. The 5th Infantry Division ordered 11,000 pairs of galoshes that were badly needed. In the 90th Infantry Division all trenchfoot victims were evacuated as litter cases. ... All along the line dry socks became a critical item and units struggled to obtain supplies and to provide some means of drying and cleaning wet socks. The 79th Infantry Division of the Seventh Army had 1,400 battle casualties and 210 cases of trenchfoot for the month. In the Third Army six men were evacuated for cold injury for every ten evacuated as battle casualties. Too often men on the line were obliged to improvise their own protective gear while the battle raged. The Third Army officers of the 35th Infantry Division had been unable to get shoe pacs for their men. Combat boots and overshoes proved inadequate protection for front-line soldiers pinned down by hostile fire. From the end of December to mid-January the division lost 479 front-line riflemen to cold injury.

Fighting in Lorraine during the German offensive, the 328th Infantry lost 500 men to trenchfoot and exposure during the first days of battle. One company of the 11th Infantry had only 14 men available for duty, and the chief cause of ineffectiveness was trenchfoot. ... During November and December losses to cold numbered 23,000, almost all combat infantrymen. Because an infantry division contained about 4,000 such soldiers the loss was equivalent to the total infantry strength of at least five and a half divisions.

The impact of cold injury losses upon American hospitals and the evacuation system was heavy. During October and November more than 11,000 trenchfoot casualties were admitted to the Paris general hospitals from the four American field armies. ... The nature of the injury worsened its effects upon the patients, the hospital staffs, and the capabilities of the field armies alike. Victims, unable to walk upon exquisitely painful feet, required litter carry at the front and bed care in the hospitals. ... The disability was long-term, and apt to recur upon exposure.

As early as September and October the medical service attempted to make up for earlier omissions distributing War Dept. publications that gave precise instructions to troops and commanders for avoiding injury. ... Command directives and memoranda followed. Unfortunately, such action came late in the day for an army in which large numbers of officers, NCOs, and enlisted men were ignorant of the nature and potential seriousness of the threat. November found General Bradley issuing a command directive with personal letters to the commanders of his field armies—... General Patton's memorandum to the Third Army's Corps and Division commanders declared... that the incidence of trenchfoot may well destroy us.
By December, admission of past errors and assumptions of responsibilities by commanders was general. ... General Hawley admitted, "I am not sure that the Medical Dept. has been aggressive enough... We have published long dissertations on the prevention of trenchfoot which are too long for anyone to read." In January General Eisenhower emphasized a need for commanders to pay "unremitting attention" to the problem... A barrage of publicity began, with articles and editorials in the Stars and Stripes. Radio broadcasts carried the message to front-line troops. Millions of copies of a brochure were circulated.

Yet all of these measures came too late. ... After reaching a new high in January, the cold injury casualty rate fell. But, by that time the European Theater had suffered a medical misfortune that cost the ground forces a total of 45,283 casualties at a most critical period.

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The United States Army in World War II. The Technical Services. The Medical Department.

Medical Service in the European Theater of Operations.

by Graham A. Cosmas and Albert E. Cowdrey.

Center of Military History. United States Army

TRENCH FOOT.

The winter of 1944-45 was the coldest and wettest that Europe had seen in many years. To plague the already miserable front-line infantry, winter brought an undramatic but crippling ailment: trenchfoot. Cases began to appear in October, and rapidly increased thereafter. In December, when the systems of evacuation and hospitalization were straining under the weight of wounded, the casualties of cold injury resulting from the Ardennes battle arrived in numbers that exceeded all expectations.

Cold injury took various forms. ...Slow and subtle was the ground type,...which did not even require especially low temperatures. In chilled feet the small blood vessels initially contracted, reducing the oxygen supply to the tissues; in serious cases the arterioles and the nerve endings were "irreversibly damaged" so that the effect of the injury persisted. Wetness increased the speed and severity of injury by conducting heat away from the body. Anything, such as tight shoelaces that obstructed the flow of blood likewise hastened the onset of trenchfoot's unpleasant symptoms—numbness followed by swelling; then by intense pain; and in some cases, by tissue death, with gangrene. Once injury occurred, the victim could look forward to a long course of treatment, and possible recurrence of the condition caused by the inability of damaged tissue to resist cold. Trenchfoot proved to be most dangerous to the front-line troops, who lived for long periods without shelter or dry clothing and who were often immobilized under enemy fire.


In July 1944 a requisition was submitted to the OQMG, calling for sufficient overshoes to equip only 75 percent of U.S. troops (in the ETO) on the assumption that the combat boot, which was then beginning to replace the old service shoe with leggings, would suffice for a portion of the continental strength.

With the onset of cold wet weather in September it was realized that the combat boot, although an excellent dry weather item, did not offer suitable protection against water and mud, and that 100 percent of the troops on the Continent would need overshoes. The combat boot, like the flesh-out service shoe, was not leakproof, and the troops used the authorized dubbing and the forbidden shoe polish in an attempt to waterproof them.

The shortage which the theater faced pending the receipt of supplementary shipments was aggravated from another source. Shoes and boots which had been fitted during the summer, when men were wearing light woolen or cotton socks, became too tight when worn with two or more pairs of heavy woolen socks.
The inevitable result was a demand for larger sizes. This requirement led to a demand for larger overshoes as well. Size tariffs did not allow for the needed high proportion of E, EE, and EEE widths. The QM's adoption of a special winter tariff which allowed for greater widths in all types of footgear did not meet the theater's immediate needs. Overshoes in the larger sizes were lacking well into January. To make matters worse, the cloth-type overshoe tore easily and leaked badly, and the first shoepacs were an early model which lacked a raised heel and an arch support.

The lack of adequate footwear became inseparably associated with the precipitate rise in the incidence of trench foot which occurred in the second week of November. Trench foot eventually caused more than 46,000 men to be hospitalized and accounted for 9.25 percent of all the casualties suffered on the Continent. Trench foot is an injury, not an infection. Its cause is long exposure to cold and wet conditions which result in crippling injuries to the blood vessels and muscle tissues of the feet. Trench foot is characterized by discoloration and painful swelling, and requires evacuation and prolonged hospital treatment. A large percentage of those affected were unable to return to combat duty; some could no longer perform any military service. The highest rates normally occurred among units (usually infantry divisions) living under wet and cold conditions in relatively static situations. Cold wet conditions however, were only the most constant factor in the cause of the injury. Failure to rotate troops, improper foot care, and inadequate footgear and clothing, all contributed to the high incidence.

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Sunday, December 10, 1944, probably about 10:00 am. Still very cold. The medics had stuck me back in the ambulance and propped me up in a corner, then headed south some twenty-five miles to the town of Sarrebourg and the 116th Evacuation Hospital.

The ride must have been bumpy, but since I was full of morphine and still convinced that I was dying, I don't recall much of the trip. My mouth was still full of blood and the left shoulder and front of my field jacket and my chin were covered with blood. I would have given anything for a cigarette, a drink of water or a hot cup of coffee. Both medics were riding up in the cab. I think one of them should have stayed in back with the wounded. I wonder if they were 82nd medics?

We finally arrived at the 116th which was set up in an old French schoolhouse. I think the building had four floors (of course no elevator). German POWs were working as medical aides.

They pulled me out of the ambulance, put me on a stretcher, and carried me into the schoolhouse. They stripped me of all of my clothes and got me into a pair of pajamas. The wounded were laid out on tables. I didn't see a chaplain or any senior medic of any kind. There were no reassurances of any kind for the wounded.

A little later they rolled me back onto a stretcher and carried me up three long flights of stairs to be X-rayed. I kept sliding back down the stretcher and bumping my head against the Kraut carrying the backend.

They carried me up and down those stairs three different times to be X-rayed. I had no idea what time of the day it was. At sometime during all of this one of the Krauts stole my wrist watch.

Finally it was time for surgery and they carried me back up and into the operating room. Everyone in the room had on white gowns, caps and masks. So I mumbled (trying to be funny) "save me, whatever it was that hit me, for a souvenir." So then they gave me the sodium penathol and told me to count backwards from one hundred. I counted "one hundred, ninety nine, ninety eight," and went out like a light.

I came to the next morning in a very small, high-ceiling room, stretched out on a canvas cot. My head and neck were bandaged like a mummy. I had a king-size sore throat and pain in my right shoulder.

A medic was sitting beside the cot with a suction pump cleaning the blood and scum out of my mouth. The high window in the room had a blackout curtain across it.

My first jolt back to reality came when I had to swallow. It felt as if someone was ramming a baseball bat down my throat. It got so that I lived from one dreadful, excruciating, painful swallow to the next. I doubt that anyone is really aware of how many times they unconsciously swallow in a day. With that kind of pain it seems too often.

I also had to look forward to hourly penicillin and sulfa.

A bottle full of clear liquid hung from a metal rack beside my cot, with a tube running from the bottle to my arm.
A major (Dr. Lipow, N.Y., N.Y.) wandered in and stood by the cot looking down at me. Then he said, "boy, you gave me two and a half of the roughest hours of my medical career, last night in surgery." Then he handed me something wrapped in white gauze. When I unwrapped it, I found a dark, jagged piece of "38" shrapnel, about as big as the first joint of your thumb. The souvenir I had asked him to save after he removed it from my neck.

The one or two nurses that I saw in that place were 2nd lieutenants. They wore one-piece, HBT (herring bone twill) coverall fatigues and combat boots. Not the sexiest outfit for a woman to wear.

My first meal was coffee, pineapple juice and grape juice. However, the pain from swallowing was so intense, it killed any enjoyment I might have gotten from the taste. I had to sip everything through a straw. I couldn't open my mouth more than a fourth of an inch. My jaw was fractured at the end below my ear. (Most guys with face and jaw wounds had their jaws wired, but for some reason I wasn't subjected to that torture). My speech was so slurred that it was difficult to understand what I was saying. Saliva, ran from the corner of my mouth and dawn my chin.

I lived on nothing but juice for the next four weeks. You name the liquid, they poured it down me. Lunch- cocoa, orange juice, and pineapple juice; supper- tea, pineapple juice and grape juice; breakfast- coffee, juice, juice, juice. And again before lights out, more juice. Free cigarettes, candy and cookies were passed out during the day. I couldn't handle any of them.

I not only had the pain of swallowing to look forward to, but now I found that I couldn't shift positions on the cot. I finally put my right hand on the back of my neck and pulled myself up and into another position.

Whenever they pulled the blackout curtains over the window I knew that it was evening or getting dark. I was still all alone in the room, but sometime during the night they set up another cot. They brought in a guy that had been shot in the chest. He groaned a lot. Two people stood beside the cot for the rest of the night pressing down on his chest.

I slept fitfully for the rest of the night. The next morning one of the nurses racked me up for bleeding on the clean pillowslip. A little later I felt nature's call and tried best how to handle it. I sure as hell wasn't going to let any 2nd lieutenant nurse or enlisted medic put me on a bed pan. I grabbed myself by the back of the neck again and pulled and rolled until I was sitting on the side of the cot. Then up and onto my feet, over to the door (there didn't seem to be anyone around) and down the corridor. The first room looked like a supply room. I staggered in and found a bedpan. It served the purpose and I made my way back to my room and the cot. A nurse gave me hell later for not emptying the bedpan. To hell with her, I had been up and walking a day and a half after being blown off the back of that tank and a day after two and a half hours in surgery.
Time crawled by. Seconds were like minutes, minutes went by like hours, and hours crawled by like days.

Nothing to do but lay there and think about food and cigarettes. But then the pain of swallowing and the pain in my right shoulder jerked me back to reality. When I complained, the nurse informed me that I had been shot in the neck and not in the shoulder. I don't recall that they were giving me anything at this time for pain. I recalled having heard someplace that listening to certain kinds of music would soothe frayed nerves. Mine were certainly frayed. Thereafter, whenever I got anxious, depressed, or began to twitch; I hummed Strauss waltzes to myself. It did seem to help. (At about this time the first Music Therapy Program was established at the University of Kansas).

No chaplain put in an appearance.

A week in that place and a Trappist Monastery would have seemed like a day at Funland. It may have been that everyone was being very GI. It may have been that the nature of your wound determined the attitude of the staff toward you. Whatever, I was ready to move on. I didn't know anyone in that place. I hadn't heard from the company. No one had told me as yet whether I was going to live or die. And if I lived what would happen to me.

And then after about a week and a half, they put manila envelopes (containing our medical records) in the hands of a group of the wounded; put them aboard a hospital train and sent it south to the 70th Station Hospital at Mirecourt, France. Bunks lined the aisle on each side of the cars. I was in an upper and the guy in the bunk across from me had had his penis slit like a hotdog by a piece of shrapnel. He was in constant pain. There seemed to be one nurse to each car.

Another call from nature, as the train roared south, so I swung my legs over the side, hoisted myself up and dropped to the aisle in my bare feet. I padded back to the latrine. That train was certainly cold and drafty. On my way back to my bunk the nurse spotted me. "When you have to go, you ask for a bedpan. You are not ambulatory. Stay in that bunk," she yelled. I pulled myself back up into the bunk and reflected that most 2nd lieutenants were the same, whether they were male or female.

The 70th Station Hospital, Mirecourt, France—Christmas Eve, 1944. A long open ward room with sixty beds, thirty on each side of the room and maybe three feet between each of the beds. Fifty-five GIs with every kind of a wound that you could imagine. Down in one corner were five wounded German POWS.

During the day, but especially at night, there were groans of pain from the GIs. But the Germans screamed with their pain. One would have thought the opposite would be true. Evidently, when they were young, and were told that boys didn't cry or acknowledge pain, the message made an impression on America boys. I wonder what other nationalities told their boys.

Some of the guys began to holler that if someone didn't stop those Krauts from screaming, they would get a trench knife and crawl down there during the night and slit some Kraut throats.

Still hadn't seen a chaplain.
Christmas Day, 1944, and I'm still on juice. Couldn't eat any Christmas dinner, and no candy or cigarettes. A very dull and dreary day in that long, open and antiseptic ward room with fifty-nine other suffering and wounded men. The next day they pulled the stitches out of my face and neck. Jesus Christ, that really did hurt.

Flat on my back on that hospital bed, I didn't know anyone. Even the medics didn't register as individuals. At least I didn't get to know any of them. Still hadn't seen a chaplain. Lay there, stare at the ceiling and wait for the next stab of pain when I had to swallow. Time stood still.

Until the morning of New Years Eve, Dec. 31, 1944.

They passed out clothes—shorts, T-shirts and socks (all OD color), shoes, wool OD shirt and pants; sweater, tie, field jacket and cap. They put the Manila envelope (medical record) in our hands and marched us to the hospital train. It was very dark and very cold. We climbed aboard and found a seat.

The train started up and headed south for the 3rd General Hospital at Aix-en-Provence just north of Marseilles. Everyone opened their Manila envelope (strictly against orders) and tried to translate the doctor's description of what was wrong with them. I looked at the X-ray of my head and neck and saw that large, jagged piece of "88" shrapnel sitting there right next to my jugular, my wind pipe, spinal cord, larynx, pharynx and trachea. A fraction of an inch any way, and...

Midnight, January 1, 1945, and as the train roared south; a couple of smart-ass comedians among the patients would imitate wounded GIs laying out in front of the lines, crying, "medic! medic!" Very sick sense of humor.

Madeline Carrol, the movie actress, was on the train serving as a Red Cross worker.

I had always believed that southern France was warm and sunny, the year round. It was cold and snowing at Aix-en-Provence when we arrived.

The ward rooms at the 3rd General Hospital were one-story, wooden buildings (like open squad room barracks) with canvas cots on each side of a main aisle. Showers and latrine were in a separate building and the mess hall was in another. The Day Room or recreation hall was in an old French house on the grounds. A large open room on one side had a phonograph with a collection of "45" discs and a library of paperbacks. The binding on many of the paperbacks was strange since they were printed across the long dimension and opened from the short side.

Out in the center of the hospital grounds was a large wooden bulletin board. On this were posted the situation maps for the war fronts—-the Pacific, the ETO- Western, Eastern, Italian; the CBI. The battle lines were changed each day to show the current battle situation in each area.
There was a schedule for each patient to see the doctor and be examined for progress and/or further treatment. I was told to be at the main dispensary for my appointments, usually at 9:00 am. I generally sat there from 9:00 to 11:30 am waiting my turn. My examinations mainly consisted of the doctor telling me to stick out my tongue (which action hurt like hell). He would then take hold of my tongue and jerk on it, which almost made me scream. He then usually remarked, "son, if you'd been an inch shorter, you'd be dead now." This was always followed by a sharp order from him that I had better shave closer to those jagged, red scars on my face and neck. Next patient. The bedside manner of rear echelon medics.

There were stories told around the hospital, that some guys with trench foot, were made to put on wet combat boots and sent outside to run around in the cold wet snow. Another story told, was that a guy who had had an eye shot out, was fitted with a glass eye and sent back to the front.

At the 3rd General my diet of juice was supplemented with mashed potatoes, hot cereal, jello and soft boiled eggs. You can't really put together a very appetizing menu with that kind of food.

I still hadn't seen a chaplain and I hadn't heard from anyone in old B/56. The Sunday morning following my arrival, I decided to go looking for the place where Mass was to be said. Either I was given the wrong directions or I took a wrong turn, because I didn't find the place and therefore missed Mass which was a mortal sin, I guess.

The next Sunday I did find the place. Confessions were being heard when I arrived but there was such a line that I decided that I would wait for another day. Most of the congregation was made up of doctors, nurses, and enlisted medics.

I damn near fell off my chair when I heard the priest's sermon. He was mad. He was a chunky, middle-aged Irishman of medium height. His ire was directed at the medical staff of the hospital, who made up approximately two-thirds of those in attendance. The other one-third was mostly the wounded at the hospital.

"Why did all of you wait until this morning, right before Mass, to go to confession? I sat over here all of Saturday evening, and only a few people showed up. I know why you didn't show up. You were over there in the rec hall watching a movie with Richard Arlen. You would rather spend your time watching Richard Arlen than obeying the commandments of the Church. Richard Arlen is more important to you than the time and schedule of your chaplain. And then you rush in here, right before Mass on Sunday morning, and expect me to stop everything that I am doing to hear your confessions." This tirade went on for at least half an hour.

It seemed to me that as far as these people were concerned, the war was being fought on another planet. They couldn't even see the walking wounded sitting amongst them. We hadn't had a hot meal or a bath in weeks. We couldn't remember the last movie we'd seen or the last time we'd been to Mass and confession. We'd been shot at daily, hadn't had a night's sleep for weeks and were scared spitless most of the time.

I couldn't believe that daily life back in the Zone of Communications was filled with such petty, trifling activities and concerns.
I was assigned to a "head and neck" wound ward at this hospital. You wouldn't believe that men could survive with some of the wounds we had on that ward.

Guys with their noses blown off and tubing running into the holes where their nose had been. Ears and chins maimed or blown off. Rounds or pieces of shrapnel that went in one cheek and came out the other, taking a guy's teeth out on the way through. The side of one's forehead blown off. Many, many guys with their jaws wired and living on nothing but liquids.

On our way to our ward we had to pass another where near the door, a kid was in a bed in traction. He had been stitched across the middle by a German machine gun. His arms were pulled up and to the upper corners of the bed with weights attached. His legs were pulled up and to the opposite corners of the foot of the bed with weights. He seemed to have been there for weeks. He usually had a grin on his face.

A Catholic chaplain finally dropped by one day, after I'd been there about three weeks. He didn't have much to say. He stayed about fifteen minutes. I never saw him again.

One day in early January, I ran into Vic Challen. He had been hit the day after me, but had stayed with the company for a week until his wounds became infected and they sent him on back. He hadn't heard from the company, but I had gotten a letter from our platoon sargeant, Delbert Darnell, telling me to hurry on back as the platoon needed me.

Toward the end of January, I was sitting on my canvas cot smoking a cigarette one evening, when five guys, dressed in their ODs and field jackets, wandered in, sat down and lit up. They asked me what outfit I was from. I told them, "B Company, 56th AIB." They all flinched and exchanged strange glances with one another. One of them then asked how long I'd been back here, and I said, "since December." And then one of them said, "We're from C/56, haven't you heard? B Company was wiped out at Herrlisheim."

I felt like someone had punched me in the solar plexis and I gasped for breath. They got up and moved away and I sat there rigid, stunned and dazed for the rest of the night. The whole company, 240 men, dead and gone, just like that.

I sat there all night, like a zombie, chain smoking cigarettes as the faces and the names marched past and I checked each one off and said to myself, "there's no way he could be dead."
The cold, dreary, long winter days (in sunny, southern France) went on. Never much of anything to do on a given day. Up to the old French home to read the old paperbacks or listen to the "V" discs. No one seemed to have planned much activity for us, like crafts. No one seemed to be in charge of daily activities at the Third General Hospital. Most of the wounded here, seemed to be coming back from the Seventh Army front.

Wounded from the old 3rd Infantry Division, the 45th, 44th, 26th, 100th and the 103rd divisions (to name a few) wandered the grounds.

And then the day came and they told me that I would be going back to the front.

In World War II the world was divided by the military into theaters of operations. The South Pacific, the China-Burma-India, the European-North African-Mediteorean theater, etc. Each theater was divided into zones. The zone of operations was where the fighting was. The zone of communications was that area through which moved, from the States to the fronts, all of the materials and equipment necessary to fight the war. Last but not least - the zone of the interior - the good old United States of America. HOME. Once you had been sent out of the States, you had only one thing for which you lived, to be "ZI'd. Returned to the States.

Everyone had told me from the 116th Evac through the 70th Station and when I arrived at the Third General that I had a "million-dollar wound." Such wounds were automatic ZI's. What happened? I knew many guys with much less serious wounds (arm, leg, back, etc.) who spent the rest of their time in the service working an eight to five day in the rear areas near some entertaining metropolis.

Although, this was a very strange time, since it was right after the Battle of the Bulge and American losses had been heavy. Besides, as we got near the border of Germany the nature of the fighting changed. The US needed more armored infantry.

The Germans had whole divisions of armored infantry (11,000 men) Panzer-Grenadiers and SS Panzer--Grenadiers, moving quickly in armored vehicles with heavy firepower.

The Americans had only battalions of armored infantry (800 men) as units of each armored division.

It was almost impossible to train air corps, quartermaster and others to fight alongside tanks and other armored vehicles.

Most armored infantry had received at least a year of training (many of us had much more) as integral parts of one of the sixteen US armored divisions. They had climbed onto the backs of tanks and jumped off in the dark, in the rain, in snow and ice, in the bitter cold and blistering heat. They knew how and where to knock a tank out. They had been with tankers in training and on pass in town and knew they were not supermen.
Once an armored division started losing men in combat, it had no replacement pool of armored infantrymen. Most of the armored divisions were overseas in Europe and armored infantry were no longer being trained in the States.

Whatever the reason, not everyone that was wounded, was returned to their own unit after being declared fit for duty. Being armored infantry at that time of the war may have sent me right back up the way to the old 56th. No one wanted to be with strangers in the hell of a winding down war. Although the replacements in B company 56th would be strangers there—should be a few of the guys left that had been with me at Camp Campbell, on Tennessee Maneuvers or at Camp Berkeley.

But for now the nights were hell. I couldn't sleep. I knew that if they sent me back up there I would either be maimed or killed. But my subconscious told me that I was duty bound to get my ass back up there as long as any of the guys I had trained with in the states were still alive with B company and the 2nd platoon.

Every night I would lay there tossing and turning trying to think of something that I could tell the medics that would keep me from being sent back up to the front. But they had already made up their minds. Whatever board of rear echelon medics that had recommitted me was not concerned with the pain I still experienced when swallowing. I was out of shape from sitting around the hospital and my nerves were shot. The two interviews that I had with the medics after my future had been announced were abrupt and unsympathetic. I was needed at the front. Discussion ended. Dismissed.

Trucks took us over to the railroad yards where we climbed aboard an old French train that looked as if it had been strafed by every Stuka in the Luftwaffe when the Krauts overran France. Car windows were boarded over. Upholstery was stained and torn. The cars hadn't been washed for years and they weren't heated.

The train headed northeast toward Dijon and Epinal. These towns were to the rear of the 7th Army front, along the Rhine river in the southeast corner of France.

And the food they served on the train. K-rations. Cold, and the taste hadn't changed.
I think the repple depple (replacement depot) was unique to World War II. I doubt that any army had used it before and certainly none has used it since. It may have been unique to the ETO (European Theater of Operations), since I have never heard any reference to it by guys who served in the Pacific. It was probably the closest thing to a German Concentration Camp that the United States ever came up with.

The one at Epinal, France would make a good example of all of them. It was in what seemed to be an old French army barracks. Old stone buildings, dirty and dank. Dirt floors, I think. Wood frame bunks. There wasn't a comfortable place to sit at anytime. The food was "C" rations, stew or beans. They did warm it up. It was damp cold all of the time.

We spent our days sitting at a half of an oil drum, which was two-thirds full of gasoline, cleaning M-1 rifles. Everyone had a cigarette hanging from his mouth. As careless as some of those guys were with a lighted cigarette, its a wonder the whole place didn't go up in flames and torch everyone.

I never could figure out who was in charge of the place. Most of the time it was hundreds of GIs just milling around when not cleaning M-1s. I felt sorry for the green replacements just over from the states. Headed for some division where they wouldn't know a soul and would probably be one of the first to get blown away.

Well, a few days in that place, and anyone would have gladly transferred out to Devil's Island.

Succor finally arrived in the form of a halftrack from old B/56. Two guys were aboard, one I had known since basic training at Camp Campbell (he was in the third platoon) but the other must have been a replacement who had joined the company after I had been hit. So I climbed aboard and off we went in the direction of the company. They had given me a replacement M-1 at the repple depple (which looked much the worse for wear) but I hadn't had a chance to fire it. Going back into combat with a weapon which I didn't know did not leave me with a good feeling.
It was along towards the middle of April, 1945, when the column halted for more than the usual short rest period. The halftracks were parked along the road and I wandered over to where my old buddy Sutkaitus had parked his. It had been a week since I had gotten the sharp, paralyzing pain in my lower back when we had been riding shotgun on the supply trucks back to the Rhine river. We had reached the river with the empty trucks and while they were loading up again with gasoline and ammunition, I swung down over the side of the halftrack. As my feet hit the ground I got an excruciating pain in my lower left back which left me gasping for breath. I hung on to the side of the halftrack hoping to God I wasn't dying and wondering where in the hell the medics were as I hadn't seen any for weeks. The pain soon passed and I climbed back into the halftrack, sat down and tried to recover from that harrowing experience. On top of that I had trouble swallowing those "K" rations, which was about all we had to eat most of the time. Since it had been a couple of months since I'd last seen a medic, I thought it might be a good idea to check in with them. I still had the feeling that I could drop dead any minute from the old wound in the neck, and the sharp pain in my lower back only made it more urgent to check in with the medics, if I could only find out where they were in this wild ride to the east into Germany.

We hadn't had a bath for a month, in fact I think it was early March back at Baumhidersdorf, Alsace Lorraine. We mounted up one very cold day and rolled on over to a large open field. Out in the middle was a large tent which must have been forty feet long. We lined up at the entrance on the north end and stripped naked. Our OD uniforms were so encrusted with dirt, body oils and weather stains that they would almost stand alone when we took them off. On a signal we rushed into the tent. There was a long overhead pipe running down the center of the tent, with shower heads projecting down. There was a walk of wooden slats running down the length of the tent under the pipe. We grabbed a bar of soap and started lathering up. We were only given three or four minutes in the shower and then had to rush out the other end of the tent. That wasn't really enough time to get all those weeks of grime off of your body. When we came out the tent exit, there were brand new OD uniforms for us to put on.

Division Aid had set up under a bridge that the German jets were trying to knock out. I said goodbye to Sutkaitus and wandered in. A medic tried to stick a thermometer in my mouth, but I protested that I didn't have a temperature, and would like someone to check my throat and back. Forget it, thermometers are SOP in the aid station for everyone. I sit down and suck on the thermometer until the medic decides to check it. No temperature. An MD wanders in and checks my eyes, ears, nose and throat. "Horner's Syndrome" he says, "By God, its a Horner's Syndrome." Other MDs have to be summoned to observe this medical phenomenon. Later I learn that that large, sharp piece of shrapnel that went through my neck caused some damage which left the pupil of one eye constricted, ptosis (one eyelid now drooped), facial anhidrosis (no longer would I sweat on one side of my face). Also, I found when looking at my chart when I wasn't supposed to, that I had partial paralysis of the twelfth cranial nerve. All of this meant nothing to me at the time.
Since the German jets were still making passes at the bridge above us I was anxious to get out of that place. Division Aid wasn't interested in me except as a medical specimen, so a couple of days later I climbed aboard an ambulance with a few other walking wounded, and we headed west back down the road we had fought our way up a week and a half before. I prayed that there weren't any stray Krauts with panzerfausts waiting in the bushes along the road, for one last chance to blow away an American ambulance. The ambulance made a sharp turn in the road. I looked out the back window, at the side of a steep hill off to the right. The ground was covered with the bodies of hundreds of dead American GIs, face down in the mud. Their M-1 rifles were stuck into the ground by the bayonet, near their head with their helmets over the butt plate. The 12th had gone through here at least a week before and I knew that we hadn't lost that many. The units following us must have run into some heavy resistance. Maybe this was an assembly point for Graves Registration.

We slept overnight in tents at an evac hospital outside the town of Tauerbischofsheim. The next morning Mickey Rooney came around to visit. He put on a skit and then went around and shook hands with all of the patients. Bulldozers had scraped a runway out of the side of a hill, and we stood there in groups waiting for the planes to come in and pick us up. I joined a group of about six guys. One of them looked to be about 18 years old. He had the shakes, His whole body shook continuously. His teeth clicked. His hands twitched. It was a warm day in April. He continued to twitch and shake. His eyes had the "thousand-yard stare." He wasn't with us. No one seemed to be looking out for him. He shook all the time on the plane and when we got back to France. The last time I saw him hours later he was still shaking.

A DC-3 finally landed and twenty of us climbed aboard. We sat facing each other in metal, bucket seats. We weren't given parachutes. Although there were red crosses painted on the sides of the plane, I didn't trust those kraut jet pilots to let us fly our way unmolested. The roar of the engines made it impossible to talk to each other. After an uneventful flight we landed at an air-evac hospital at Bar-le-duc, France.

We walked over to a long, low building and went inside. We were in a large open room the size of a mess hall. An army nurse (a captain) walked up to us and yelled, "everybody strip!" No one moved. This called for another yell. "Think I've never seen naked men before? I said strip and that's an order!" We stripped. An orderly brought over some pajamas and we each grabbed a pair and put them on. We gathered up our old clothes and marched off to be processed.

Since this place was a stopping off spot for other destinations, provision wasn't made for morale with activities or recreation. Paperbacks to read and maybe a movie in the evening, but that was about it. The rest of the time you sat around and stared into space. No way to make friends since everyone was on the move and wanted out of this place. The word was that we would be flown back to the States and the flight would probably take some eighteen hours. Outside in the compound was a wooden tower with four loudspeakers at the top. From early in the morning until late at night that thing blared out music. The only trouble was, they had a limited supply of records. Over and over again, they blasted us with Vaughn Monroe singing Rum and Coca Cola. The plans to fly us back to the states fell through, so
we climbed aboard a hospital train and headed south for a hospital at Marseille.

We were assigned two to a room in an old building which may have been a French hospital at one time. We were up on the second floor and I was put in a room with a black guy in the Quartermaster Corps who had been driving a truck on the docks at the harbor. This was a U.S. Army Station Hospital. The bathroom facility was a square tile area in the room, about 30 inches long and wide. A hole in the middle about five inches in diameter. An indentation on either side for your feet and a chain hanging down from overhead. You were supposed to squat over that hole and take a crap. Trust the crazy French to think up something like that.

The black guy had ulcers. He bitched and complained early in the morning and late at night. I don't remember that he enjoyed one happy moment in all the time he was in that room. This was before the army was integrated. If he wasn't complaining he was telling me that if he was white he would be down the hall every night laying those nurses.

The word was soon out that everyone would be interviewed by a psychiatrist and perhaps even given a shot of sodium penathol to find out who was truly sick and ailing and who was goldbricking. Of course nobody wanted to make that trip to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan.

No one in the hospital celebrated May 8, "V-E" day. The French in town fired off some weapons and that was about it. No special food or drink; no singing and dancing. The war in Europe was over and now it was time to invade Japan.

The weather was very hot most of the time. The food was institutional. The PX had candy bars, cigarettes, chewing gum and razor blades. The library had old dogeared paperbacks, difficult to read. Everyone had to exercise some every afternoon. An old movie in the evening, usually newsreels a couple of years old about how we were winning the war in China. Most of the time we sat and stared out into space.

We were evidently waiting for ships to take us back to the states. There were no ships available at this time they said. Yet every day in "The Stars and Stripes" we read about the English and French warbrides who were being taken to the States in American ships.

Down at the end of the corridor on the second floor where we were was the psycho ward. There was a locked door with bars at the entrance. The noise and screams coming out of that place, especially at night, was enough to make your skin crawl.

One day while standing in line for chow, I began to fidget, I became nervous and edgy. This line was taking too long. Yet, I had been stand- in every kind of a line the Army could dream up, for two and a half years, and I had never had this feeling before. That goddam "88" shrapnel must have screwed up my nervous system.
It finally came my turn to be interviewed by the psychiatrist. First, you had to strip naked. Then you walked into a fairly large room, not too well lighted. The psychiatrist sat at a desk in the middle of the room. That and a chair for the patient to sit in was all of the furnishings. The chair was straight-backed without a cushion. It was too cold in there without any clothes on. I don't remember all of the questions that he asked. He was busy writing. Then he asked, "why don't you want to go back to the front?" Catch-22. He must have been thinking of the war in the Pacific, because the one in this theater was over with. There was no rational answer to the question. If this guy thought that all red-blooded, patriotic American males wanted to go out and fight the Japs, he needed a psychiatrist. No one wanted to go back up and get maimed or killed. The catch was that if your old buddies and your old unit were still committed, you felt guilty as hell if you weren't with them. My answer to his question was, "I don't think that my family could take another telegram." On my chart he wrote, "anxiety neurosis." With that he dismissed me.

The only other excitement around that place, that summer, was July 14, Bastille Day. The crazy French fired off every weapon that they could get their hands on. Bullets went whistling through the hospital compound all day and all evening. Its a wonder they didn't kill off half of the patients.

The ship to take us home finally arrived about the middle of July. It was the Hospital Ship "Acadia", a one-stacker. International Law said that all patients had to be in pajamas and robes at all times on board the ship. The captain had to radio his route and destination to Geneva Switzerland, where it was given to the Japanese, so that their surface ships and submarines wouldn't sink us. The ship traveled with all lights on.

The ship's crew and the medics on board gave us the best of treatment, We hadn't had such food for over a year. Steak and ice cream. The captain gave a running commentary over the loudspeakers, when ever there was something worth reporting. As we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar he gave some description and history of the Straits, Gibraltar and North Africa off to the south. As we passed the Azores we got some more running description and history.

One day I decided to go to confession. I couldn't remember the last time I had gone, and I had probably received general absolution a couple of times since. I knocked on the cabin door of the chaplain. He invited me in. He was an Irish monsignor from Boston. Told me to kneel down at his knees and make my confession. I wasn't used to being looked at by the priest when confessing but couldn't see any way out of it. After absolution he told me to sit and asked where I was from. When I said Kansas City he started talking about steaks. Well if that was all he knew about Kansas City this conservation wasn't going anywhere. I got up and left.
Sometime after we had passed the Azores we ran into some very rough weather. The patients who were confined to bunks had to be tied in or they would have been thrown to the floor. Those of us who were ambulatory had to hang on to railings to make our way about. Some of us went up to the main deck and watched as the waves washed over and tossed everything about that wasn't tied down. When you looked out the portholes at the back of the ship, one minute all that you could see would be water, the next minute all that you could see would be sky. We bobbed around out there like a cork.

We finally made it to New York. Sailed in past Jones' Beach. Some tugboats circled us blowing their whistles. Some of the buildings in the harbor had a large sign across their front saying, "welcome home." We disembarked, after putting on our uniforms, loaded up in buses and were taken to O'Halloran General Hospital on Staten Island. After being processed in and assigned to a ward and a bed we were given a 12-hour pass to New York City.

I had met up with an old newspaper man on the ship, who had been doing time in a rifle company, and he and I headed off to the city to see the sights. The last time I had been in New York City, old Charlie Staples had led some of the second platoon into the saloons of the Bowery for the time of their pass. The old newspaperman headed straight for a bar, with me tagging along. He bellied up and yelled, "a double Irish for both of us." Jesus Christ. I downed the double Irish and dammed near choked to death. Maybe my throat was still somewhat sensitive from that king-size "88" sore throat I had had. Anyhow, I cut out of there and left the old newspaperman to do his drinking by himself. It was that day while I was wandering around the streets of New York that a B-25 bomber crashed into the Empire State building.

It was difficult to make the transition from combat and life in the ETO back to an Army hospital in the states. When a car backfired or you heard thunder during a storm, you instinctively flinched and made ready to dive for cover. Most civilians didn't seem to have been touched very deeply by the war.

They told us at O'Halloran that we would be sent to an Army hospital close to our home. The nearest one to Kansas City was probably O'Reilly General at Springfield, Missouri. The first time that I called home I told the family that. After a few days they put a group of us on a train and we headed west. The pullman cars were fitted up with hospital bunks along each side, so that you could stretch out on your back and watch out the window as two-thirds of the United States went floating past. Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, the flat lonely plains of Nebraska, some spectacular scenery in Wyoming, and then into Utah and up to Brigham City and Bushnell Army Hospital.
Bushnell General Hospital was a facility for the treatment of paraplegics. I suppose a certain percentage of patients with other kinds of wounds were sent there to keep the activities and atmosphere at a certain level. The floors in the buildings were connected with each other by long ramps. A good number of the paraplegics were in wheelchairs and spent their days racing each other down those long inclines. Walking wounded and the staff had to keep alert or they would be bowled over by a speeding wheelchair.

The food was fairly good for an institution, but then if you had lived on "C", "K", and "D" rations for a year anything would taste good.

Very attractive Mormon girls had been hired to give physical therapy and to lead the patients in daily exercises.

Patients wore a maroon colored outfit, jackets and pants, with "MD, USA" stitched on the chest. Many of us took the outfit home with us when we were discharged. Theft was rampant in that place. It may have been that some of the wounded were still liberating souvenirs (as they had done in the ETO and the Pacific), and didn't consider what they were doing as stealing. In any event security seemed very lax.

If you were ambulatory, they got you up early for breakfast, but you made your bed before you went down to the cafeteria. You stood at the side of your bed every morning at 0900 when the doctor and his staff made the rounds. The question was usually how do you feel. But any response to a particular 1st lieutenant, MD on our ward was generally met with, "what are you, a doctor?"

A couple of weeks after arrival we were given a 30-day leave. The train was jammed with military personnel, in old coaches that must have been used in the Civil War. We sat all the way from Utah to Kansas City, wearing our suntan summer dress uniforms, which became very dirty and wrinkled by the time we reached our destination.

We were given a pass to Salt Lake City, and stayed overnight in a hotel. There isn't all that much to see in Utah except for the Great Salt Lake and the Mormon Cathedral. We saw the Lake at a distance and were given a tour of the Cathedral by some very attractive Mormon girls.

I made friends with a couple of guys. One was a tall guy named Mulligan from Omaha, Nebraska, who had been with the 63rd division in the ETO. He hadn't been wounded, but was found to be an epileptic. In fact he had a seizure as he waved goodbye to me when I left on my 30-day leave.

Mulligan had struck up an acquaintance with a WAC (Women's Army Corps) who was a librarian in the hospital's library. She had a couple of WAC friends, who were from New York (both with heavy accents) and both were Jewish. Mulligan and I spent a little time with them, but what we talked about I can't remember.
Another guy that I made friends with was a kid from Kansas City Kansas. He had been in the Pacific and a Jap had shot him in the forehead. He had pretty bad headaches but seemed to be fairly stable otherwise most of the time. However, everytime he and I would cross the hospital compound, if he saw a good-looking nurse, he would stop and yell at her, "I'd like to bang you." I tried to warn him that he was going to get his tail thrown into the stockade if he didn't watch it. He paid no heed. One morning he climbed up on the small table beside his bed and sat there when the doctor was making his rounds. No threats from the doctor would make him get down. Finally a couple of the patients coaxed him down.

When I first heard about the "A" bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasack I thought, "Oh God, this is the end of the world. If they can destroy large cities with one bomb, how long before something triggers a reaction that destroys the earth."

"VJ Day" was just another day at the hospital. No celebrating, no special food or drink, no parades, no dancing in the streets. In fact the whole atmosphere became rather somber. Life in the hospital continued as it had been before the announcements. No one was to be discharged any sooner, just because the war was over.

I was scheduled to appear before a board of doctors who were to consider if anything further should be done about my wound. The board was composed of two majors and several captains and they informed me that they had decided to cut my neck open and try and sew the damaged nerves back together again. Before I had entered the room an old noncom in the hall had told me, "don't let them get near you with a knife. Those guys love to cut enlisted men open and tinker." I hadn't intended to let anyone near me with a knife so I declined their offer of surgery. They then told me how much it would cost to have that kind of surgery done in civilian life. They hadn't guaranteed that the repairs would be successful or that I would feel any better. I didn't hear anymore from that board.

There was another patient at the hospital who was paralyzed from the waist down. He spent most of his time during the day on his belly on a table with wheels. He had on an overseas cap, a sheet over his lower body, a "P-38" (urinal can) hanging from the corner of the table. He had a cane in each hand and he pumped himself down the corridors and ramps at a fairly good clip. One day he pumped himself out the front door, down the walk to the highway, and down the highway into Brigham City. He was parked on his table outside of a bar yelling for service. The hospital sent out a large truck, and the orderlies loaded him and his table on board and took him back to the hospital.

There was a WAC on one of the wards that everyone called "tapioca" because, "you could make her in a minute."
So, this was the end. Almost three years to the day since I had walked into the courthouse in Kansas City, Kansas and enlisted in the army. Late October, 1942. The United States and its allies were losing the war. Germany had conquered most of Europe and Japan had conquered much of Asia. Rommel was chasing the British all over North Africa with his panzers.

Since they weren't yet drafting 18 and 19 year olds (it would be another year), I was given my choice of the arm of the service I would like to serve in; Air Corps, Quartermaster, Medics, Signal Corps, Ordnance, etc. I chose Armor. I don't know why. Maybe because Rommel and his panzers were in the headlines. And, it just so happened that at that very time the 12th Armored Division had been activated at Camp Campbell Kentucky. Truthfully I didn't know anything about armored divisions. And I didn't know anybody that did. That wasn't strictly true, but I didn't find that out until I got home on my first furlough in March of 1943, right after we had finished three months of basic training. Old man Saint, ran a filling station and an ice-house in the neighborhood, saw the armored division patch on my shoulder and yelled, "Jesus Christ, why in the hell did you join an armored division? That's the roughest training and life in the army. Tommy (one of his sons) is in the 9th Armored and he says it is rough." He didn't need to tell me that, I had just finished three months of hell in the dead of winter at Camp Campbell. But all of that was ahead of me.

The lady in the enlistment office at the courthouse, wanted to know if I had ever had VD and when was the last time I had wet the bed. I told her I had never had VD and I didn't remember ever wetting the bed.