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She sobbed, "I don't want you to go!" The young man fought back his own tears as he wiped the salty stream from his wife's face. A dozen about-to-be soldiers stood in the predawn fog by the Red Car interurban in Van Nuys, California. Most were exchanging good-byes with parents, friends, or family. Red eyes were everywhere. I had said my last good-byes the night before at Ducky Dingler's rooming house, but my eyes, too, were misty.

The conductor picked up his light and with sadness in his voice said, "Boys, it's time to go." He waved his light, a bell on the front of the car clanged as the last hasty kisses were exchanged. Silent men filed into the car and sat down. Wheels squealed and the little knot of well-wishers vanished into the fog. There were no dry eyes as we moved down Van Nuys Boulevard. This was the last chance for tears, for in a few hours we would all be soldiers. And soldiers did not cry, did they? Little did we know. It was January 2, 1943. Our date of return was unknown.

Thirty-nine months later I came back to my old boarding house on Van Nuys Boulevard. Ducky Dingler had a bed for me. The morning after I returned, the San Fernando Valley was again engulfed in fog. After breakfast I went out to Ducky's front porch and lay down in her porch swing and daydreamed about buying civilian clothes. I drifted off to sleep.

Then I heard them. German jet bombers! And a voice came to me: "Red, what in the world are you doing?" That was Ducky's voice, but what was she doing over here in Germany? She had no business in combat. Slowly I realized I was back in Van Nuys, on Ducky's porch, with paint and wood under my fingernails from digging into her floor with my bare hands.

As I slept, the fog had dissipated, and a flight of Lockheed P-80 jets had taken off from Burbank.[1] In my sleep the noise of those American jet fighters became the only jet fighters I had ever seen, the Ger-

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[1] The P-80 was the first operational jet fighter in the United States Army Air Corps. It did not see combat until the Korean War, when it was designated the F-80.

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man Messerschmitt 262s.[2] I was scared to death of them and had tried to dig a hole with my bare hands to hide in. I tried to explain this to Ducky, but I was certain she did not understand at all. I know she thought, "I am going to have to watch this kid. He's crazy."

In the following pages I will describe a few of the incidents that changed a twenty-year-old airplane lover into a man who could be scared by the sound of a jet. During those thirty-nine months I was to find out how the Army worked and how men reacted to high stress as my buddies and I were bombed, strafed, shelled, mortared, sniped at, and on occasion forced into playing God.

I'm in the Army Now

I went to war a Hoosier, born in Elkhart, raised in Osceola and Mishawaka. My father was a baker, but during the depression he often worked at manual labor. My dream of a college education and of becoming a chemist had to be financed by my own earnings. After graduation from Mishawaka High School in 1940, I worked as a physical testing technician in the laboratories of the Ball Band Plant of the United States Rubber Company.[3] For the next two years I tested materials used in flying boots, rubber fuel tanks for airplanes (some for Jimmy Doolittle's raiders who bombed Tokyo in April, 1942), military raincoats, deep-sea diving suits, rubber boots, tennis shoes, and more. I started at fifty cents an hour and soon received a two-and-a-half-cent raise. I paid my mother five dollars a week for room and board, bought a 1937 Ford, and enrolled at the Indiana University extension at South Bend. Working with aviation products whetted my appetite for flying, so I learned to fly a Piper J-3 Cub, soloing on October 10, 1941.[4] My instructor, Zenith Barber, soon after left to ferry

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[2] The Messerschmitt 262 (Me 262) was the world's first operational jet fighter-bomber. It was much faster than the American piston-engine fighters, but its time in the air was limited. A controversy over how the plane was to be used delayed development and production of the Me 262. Hitler wanted it to be equipped as a fighter-bomber in order to use it against the Allied invasion of France. Others in the German government envisioned it as strictly a fighter plane. Had it been used as a fighter plane earlier, the Me 262 could have caused great damage to Allied bombers and their fighter escorts. Jeffrey Ethell and Alfred Price, *The German Jets in Combat* (London, 1979), 10-71.

[3] The Ball Band Plant in Mishawaka once employed over three thousand workers. During World War II the plant manufactured gas masks, flying boots, gasoline bladders for aircraft, self-sealing gasoline tanks for most bombers and fighters, raincoats for soldiers, a nylon-resin composition called V-board to support fuel cells in aircraft, and deep-sea diving suits for the Navy. After the war the company name was changed to Uniroyal.

[4] The Piper J-3 Cub was one of the best planes for primary training in the early 1940s. It was a high-winged, fabric-covered aircraft. Early versions were powered by a fifty-horsepower Franklin or Continental engine. Instrumentation was sparse: oil temperature and pressure, engine rpm, airspeed, and altimeter. The Cub could be stalled, spun, and looped, and most students performed all of these maneuvers before flying it alone. It cost me four dollars an hour to fly with an instructor and three dollars an hour to fly it solo.

military airplanes to overseas bases and encouraged me to try to do the same.

Then came America's entry into the war. Not having enough flying time to qualify as a ferry pilot, I decided to become a celestial navigator. In April, 1942, I sold my 1937 Ford and bought a one-way bus ticket to Van Nuys, California. I enrolled in the Pan-American College of Celestial Air Navigation at the Van Nuys Metropolitan Airport where I studied aerial navigation under Alan Zweng.[5] I supported myself by testing gasoline tanks for P-38s at Timm Aircraft, which was located at the same airport.

I developed a hernia that fall and had corrective surgery on October 1. Navigating was now on hold. Then my draft number came up, and I reported for induction on December 28. All body openings were poked, probed, and examined. The internist saw the red scar on my belly and inquired about it. After my explanation, he said, "Well, Son, we can't put you on active duty for ninety days after hernia surgery. You will be sworn in today and report for active duty on January 2, 1943, at Fort MacArthur, California." This was not what I had planned. Could I now plan anything?

The main gate of Fort MacArthur loomed out of the mist.[6] A corporal met us. He was God personified for the next three days. He told us, "You WILL draw your GI clothing. Then you WILL send your civilian clothing home or donate it to charity. Then you WILL get your haircut. DO NOT PLAN for your future. The Army will do that. And remember, the Army always has 'contingency plans' to take care of any emergency."

Then he asked if there were any questions. I said, "I can fly and navigate. How do I get into the Air Force from here?"

"The Air Force is filled up, buddy. Everybody wants to fly. I want to fly. If an opening comes up, I am going to get it!" He continued, "You will take your tests and wait to see what the Army thinks it can do with such a sorry looking batch of misfits. But don't think for a moment that we are going to throw any of you back. We ain't. In about three days you will be assigned to a camp for your basic training. We are going to make fighting men out of each of you. It's going to be hard on you but harder on us poor corporals who have to teach you poor dumb slobs."

They issued us GI clothing. One of our group, promptly nicknamed "Fashion Plate," resplendent in his obviously tailored "zoot-

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[5] Alan Zweng ran the Pan-American College of Celestial Air Navigation in the 1940s. His father and Admiral P. V. H. Weems developed a system of aerial navigation based on the use of an octant to measure the angle of a star, moon, or sun above the horizon. The Zweng school was located at the Van Nuys Municipal Airport, but in the late summer of 1942 the owners moved it to a new location near Universal City.

[6] Named for General Arthur MacArthur, the father of General Douglas MacArthur, Fort MacArthur was located on the Palos Verde peninsula in the town of San Pedro. During World War II it was the reception center for men entering the Army from southern California.

suit," yelled out, "Hey, sergeant, you made a mistake here! I don't wear boxer shorts; I wear jockey shorts."

The supply sergeant just rolled his eyes heavenward and yelled back, "There ain't no jockey shorts in this man's Army!"

Fashion Plate muttered under his breath, "That's uncivilized. Kee-rist! Boxer shorts always ride up on me."

Then came the shot line. Rumors and jokes about horse needles floated back to us. We embellished them, adding blunt needles, and passed them on to the guys behind. Soon we all knew the cold hand of doom was waiting just down the hall. We were handed a piece of paper and told, "If you lose this, you will have to take your shots all over again!" Before we knew what was happening, a medic scratch-scratched our left biceps, and as we stepped forward, zip-zap, unseen medics stabbed needles into both arms. Then we were told to dress. I raised my arms to slip on my new olive drab undershirt, and the next thing I knew I was lying on the floor wondering where in the world all those soldiers had come from! Years later I recalled those unconscious seconds as the happiest moments of my army career.

On my third day in the Army, at exactly three o'clock, a sergeant posted lists on the bulletin board alongside the toilet and showers. There was much shoving and pushing and neck-stretching as everybody tried to learn his fate at the same time. There was mine: "Pvt. Rice, Bernard L., Camp Wallace, Texas. Coast Artillery, 26th Anti-Aircraft Training Battalion." I was not going to fly airplanes. Oh, no, I was going to shoot them down! This was the first in a long series of lessons on how the Army operated.

After my basic training, I was selected by competitive examination to attend the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) and assigned to New Mexico A & M to study basic engineering.[7] We were to remain privates or privates first class (pfcs) until we finished the program; then we would be commissioned second lieutenants.

A year later, however, the ASTP was disbanded abruptly, and we were shipped to the 12th Armored Division, which was preparing to go overseas.[8] In early 1944 the 12th had received a call for volun-

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[7] The Army Specialized Training Program was created at the urging of educators and industrialists who were worried about a dearth of well-trained technicians and engineers in the United States. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, worried that the program would become a way for the wealthy to keep their sons out of combat, insisted that admission be by competitive examination and available only to men with IQs of 115 or higher. During preparations for the invasion of France, much of the ASTP was disbanded in order to free more men for combat duty. Most ASTP soldiers were scattered among combat units then in the final stages of training in the United States. ASTP men in the medical schools continued to study and did earn their degrees and commissions as promised.

[8] Armored divisions were all nicknamed. The 1st Armored was "Old Ironsides," the 3rd was "Hell on Wheels," and the 12th was "Hellcats." We went from one extreme to another, from the "Sword and Lamp of Knowledge" of the ASTP to "Hellcats." It was quite a change for all of us.

teers for a hazardous duty assignment. Several hundred men had volunteered and participated in the invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. The depleted ranks of the 12th were filled with about one thousand ASTP men. Most of those who had volunteered to leave the division were privates or pfcs, leaving the 12th top-heavy in rank. We ASTP men found we had no chance for advancement. I asked to be placed in the field artillery so I could fly their observation planes, which were Piper Cubs gone to war. The pilot and observer radioed corrections to the aiming of our big guns. When my orders came, however, they read, "Company C, 82nd Medics."

I Become a Pill Roller

The 82nd Armored Medical Battalion had been activated as a unit of the 12th on September 15, 1942, at Camp Campbell, Kentucky. Most of the men in the 82nd had been with it since its formation. They had received their basic and advanced medical training at Campbell.[9]

The 82nd provided medical support for the 12th Armored. The large vehicles—such as tanks and half-tracks, tank retrievers, and self-propelled guns—and other specialty vehicles plus their fuel posed hazards different from those in standard infantry divisions. In addition to tending the wounds inflicted by enemy weapons, we were faced with treating casualties from vehicular accidents and burns.

All training, equipment, and treatment techniques were under the direction of our division surgeon, Colonel Alf T. Haerem. He worked with medical personnel in the headquarters of the army corps to which the 12th was assigned. The 82nd was headed by a battalion headquarters that supplied the division with medical equipment and drugs, performed major repairs to all our medical vehicles, and maintained medical records of casualties as they flowed through the battalion. There were three letter companies—A, B, and C—composed of about 120 men each. Each company had two treatment platoons that operated the mobile medical and surgical facilities. Composed of four doctors and about one dozen technicians, a treatment platoon stabilized the sick and wounded men so that they could be transported farther to the rear, usually to an evacuation hospital. One of the doctors was a dentist who had an assistant.

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[9] Medics, both officers and enlisted men, had myriad stories about their training at Camp Campbell. A strong bond between these men was apparent when we arrived. One of our first lectures was on the history of the 82nd Armored Medical Battalion by the C Company commanding officer, Captain Walter Wiggins. All of us newcomers to the 82nd had a lot of catching up to do even though we had had first aid courses in basic training and more while in the ASTP. We sewed up orange peels as they were supposed to be a realistic substitute for human flesh. At least we learned how to thread a needle properly and could bring the edges of the orange peel together even if they were a bit mismatched. We were divided into two-man teams, and we practiced giving shots and drawing blood from each other. Believe me, there was a lot of squirming on the part of the guy being shot or stuck.

SOLDIERS OF THE 12TH ARMORED DIVISION, ABILENE, TEXAS, MARCH 1944
THE AUTHOR IS KNEELING ON ONE KNEE AT THE LEFT OF THE FRONT ROW.

Courtesy Max Eagelfeld and the author.

Each letter company had ten ambulances. During training and in the first weeks of combat, the ambulance platoon carried casualties from the forward aid stations to the treatment station. Later, as we swept across Germany, we fought as a "task force" composed of a company of tanks, a company of infantry, an artillery battery, plus specialists from ordnance, engineering, and signal companies. One or more of our ambulances usually brought up the rear.

The ambulances of C Company were directed by First Lieutenant Bill Roark, who was assisted by Second Lieutenant Joseph L. Pittari. Staff Sergeant Arthur Long helped manage the platoon. Under Long were two sergeants, Clyde Robinson and Clarence Fread, and Corporals Chester Higgs, Tom Rhodes, Byron Young, and Alan Horowitz. The ambulance drivers were either privates first class or technicians fifth class.[10] Each ambulance driver had an assistant driver or aid man. Once in combat, an aid man who survived thirty days or more with an infantry, tank, reconnaissance, or artillery unit became a combat medic. He could be a private, private first class, or technician fifth class.

[10] Men who had taken courses in the various medical or surgical specialties were rated as skilled technicians, and their rank was noted as technician fifth, fourth, or third class. They were referred to as T5, T4, or T3. A T5 was equivalent to a corporal, a T4 to a sergeant, and a T3 to a staff sergeant.

I well remember my chagrin at being told I was to be a "pill roller." As we trained to save the lives of the wounded, injured, and sick, however, I began to accept the role. We learned which injury to treat first and how to stop the flow of blood, how to sew and protect damaged tissue, and how to administer morphine and blood plasma. We could splint a broken bone using army equipment or improvise when issued equipment was not available. We were also taught the value of prophylaxis, the prevention of disease.

We spent the summer of 1944 in intensive training. We attended classes on medical and surgical techniques and worked on field problems with a combat command. We transferred simulated casualties over rough terrain from the "battlefield" to our treatment stations. There were also real casualties from injuries and accidents during this time. One man was nearly cut in half when his "grease gun," a new machine pistol, went off by itself while lying on the back seat of a jeep. Another ran through a barbed wire fence, severely slashing his throat.

On September 3, 1944, we boarded a troop train and were sent to Camp Shanks, New York. From there we boarded the navy troopship *Tasker H. Bliss* and landed at Avonmouth, England, on October 1. After five weeks of further training at a British army base at Tidworth's Windmill Hill, we were given our assignments; mine was to drive Lieutenant Bill Roark, our ambulance platoon leader.[11]

We waited on the docks at Southhampton to board Landing Ship Tanks (LSTs) on November 11. In those days we all observed a moment of silent prayer at 11:00 a.m. on that date in remembrance of those who had died in wars. As the somber notes of taps echoed off the hulls of ships at the wharf, we wondered what our fate would be. How many of us would be among those being revered a year later? I thought, "I'm going to miss you guys."

Our LSTs crossed the English Channel and were the first military cargo to go up the Seine River to Rouen, France, where we arrived in mid-November. Assigned to the 7th Army, we convoyed across France to Lunéville. In the first week of December we went into combat for the first time on the Maginot Line near Bitche. We relieved the 4th Armored Division, destined to fight the Germans in the Ardennes in a few days.[12]

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[11] Located between Southampton and Salisbury, Tidworth Barracks was originally a training camp for the British army. After the United States entered the war, American forces occupied a tent city called "Windmill Hill." When my unit stayed there, the equipment was in bad repair. We heard that we were the last men to occupy the site, since with the invasion of France, American forces arriving in Europe could go directly to the mainland.

[12] The 7th Army was the spearhead of the Allies' 6th Army Group, which had invaded southern France from the Mediterranean in August, 1944. After quickly securing beachheads on the Riviera and taking the port city of Marseilles, the 6th Army Group had driven north toward Grenoble and beyond. American forces had reached Dijon in mid-September and then had turned northeast to link up with George Patton's 3rd

Our training period may have been over, but now we were truly learning. We quickly discovered war was not what we had experienced on maneuvers.

Herrlisheim

We were finally in combat. Now our casualties were real. We bandaged and carried men torn by bullets and shrapnel. Our tank warfare expert, Lieutenant Colonel Montgomery Meigs, was decapitated when he stuck his head from the turret of his tank to direct the attack. On our first day of combat, two out of ten C Company ambulances were fired on and one medic, Louis Kaducak, was wounded. It was an ominous beginning.[13]

In mid-December the Germans broke through the Allied lines in the Ardennes Forest in an attempt to retake the major port of Antwerp. This was called "The Battle of the Bulge."[14] The 12th, meanwhile, had been assigned the task of eradicating a small pocket of Germans at the Gambsheim bridgehead along the Rhine River north of Strasbourg. We were told this area was defended by a few hundred ill-equipped Wehrmacht. A quick victory here would give this green division experience and confidence for future combat.

However, Hitler knew the Allies had rushed all their reserves north to the Bulge. When it became obvious the Germans would not recapture Antwerp, he decided to smash into our weakened southern

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Army, which had raced across northern France. The Allies had then struck east toward the Rhine River. In late November the 7th Army had led the 6th Army Group in taking Strasbourg. Robert Leckie, *Delivered from Evil: The Saga of World War II* (New York, 1987), 757-58; L. F. Ellis, *Victory in the West*: Vol. II, *The Defeat of Germany* (London, 1968), 165.

[13] The death of Meigs is noted in Kenneth Bradstreet, ed., *Hellcats* (Paducah, Ky., 1987), 61. The details of his death are still being debated by men who were there. The most popular version says that Meigs, having lost several tanks to accurate German fire from pillboxes on the Maginot Line, had surveyed the situation and concluded that he could not take the assigned pillboxes from his position on the front. He asked Major General Rodrick R. Allen, commanding general of the 12th Armored, to request permission for his tanks to attack through the lines of the infantry division next door. He was refused and told to stay within the 12th's boundaries. Leaving the meeting, Meigs was reported to have said, "I'm a dead man." Men within the tank told many times of the terror felt within the tank as the headless body dropped back inside with blood spurting from the neck arteries.

My driver, Hooper, and I were fired upon by a German eighty-eight millimeter gun while we were returning with our first load of wounded that first day. Fortunately, either the gun crew was inexperienced or Hooper's slow-down-speed-up tactics threw off the gunners' aim, for all of the shells fell behind us. The ambulance carrying Louis Kaducak was not as lucky. Kaducak was in the passenger seat, and medic Andy Clemente was lying on a litter behind the driver. A piece of shrapnel slammed into the side of the ambulance, whizzed above Clemente's head, and imbedded itself into Kaducak's back just above the left kidney. Kaducak, however, returned to duty a few weeks later and rejoined us.

[14] For the Battle of the Bulge, see Charles MacDonald, *A Time for Trumpets: The Untold Story of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York, 1985); Robert E. Merriam, *Dark December: The Full Account of the Battle of the Bulge* (New York, 1947); John Strawson, *The Battle for the Ardennes* (New York, 1972).

front from the Gambsheim pocket. He set up "Operation Nordwind," to be led by Heinrich Himmler. Nordwind was to push the French out of newly freed Strasbourg, breach the gap in the mountains at Saverne, then push on toward the sea.[15]

Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, keenly aware of his lack of reserves, wrote General Jacob L. Devers, 21st Corps commander, that in the event of a German attack in the south he should straighten the Allied lines and withdraw all American and French forces from the Alsatian plain. This would strengthen the front, place the Allied forces in a better defensive position, and free up two divisions that could be used as reserves. This decision would come back to haunt Eisenhower.[16]

In early January, Himmler assembled the 553rd Volksgrenadier Infantry Division, the 10th SS Panzer Grenadier Division (Liebestandarte Adolph Hitler), the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division, 31st Panzer Division, and several smaller battle groups in the Black Forest across the Rhine opposite us. These units were ferried across the Rhine at night.[17]

The panzer divisions were equipped with the newest German Tiger and Panther tanks, whose guns could blast through an American Sherman tank's front armor from five thousand yards away. The Sherman's guns could not penetrate the frontal armor on these German tanks, but if they had the opportunity to attack from the side at ranges of two thousand to four thousand yards, they could blow the tracks from the Tigers and Panthers. This was not an even match.

The Germans had discovered early in the war that our Sherman tanks would burn when hit at a rear sprocket. When Shermans appeared, the Germans called out, "Here come the Ronsons!" ("Ronson" was a famous American cigarette lighter.)

Working with these disadvantages, we used our tanks primarily against infantry and avoided tank-versus-tank battles. Our tank destroyer battalions and infantry with bazookas were to take care of the German tanks. The bazooka was a rocket-propelled projectile that could burn a hole through the thick armor of the Tiger tank. (The Germans had earlier developed the Panzerfaust which destroyed our tanks the same way.) The TDs (tank destroyers) manned "Hellcat" vehicles that had a large bore gun mounted on a Sherman tank chassis.[18]

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[15] Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 67.

[16] Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York, 1948), 362-63.

[17] Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 77.

[18] Shelby Stanton, *Order of Battle, U. S. Army, World War II* (Novato, Calif., 1984), 64-65, 337; Keith E. Bonn, *When the Odds Were Even* (Novato, Calif., 1994), 58. Two of my ASTP buddies, the Mancill twins, Robert and Allan, were a bazooka team in C Company, 66th Armored Infantry Battalion. Allan was killed on February 16, 1945, and Robert was captured the same day near Weyersheim, France.

The Germans moved across the Rhine at night into the Gambsheim area and hid in the wooded area known as the Stainwald. In the meantime, the 12th was preparing to attack the supposedly small German force. We were about to find out what hell really was.

When German prisoners of war told of the build-up taking place in the south, Devers ordered all divisions, French as well as American, to retreat to the Vosges Mountains. This would abandon Strasbourg and the surrounding area, an act condemning three hundred thousand loyal Frenchmen to death when the Germans strode back into the area. French commander Charles de Gaulle found this unacceptable, and he ordered his men to hold Strasbourg at any cost. De Gaulle also telegraphed British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt to request their support in halting the planned withdrawal. Roosevelt deferred the query back to Eisenhower who was furious at de Gaulle's insubordination.[19]

Things came to a head on January 3. Churchill flew to France and met with de Gaulle and Eisenhower. Both de Gaulle and Eisenhower later wrote accounts of that meeting. De Gaulle related that Eisenhower opened the meeting by stating his reasons for the withdrawal: the Bulge, the emergence of German jet- and rocket-powered fighter planes, and the new German Panther tanks. While Allied ground troops would be slaughtered if the armies met on the flat plains, the Panthers would be at a disadvantage in the Vosges Mountains. Moreover, the Germans had attacked in the Colmar pocket just south of the 12th Division over the previous two days.[20]

When de Gaulle told Eisenhower he could not condemn thousands of Frenchmen to certain death, Eisenhower responded with, "You give me political reasons . . . to change military orders."

De Gaulle argued, "Armies are created to serve the policy of states. And no one knows better than you yourself that strategy should include not only the given circumstances of military technique, but also the moral elements. And for the French people and the French soldiers, the fate of Strasbourg is of an extreme moral importance."[21]

De Gaulle wrote that Churchill chimed in, "All my life I have noted the significance Alsace has for the French. I agree with General de Gaulle that this fact must be taken into consideration."[22]

Eisenhower pressed de Gaulle further, asking what the French First Army would do if the Americans cut off all the supplies to the

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[19] Charles de Gaulle, *The Complete War Memoirs of Charles de Gaulle* (3 vols., New York, 1955), III, 164-67.

[20] *Ibid.*, 169. Although the 6th Army Group had successfully pushed the Germans across the Rhine in an area around Strasbourg, there remained a substantial German bridgehead east of the Rhine to the south of the city. This was known as the Colmar pocket, since the city of Colmar was at its center. Ellis, *Defeat of Germany*, 165.

[21] De Gaulle, *Complete War Memoirs*, III, 169-70.

[22] *Ibid.*, 171.

French. De Gaulle replied that the French people might be forced to deny the Allies the use of the roads and railroads if the war was not conducted in the best interests of France. He wrote later: "Rather than contemplate the consequences of such possibilities, I felt I should rely upon General Eisenhower's strategic talent and on his devotion to the service of the coalition of which France constitutes a part."[23]

De Gaulle won his point. Eisenhower telephoned General Devers that the retreat was to be cancelled immediately. Eisenhower, in his account of the conference, wrote: "He [Churchill] sat in with us as we talked but offered no word of comment. After de Gaulle left, he quietly remarked to me, 'I think you have done the wise and proper thing.'"[24]

The 12th Armored Division stayed and fought. Not only were we badly outnumbered, we were also not equipped to dig in and hold against an enemy attack. An armored division's strength is its ability to move, strike, and then move again.

The "Hell of Herrlisheim" lasted eight days before troops from the 36th Infantry Division relieved us. In memory, everything runs together, but here are incidents I cannot forget.

We attacked over a broad, flat, frozen plain covered with snow. The plain ended at the Stainwald. We whitewashed all our tanks and other front line vehicles so they would blend in with the snow. The tankers soon found Sherman tanks uncontrollable on the snow-covered ice.

The infantry had no picnic either. Soldiers fell while running over those flat and slippery fields. It was impossible to dig in. They waded or swam the ice-clogged ditches and canals that crisscrossed the plain. Sometimes they used the canals as trenches. Some infantry platoons were cut off and sliced up piecemeal. Others were captured intact as they were overwhelmed.

The casualty list of the 1st Squad, 2nd Platoon, C Company, 56th Armored Infantry at Herrlisheim tells the story of those foot soldiers. Of the eleven men, Platoon Sergeant Leslie T. Silvering and Privates First Class Alex A. Palma and William P. Desmond were killed. Priest, Knox, Hinojosha, Pilings, and Platoon Corporals Dewitt and Oaks were wounded. Only T 5 Conkling and Simmons went unscathed.

I helped the medics of the 56th Infantry pick up some wounded along the canal near Rohrwiller. Dozens of burned-out and flaming tanks screened the field with smoke. We evacuated our wounded under fire and came back into town. Then I saw an ASTP buddy, Joe Lentz, of South Bend, climbing aboard a halftrack, his M-1 rifle slung over his back. I ran over and said, "Be careful, Joe. I just came back from the canal. It is hotter than hell up there."

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[23] *Ibid.*

[24] Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 362-63.

He looked down at me and said, "Don't worry. I'll be OK."

About an hour later someone walked into the aid station and told us that the last halftrack had been ambushed and that all aboard had been killed. I felt pretty bad about Joe. But this story has an epilogue. Two years later I thought I saw the ghost of Joe Lentz walking toward me in downtown South Bend. This was no ghost, just one bitter man. He said that he had been wounded and left for dead by someone from the 12th. He was later picked up by a medic from the 36th Infantry.

One night at the 56th Infantry aid station, two wounded were brought in. One, a lieutenant, had his left arm severed just below the shoulder. He was conscious and talking. The other GI had several holes in his abdomen and was unconscious. The aid station surgeon, Captain William Zimmerman, said, "Let's get the arm first." I applied sulfa powder and helped bandage the stump. I lit a cigarette for the lieutenant and placed it between his trembling lips. "Thanks," he whispered. He sat on a litter with his back against a box.

We then worked on the lad with the belly wounds. There was little hope for him. There were vital organs in that area, and he had so many holes. We sprinkled sulfa powder all over his belly and put on a compression bandage.[25]

We heard a "clunk" and checked the lieutenant. He was lying on the floor, dead. The GI with the belly wounds, however, lived and returned to his company a few months later. You never bat a

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[25] Combat medics provided very basic first aid. We were to protect wounds from infection, control pain, and stabilize the wounded man so that he could be transported back to a medical clearing station where he could receive emergency medical care from a physician or surgeon and other trained medical personnel. The combat medic had to adjust to the rapid transition from periods of relative quiet to the hellacious, feverish activity of diagnosis, stabilization, and evacuation of the wounded under enemy (and sometimes friendly) fire. We had minimal equipment. All training and supplies were predicated on the assumption that there would be no running water. Each soldier carried an all-purpose Carlyle bandage on his belt. The combat medic carried several Carlyles plus packets of sulfa powder, a few morphine syrettes, and a supply of emergency medical tags. If possible, the medic would fill out a form (EMT) so that the next person treating the wounded would know what the injury was and what treatment had been given, for often the wounded would be unconscious upon arrival at the next station. The empty morphine syrette was attached to the EMT or the patient's clothing to insure that the patient did not receive a second dose. Bleeding was stopped with pressure and the wound securely bandaged. The tourniquet was used sparingly to prevent oxygen starvation to limbs. Sucking chest wounds were not readily treated by the combat medic for the vaselined gauze used to stop the flow of air through the hole was not always available. Broken bones were immobilized with whatever the environment provided. First choice was an army medical splint, followed by sticks, rolled papers, or a blanket, each bound tightly to immobilize the joint above and below the fracture. Sulfa powder was sprinkled on open wounds. Water was not given to wounded men with abdominal perforations, for that could lead to partially digested material within the abdominal organs being flushed out into the abdominal cavity, compounding the problems and even causing the death of the man. Combat medics were told that when they were faced with a situation for which they had not received training, they should still do something. Chances were that you would do the right thing even if you did not know why. We were instructed never to let a man die because we did nothing.

thousand when you play God. At Herrlisheim, hell and health met at the hands of the combat medic and were forever after united.

Late one night Colonel Ingrahm Norton, commander of the 56th Infantry, came into the aid station. Captain Zimmerman offered him a canteen cup of hot coffee. As the colonel hugged the warmth of the stainless steel container, he passed his haggard eyes over the scene: our sparse aid station, an unconscious wounded GI on a litter. He had already passed the pile of bodies awaiting the Graves Registration team. After a few minutes the captain asked how things were going.

The colonel spoke in halting phrases. "I can account for . . . about 100 men . . . of the 56th . . . right now." He choked back dry sobs as he spoke. He was a very miserable man.[26]

Aid stations treated more than body wounds. Combat took its toll on the mind, too. It was not that everybody went crazy, but many men needed a kind word and a little reassurance. It was not easy to accept the loss of buddies that you had slept, eaten, worked, and played beside for months or years. Even the most hardy had difficulty facing the fact that they might die in the next hour, the next day, the next week.

Into this Hell the hand and voice of the chaplain was sometimes the best medicine. The following is a condensation of a recollection by First Lieutenant Lee Ghormley of the 66th Infantry about a night at Herrlisheim:

> God, it's cold. Today is tomorrow and yesterday is today and Rohrwiller is Bischwiller and Herrlisheim is Hell on earth. A Sergeant moved along the remnants of his platoon, selecting one, then another, for a short rest back at the 82nd Medical Battalion Aid Station in Bischwiller.
>
> There, those tired and bearded men of mercy, the Medics, moved about, zephyr-like, administering aid, comfort and relieving the pain of the wounded, frozen and exhausted. Saving lives, that's what they were doing. God Yes, saving lives!
>
> In another room, a group of tired, cold men with hollow hearts and sunken eyes, sat and smoked a cigarette in peace. These were the darkest days of that grim, horrible war for most of the men; for many, their last.
>
> They were gathered around a Chaplain frying cheeseburgers on a small stove. He placed them into grimy hands, offering words of encouragement, reminders of home or some sincere tribute to a fallen or missing comrade; speaking their language, renewing their faith and fanning the embers of the will to live within the bodies of bearded things that had almost forgotten that they were men, human beings.
>
> A GI muttered, "This is the best kind of religion." Grimy, battered GIs, most of whom had not smiled in days, looked at each other and grinned. They were ready to go back up. The Chaplain had done his work well.[27]

Private first class Robert Hooper, my ambulance driver, was Pennsylvania Dutch. He looked like Bing Crosby and played the guitar. He would sing "He's Too Old to Cut the Mustard Anymore" and "The Big White Bird" as he drove. The crew of a German eighty-eight

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[26] Many of the missing men had been surrounded in Herrlisheim. Some were captured, a few escaped, and many were killed.

[27] Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 92.

millimeter gun would fire at vehicles as we sped along a short stretch of road. Eventually Hooper was dodging wrecks along the way. We would both sing to take our patients' minds off the danger of a shell that might blast us into oblivion at any instant. Hoop always got us through.

One night after taking a load of wounded back to our clearing station, a primitive emergency room, Hoop had to service the ambulance. Captain Campbell asked me to hold the plasma bottle while he amputated the leg of a badly shattered young man. As Campbell proceeded with the surgery, I felt tunnel vision setting in and knew it was just a matter of time until I passed out. I focused on the eyes of a surgical technician and prayed he would notice me. As my legs buckled, he rushed up and grabbed the plasma bottle as I fell. In a couple of minutes, I got up and drank a cup of hot coffee. Hoop stuck his head in the door and hollered for me, and we went back for another load of wounded.

A tired bunch of survivors left the Herrlisheim area. As we pulled out, we realized we had neither changed clothes nor slept for eight days. How did we stay awake? Well, if you were as scared as we were, you would not sleep either!

After the battle the 12th was rated by the 7th Army as "at one-third effective strength and unsuitable for combat." We immediately received 13 officers and 1,089 enlisted men as replacements.[28]

The 82nd Armored Medical Battalion was awarded the Presidential Meritorious Service Unit Plaque for its role during Herrlisheim. The 12th was awarded a battle star.

As an inexperienced and green division, we had made a lot of mistakes but not as many as the enemy. We also learned a lot. We had been outnumbered and had possessed inferior tanks. We may have bent, but the Germans did not break through our thin line. Hitler did not get his Atlantic port. The battle of Herrlisheim did not receive much notice in the press. All the correspondents were up north covering the big story, the mop-up of the Germans in the Ardennes. Had the Germans broken through our lines, all the correspondents would have flocked down to cover the story. But the Germans had taken notice: they now respectfully called us "The Suicide Division."[29]

In the French First Army

After Herrlisheim we were assigned to the French First Army, commanded by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, later Marechal de France. This was one of the few times in United States history that American troops served under a foreign flag. Our mission was to drive the Germans from the Colmar pocket.

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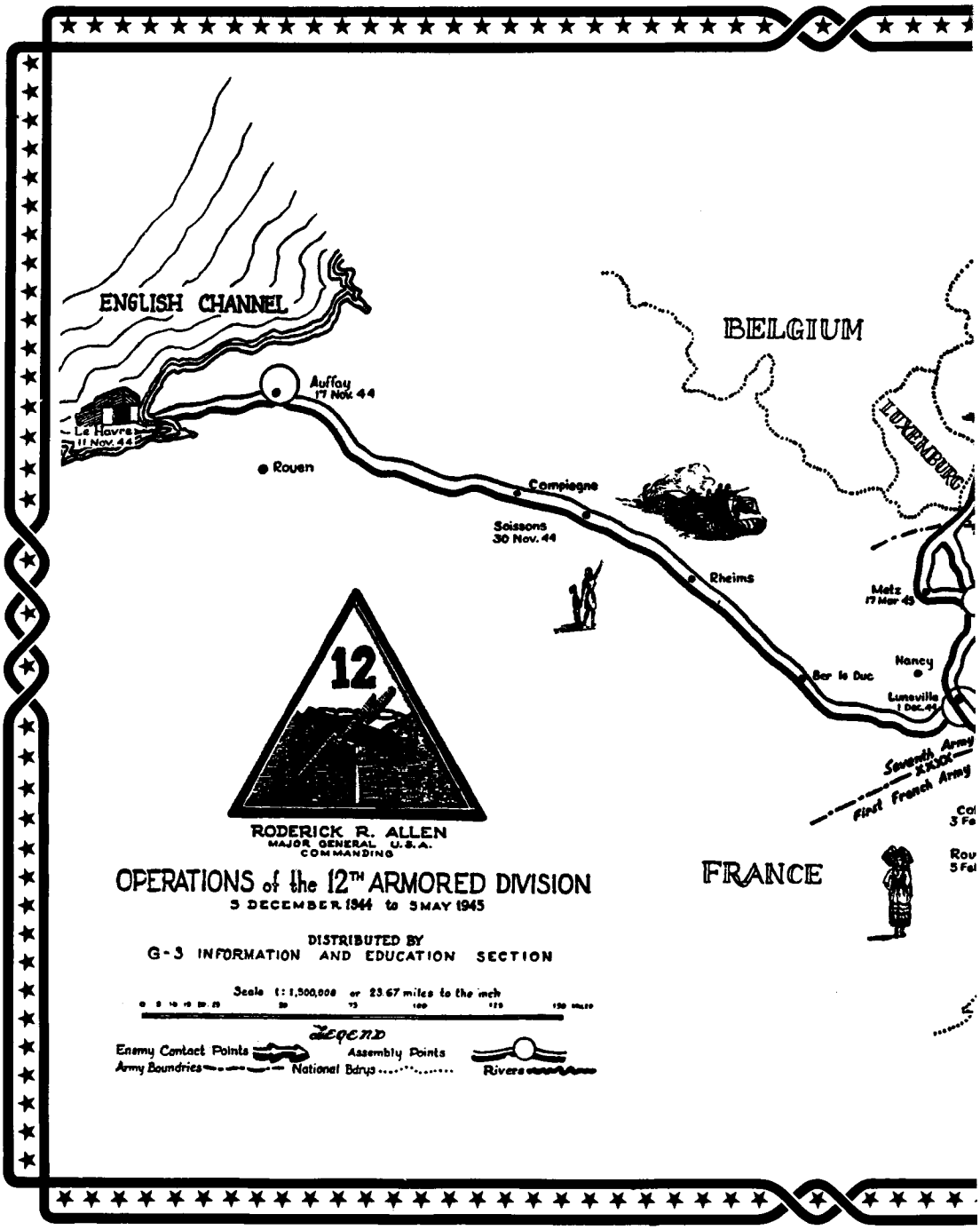
[28] *Ibid.*, 77.
[29] *Ibid.*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17 Mar 45
Nancy
Bar le Duc
Luneville
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First French Army
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RODERICK R. ALLEN
MAJOR GENERAL U.S.A.
COMMANDING
OPERATIONS of the 12TH ARMORED DIVISION
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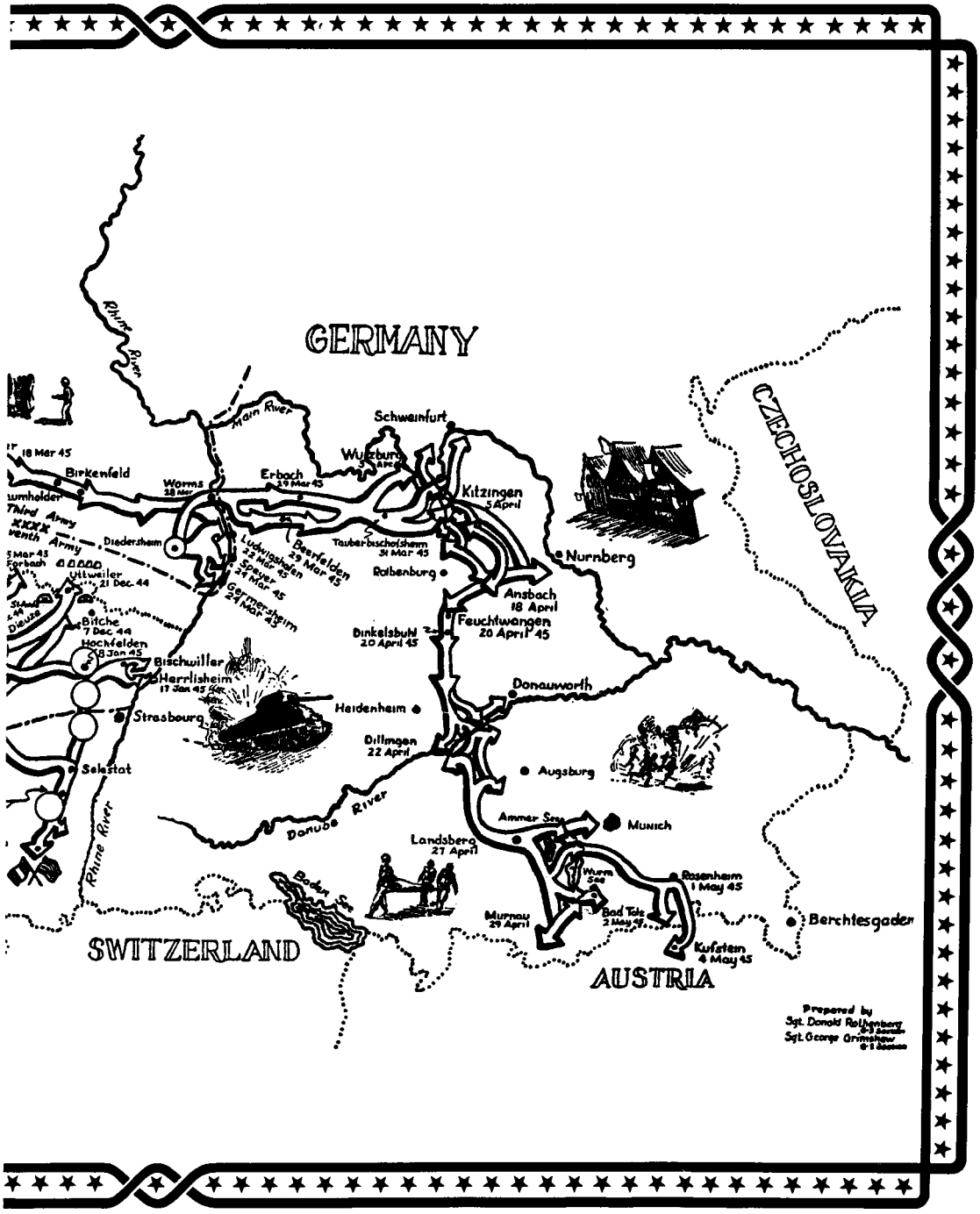

Courtesy the author.

Hooper and I took Lieutenant Riley and a billeting party of three into the city of Colmar. Later we found we were the first six GIs to enter that historic town. Riley picked the University of Colmar building for our treatment station.

That night a small group of German soldiers who had holed up in a building across the street from us tried to escape in the darkness. Within a few moments we had several casualties right on our doorstep. Later, huge shells from a railway gun across the Rhine dropped into our area. One shell hit the roof of our building. Tile and bricks rained down upon our ambulance.

The next day Hoop and I supported the 17th Infantry Battalion. We served alongside the French Moroccan troops. They fought from horseback, and we witnessed what may have been the last cavalry charge on the western front. It was quite a sight as a few hundred white-robed men armed with long rifles mounted their steeds and raced down the hill onto a plain to charge a German outpost.

During this action, ambulance driver T 5 Lawrence Keller and his aid man, Fred Santoro, were wounded when a shell dropped beside their ambulance. Fred jumped into the ditch and discovered he was next to an old high school buddy whom he had not seen in years. Surprised, Fred yelled, "Joe, what in the world are you doing here?!"[30]

After smashing the Colmar pocket, the 12th rested and trained near Nancy, France. C Company, 82nd Medics spent a couple of weeks in the small village of Basse Vigneulle on the Maginot Line. While here, I had a serious discussion with our combat command surgeon, Major Pennock, about getting an aerial ambulance. I knew the Germans had one called a Storch. I told Pennock that I could fly patients back in minutes in relative comfort compared to the hours it took to drive over rough fields and torn-up roads. The groans of the wounded as we jostled them in the ambulance told us we were compounding the injuries that they had already received. Pennock told me to keep my eye open for a Storch, and if I found one, to hold it and notify him.

With Patton's Third Army

On March 17, 1944, we were transferred to the 3rd Army. All division markings were removed from our vehicles and all 12th Armored patches were removed from our clothing. We were now "The Mystery Division" spearheading Patton's drive to the Rhine.

We broke through the German lines near Trier heading east. Patton's strategy was simple: once you were on the move, keep going. Keep the enemy off balance, never give him time to dig in, and set

[30] In 1985 the widow of Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, Marechal de France, sent me a picture of her late husband with a handwritten note: "Bernard L. Rice, En souvenir de la victoire de Colmar-2 Fevrier 1945. G. de Lattre. 1985."

up a line of defense. Just keep going until you ran out of gasoline or until you met too much resistance. Once more, we went without sleep, but this time it was only for three days.

It was here that we observed the close cooperation between the ground troops and the P-47s of the 9th Air Force. The planes came in right over the trees and shrubs and strafed the German convoys fleeing ahead of us.

Until now we had not realized the wide range of German modes of transportation. They had many bombers, the Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter and the Me 163 rocket-powered fighter, yet a lot of their ground equipment was horse-drawn. After a pass by four P-47s, the roadside was littered with dead and dying horses. Many were still harnessed to struggling survivors. Once, we cut a struggling horse free from its dying mate after giving aid to the German wounded.

When the drive to the Rhine was over, we had captured thousands of German soldiers. Our losses were light. We joined up with the French on March 24 and reverted back to the 7th Army.

No Turning Back

We crossed the Rhine on the pontoon bridge at Worms on March 28. Now there was no turning back. We had to attack and keep moving east. The only alternative, as we saw it, was drowning in the Rhine.

Our first objective was Würzburg. Hooper and I were sent along with the 92nd reconnaissance squadron. Most of the time we were miles ahead of the main body of troops. Evacuating the wounded led to some harrowing moments.

Three B Company men never forgot George Wenrick, of A Company 714th Tank Battalion, and George never forgot them. In one horrible instant George's lower jaw had been removed by a burst from a German machine pistol. Sergeant Frank Thomas, T 4 Richard Hendry, and Pfc. Menzo Van Slyke found him.

They tried to lay George down so they could determine the extent of his injuries and stop the bleeding, but George kept struggling to sit up. Menzo then realized that George's unsupported tongue was falling back into his throat, blocking his air.

Once more Hell and heroism met at the fingertips of a combat medic. Menzo stuck a safety pin through the tip of George's tongue and closed it. Then he tied the safety pin to a shirt button with a piece of string. This kept George's tongue from strangling him when laid down. Then they were able to stop the bleeding.

Back in the states surgeons reconstructed a new jaw from George's hip bone. Muscle and skin from his abdominal wall were sculpted into facial tissue. It took them six years to form George's new face.

PONTOON BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER RHINE AT WORMS, 1945

Photograph by Robert Spring. Courtesy the author.

MEDICAL SUPPLY TRUCK ENTERING SAARBRUCKEN, GERMANY

Photograph by Robert Spring. Courtesy the author.

Menzo Van Slyke was written up for a Silver Star for saving George's life, but a combat command surgeon vetoed it because the proper antiseptic procedures had not been followed![31]

Lieutenant Bill Roark, our ambulance platoon leader, decided to give his driver, Corporal Byron Young, a rest and asked Private Kenny Zaraco to drive him. Zaraco wondered if he could finish his coffee first. Roark replied that he would find someone else. Company Clerk Loren Cluff jumped at the chance to drive the jeep, but his superior, Lieutenant George Reilly, objected because Cluff had to file a report. Roark then asked Corporal Tom Rhodes of Rochester, Indiana, if he could drive. Tom responded, "Sure, Sir."

They picked up Sergeant Arthur Long and took off for the front. They came to a fork in the road, and Tom took the left fork because he had been at that same route the evening before. Roark told Tom to stop, back up, and take the righthand road. Tom told Roark he had taken the left fork the day before, but Roark insisted he was correct and ordered Tom to go right. About a half mile down the road, German soldiers popped up from foxholes along the road. They were captured. Eventually Long escaped, but Tom and Roark were not freed until the end of the war. Lieutenant Joe Pitari, our assistant platoon leader, now took over the ambulance platoon.

I was with the 17th Infantry near Lorsch, Germany, on April 6, 1945. Two Messerschmitt 262 jet fighter-bombers dived in on us. As I lay facedown on the bank of a small stream, one of their bombs lifted me off the grass. When I finally shook the cobwebs from my brain, I heard the familiar call of "Medic!" I helped pull a wounded GI from a burning halftrack. During the next few minutes the wounded man and I discovered we had both worked for Timm Aircraft back in Van Nuys in the summer of 1942. He had a bad leg wound and a perforated belly. He could have no water. As we evacuated him, he begged for a drink. All I could do was wet his lips with a handkerchief dipped in water. He died shortly after we got him back to the treatment station. I wished I had eased his last moments with a drink, but I would have felt responsible for his death. I still have nightmares about him.

April 8, 1945, was a bad day for A Company, 82nd Medics. They set up a large canvas tent marked with red crosses on its top as a treatment facility. A Luftwaffe pilot strafed the tent, killing both Captain John E. Edge and his patient and wounding another medical officer and four technicians.

Still in early April, as we penetrated deeper into Germany, litter bearers brought into our station two wounded GIs whose jeep

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[31] In the early 1950s George Wenrick went to the 12th Armored Division Association reunion in Chicago. In an elevator he met Menzo Van Slyke. By this time George had a new face. Neither man forgot this meeting, but it was another thirty-five years before they met again. In 1988 the 82nd Medics held their reunion in Columbus, Ohio. George Wenrick and his wife, Sarah, attended our reunion, and he and Menzo met again. George came because he wanted to thank Menzo, Hendry, Thomas, and the 82nd Medics for saving his life. It was an emotional reunion.

had run over a land mine. Both were so badly hurt that I did not immediately recognize my platoon leader, Lieutenant Joe Pittari, and his driver, motor pool Staff Sergeant Fran Charpentier. Charpy had volunteered to drive Pittari, so Corporal Young once more could have a few hours rest. Pittari died of his wounds, but Charpy recovered and lived another fifty years.

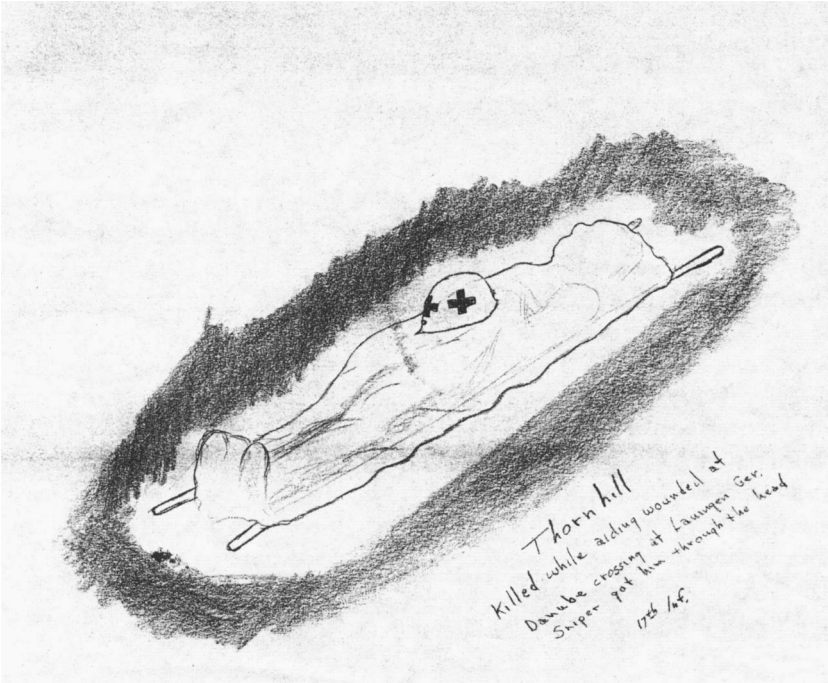
A task force of the 12th raced to the Danube and captured the bridge at Dillingen. Hellcats poured over it and secured the ground on the other side. Our task force, situated a few miles south, was not as fortunate. The Germans blew the bridge at Lauingen, and we had to wait for the engineers to put in a prefabricated steel Bailey bridge.

I was assigned to give medical aid to the engineers for a few hours. While walking along the river bank, I spotted a strange object. I picked it up and hastily discarded it when I realized it was a human ear and a small section of hairy scalp!

I was relieved by one of the best combat medics I knew, Clarence Thornhill. He was a big, hulking young man from Alabama. He was fearless. We called him Churchill. He refused to crawl when lead was flying, saying, "If God wanted me to crawl, he would have put scales on my belly." Shortly after I left, an engineer was shot by a sniper on the opposite side of the river. Thornhill crawled onto a tank to radio for help when the sniper put a bullet through Thornhill's helmet. I sketched his sheet-draped body and helmet as it lay in the aid station.

As this was happening, I had my own problem. The first thing we did upon entering a town was to order all small arms to be turned in at a central spot. Fine hunting rifles and fowling pieces were later smashed by a Sherman tank. This day, a small boy was carrying a shotgun to the collection point. He had it over his shoulder, barrel down. It accidentally discharged, striking another boy about eight or ten years old in the right leg. Luckily, the gun was loaded with small bird shot, not buck shot. Hearing the shot, I ran out and carried the wounded lad in for treatment. The captain said we should not treat him as this was a case of one civilian shooting another. He directed me to a hospital located on a side street a few blocks down the street. I gave the lad a stick of Wrigleys Doublemint chewing gum and he quieted down. I picked him up and started for the hospital. Glancing down a side street, I saw a red cross on a flag flying in front of a building and walked to it. The ground was covered with snow, and the stone steps were icy. The building entrance was one story up from the street. As I carefully ascended, I paid no attention to what was above me until a pair of German boots came into my line of sight. I looked up into the eyes of a German soldier with his rifle at his side.

Still thinking this must be the civilian hospital, I was taken by surprise. I asked the soldier to bring his officer. He stepped inside and returned in a moment with a German medical doctor who spoke



THE AUTHOR'S SKETCH OF A MEDIC KILLED IN ACTION

Courtesy the author.

English. I explained my mission, and he told me to bring the lad in; he would remove the shot and bandage the leg. I followed him into a corridor and soon discovered wounded German soldiers standing at each doorway. I knew right then that the wounded boy was my ticket out of there. I followed the doctor to a small operating room where he removed the shot while I kept the boy calm. It did not take long, although the lad began to cry. I sure did not want to walk the gauntlet with a crying German boy. I gave him another stick of gum; he quit crying; and with the German doctor leading the way, we walked back down the corridor to the front door. By now my presence must have been known to everybody, for the corridor was lined with German wounded. I kept my head high, looked straight ahead, and walked out, negotiating the slippery steps with deliberate care and walked to the main street of town. I turned the corner and only then did my legs turn to rubber! I had blundered into the German military hospital by mistake.

That night Hooper and I were sent to an interrogation center in Dillingen, where a wounded German soldier awaited evacuation to a hospital. We found our patient lying on a litter, fear etched on his face. As we picked up the litter, one of the intelligence officers who had been questioning the wounded man remarked, "I'd like to

shoot that son of a bitch." I thought to myself, "Somebody beat you to him, don't you see?" Apparently the German had not cooperated with his questioner. After we loaded him into the ambulance, I shined my flashlight onto his face, and he smiled his thanks. He was just another wounded man, glad the war was over for him. He was no threat to anyone.

On April 12 Hooper and I were winding among some small hills in our ambulance. A jeep driver told us a plane had been shot down ahead of us. Hoop and I raced past the line of vehicles and found one of our Cub artillery spotter planes in a small meadow alongside the road. (You may remember that flying a spotter plane was the duty I had asked for a year before.) A shell had hit the plane just behind the observer, who received a sucking chest wound, and the pilot was also in pretty bad shape with head wounds. We sprinkled the hole with sulfa powder, plugged the chest hole with vaselined gauze, and taped it securely. We then treated the pilot's wounds and bandaged him. Both men appeared to be survivors when we transferred them to an evacuation hospital ambulance, so I figured we had saved their lives. In 1986, however, another artillery pilot, Pete du Pont, told me that both had later died. Had someone been looking over me?

Dachau

On April 26 strange people wearing ragged clothing began straggling to the 12th Division's rear. They were obviously fleeing something. Up close we saw that they were emaciated; their bodies were just skin over bone. They spoke in high-pitched, almost birdlike voices. They carried nothing. They could hardly put one foot ahead of the other. Their only clothing was thin, striped rags although the air was cold.

Words cannot describe their eyes. They, too, had seen death daily, but not as we had. They had been staring at their own deaths for years. The death they saw, however, was a light at the end of a very dark tunnel.

This was our first encounter with the German concentration camps. The people we met were inmates who had escaped from a satellite of the Dachau camp as the Germans retreated.[32] We were not prepared for this. We had seen death almost daily during the previ-

[32] Dachau, located about ten miles northwest of Munich, was one of the first concentration camps established by Nazi Germany. It opened in March, 1933, and originally housed political opponents of the Nazis and criminals. With the rise of systematic persecution of Jews and the beginning of German expansion, Dachau's inmate population swelled with Jewish prisoners and those who resisted German expansion. During the war, Dachau became an important source of slave labor, especially in arms industries. Thirty-seven subsidiary camps, along with other smaller installations, were built to house armaments workers. Toward the end of the war Dachau received large numbers of inmates from other camps the Germans were forced to abandon as they retreated. Plans were drawn up for the killing of all prisoners, but before they could be carried out, elements of the American 7th Army began to overrun the Dachau

ous five months, but the dead up to now were mostly one or two at a time. Even our bloodiest battle could not prepare us for Dachau. There we found hundreds of dead. Some lay in grotesque piles, some neatly stacked like cordwood, others thrown helter skelter into a pit.

This was Hitler's "Final Solution," eliminate all of Europe's Jews and anyone else who opposed Hitler. Words cannot describe what we saw nor the feelings of revulsion we felt.

Combat Medic Fred Santoro, of Sandusky, Ohio, said the task force he was supporting opened the gates at a railroad siding that led into Dachau. He saw boxcars loaded with bodies.

Ambulance driver Alan Starck from Darian, Illinois, and his aid man, Pfc. Edmund Sorola from San Antonio, Texas, arrived at a locked gate. Starck opened it. He thought he was a liberator, the finest person in the world. He was promptly ordered by a lieutenant to close that gate! Al's protests that these people should not become "our captives" bounced off deaf ears.

As I approached the camp, a building was burning inside an open gate. The German guards had herded a bunch of captives into a barracks and set it on fire only minutes before. Then the guards had vanished, blending into the civilian population. Some survivors told of their mothers, fathers, and children being burned alive. An occasional moan from the pitiful pile of scorched bodies and the twitch of an arm or leg testified that not all had met their final moment of doom.

The jumble of black, scorched bodies lying in the smoking embers contrasted with the hundreds of white, naked bodies nearby. The Germans probably intended to dispose of these bodies in a nearby crematorium. A horse-drawn wagon, minus the horse, stood partially loaded alongside a stack of bodies. Had a guard run off with the horse?

The next day Pfc. Al Pheterson, of Rochester, New York, who had been in the ASTP with me, entered that same gate. Al had a camera. He knew that if he asked an officer for permission to take pictures, he would be told, "No," so he just took pictures without asking. Later he developed them himself at a German photo lab. He brought the negatives back home with him. I met him on June 19, 1997, at our annual reunion in Louisville. He asked me if I would like to see his scrapbook. I did. There were the scenes I had been trying to bury for fifty-two years. The burned bodies. The dead lying in the area.

The events in the following paragraphs occurred after we passed through, but the stories were told around the division.

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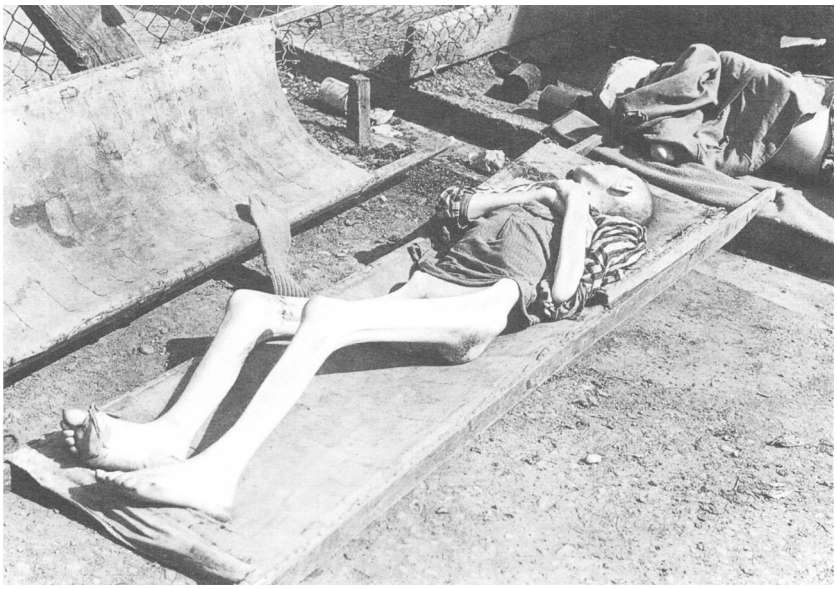
camps. The main camp was liberated on April 29, 1945. Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (4 vols., New York, 1990), I, 339-43. See also Paul Berben, *Dachau, 1933–1945: The Official History* (London, 1975); Feig Konnilyn, *Hitler's Death Camps* (New York, 1981); Marcus J. Smith, *Dachau: The Harrowing of Hell* (Albuquerque, N.M., 1972).

BURNED BODIES LAID OUT FOR BURIAL AND GERMAN CIVILIANS AT DACHAU

Photograph by Al Pheterson. Courtesy Al Pheterson and the author.

VICTIMS OF DACHAU

Photograph by Al Pheterson.
Courtesy Al Pheterson and the author.



VICTIM OF DACHAU

Photograph by the author.

BURNED BODIES IN THE ASHES OF A BURNED-OUT BUILDING AT DACHAU

Photograph by Al Pheterson. Courtesy Al Pheterson and the author.

The administrators of the Landsberg camp had fled. A search team, however, soon found the camp commandant and brought him back. He said he had been responsible only for what happened outside of the enclosure. He blamed a doctor as the real culprit.

Colonel Edward Seiller, the head of the 12th Armored Division military government team rounded up a bunch of local civilians and brought them into the camp. They, of course, protested their ignorance of what had gone on inside the camp. Seiller asked them why they could not smell the camp as we could. Did these "good Germans" feel the same horror and revulsion that swept through us? We wondered.

Seiller then produced the camp commandant, stood him among the partially burned corpses, and told the Germans that this man was responsible for the deaths.[33]

The civilians, seeing our strength and feeling that Hitler's dream of a "Thousand Years of Enlightenment" was now over, made quite a show of wanting to kill the camp commandant right on the spot. What else should we have expected?[34]

Once we crossed the Rhine, the division was covering a wide front. There were many roads heading east and south, so they split the combat commands into task forces, usually a company each of infantry, tanks, and artillery. These task forces were then assigned an objective and a route and were under the command of the ranking officer. Usually each task force had an ambulance attached to it. We stayed with the task force as much as possible but had to leave it occasionally to take wounded back to the rear.

I Find My Storch

May 1 found us on the autobahn south of Munich. As we drove alongside a German airfield, I was amazed to see hundreds of airplanes of all types sitting on the ground. The task force stopped as the lead tank met some resistance. Huge snowflakes drifted gently down upon everything, making a fairyland of the war zone. I enjoyed the enchanting moment.

Then, faintly through the snow, I saw a red cross on an airplane. My brain could not believe what my eyes were telling it. There was a German ambulance plane, the Feisler Storch. At last Major Pennock and Pfc. Rice would have their aerial ambulance. I left Hoop-

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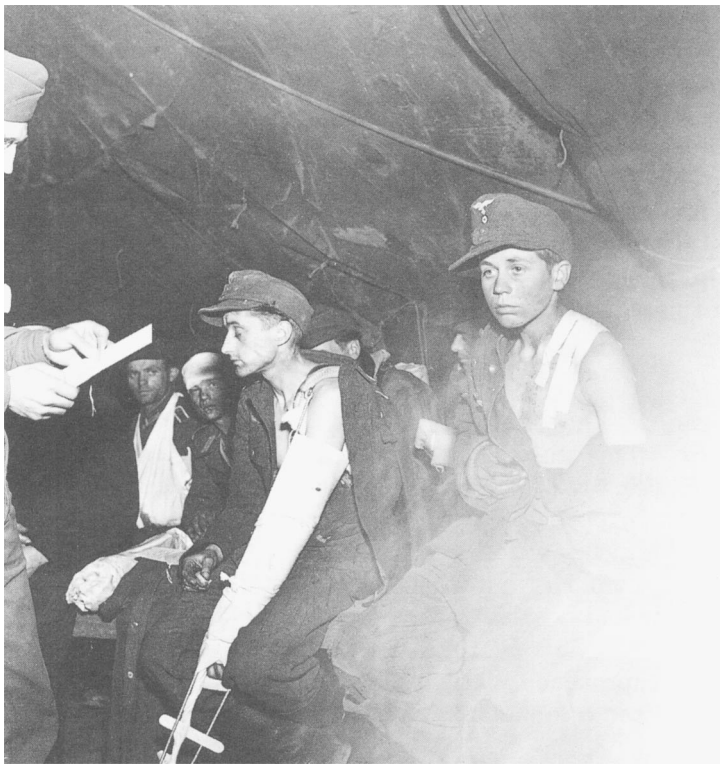
[33] Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 115.

[34] In 1986, at the 12th ADA Reunion aboard the Hotel Queen Mary, Long Beach, California, I met Harold Gordon and his wife of Salinas, California. The 12th had liberated Harold while he was a captive of the Nazis at the Landsberg camp. He addressed the assembled Hellcats and thanked us for the last forty-one years of his life. Harold has since written a book about his life in a concentration camp, his struggle to get himself and his father to the United States, and his meeting with his wife. Harold Gordon, *The Last Sunrise, a True Story: Biography of a Ten-Year-Old Boy in Nazi Concentration Camps during World War II* (Salinas, Calif., 1989).

er in the ambulance and ran to the plane. I stuck my bare hand under the cowling and felt the warm cylinders. It had been flown within the past half hour. I crawled up into the fuselage, noted a stretcher in place behind the pilot's seat, and sat down. As I studied the instruments, I saw the gas gauge read empty. That was why the pilot did not fly it away.

My concentration was broken by a strange noise. Glancing out the left window, a Sherman tank was roaring down on me. It was crushing the tails of the planes into the mud. I jumped out and tried to stop the tank driver. I was yelling at the wind. He could not hear me. The tank ran over the Storch's tail, and I watched the steel tubes bend, then poke through torn fabric. Tank treads flattened the aft of the plane into instant junk. There went my dream of an aerial ambulance. It made no practical difference, for our fighting days were numbered and we would evacuate just a few wounded in the following days.



YOUNG GERMAN SOLDIERS NEAR THE END OF THE WAR

Photograph by Robert Spring. Courtesy the author.

Werner von Braun

On May 2 Colonel Frederick P. Fields, 714th Tank Battalion, commanding Task Force Fields of the 12th was about to move out of Benediktbueren, Bavaria, when a gray jeep slid to a stop in the foot of snow beside him. He looked down at a United States Navy captain and his pea-jacketed driver. Our navy? In southern Germany? The captain said he needed a battalion of tanks and a battalion of infantry to capture and secure a German supersonic wind tunnel guarded by an SS unit up in the mountains.

When Fields said he did not have a force that large, the captain showed him some impressive letters signed by President Roosevelt, Admiral Ernest King, General George Marshall, Generals Eisenhower and A. M. Patch, each requesting that all possible aid be given to the captain.

Fields assigned him one platoon of tanks and one platoon of infantry, requesting they keep in radio contact with him. He then left as he had been assigned to capture Innsbruck, Austria. He lost radio contact with his splinter group soon after. Later, Fields ran into a blown bridge that he could not get around, and as he had no bridge building equipment with him, he backtracked into Kochel.

There on the veranda of a hotel was the navy captain, talking to a civilian with a broken arm. The captain introduced Fields to Dr. Werner von Braun. Von Braun showed Fields his wind tunnel, but Fields was not very impressed. He told me a few years before he died that it looked like a lot of junk to him. But he did remember that von Braun complained loudly that someone had stolen his bicycle!

That was how the men of the 12th happened to capture the rocket scientist who decades later would help the United States place men on the moon. He was just one of the estimated eight thousand Germans taken prisoner that day by the 12th.[35]

Overtime

Did you know that World War II went into overtime? It did for the 12th.[36] This story features Captain John C. Lee, Jr., Lieutenant Harry Basse, two tank crews from the 23rd Tank Battalion, and four infantrymen.

Captain Lee was the commanding officer of B Company, 23rd Tank Battalion. His unit stopped at Kufstein, where a captured German major told Lee several important French people were captives in Castle Itter near Wörgl, Austria. Lee and the German left in a jeep and approached Wörgl under a flag of truce. The German soon convinced the commandant in Wörgl that the war was over, many

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[35] Personal conversation with Colonel Frederick P. Fields. His story is documented in Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 175.

[36] Bradstreet, *Hellcats*, 53, 175.

American tanks were coming, and this was the time to surrender. Lee decided to rescue the people in Castle Itter.

The duo returned to Kufstein, crawled into Lee's tank, "Besotten Jinny," and led six other tanks and a half-dozen infantrymen toward Wörgl. German soldiers surrendered to them, and Lee's men found explosives wired to the bridge into town. The prisoners defused the explosives and threw them into the river below.

"Besotten Jinny" and Lieutenant Basse's "Boche Buster" crossed the quivering bridge. They decided the engineers would have to reinforce it before another tank could pass over. Lee took four infantrymen atop his two-tank task force and headed into Wörgl. The rest of his troops returned to notify the engineers of the bridge.

Once in town, Lee left "Boche Buster" and three infantrymen in command of Tech Sergeant William Elliot to secure the town. Lee and his tank crew, Basse, the German major, and the remaining infantryman took off in "Besotten Jinny" for Castle Itter.

"Boche Buster" was to relay radio messages between "Besotten Jinny" and headquarters back in Kufstein. The infantryman led the way around the curving mountain road. He discovered that the SS had set up a roadblock just short of the castle. Rather than sit and fight it out, Lee decided to charge the roadblock. Firing his guns to keep the German defenders' heads down, he ran the gauntlet of fire and sped up the road. "Besotten Jinny" slid to a stop in the driveway of the castle, blocking the entrance.

An eighty-eight millimeter gun concealed in the brush along the mountainside fired at the tank. Lee fired back. "Besotten Jinny" was hit six times. The last shell hit the gas tank and flames erupted. As the crew bailed out of the burning tank, they grabbed the thirty-caliber machine gun and some ammunition. A hail of SS bullets followed the men as they dashed to the castle gate. It opened at once, and they felt safe behind those stone walls.

Then they met the "important people" they had come to rescue. There were two former French premiers, Edouard Daladier and Paul Reynaud; Madam Alfred Cailliau, a sister of Charles de Gaulle; French Generals Leon Jouhax, Maxime Weygand, and Maurice Gustave Gamelin; Madam Weygand; former French minister M. Caillaux; Jean Borotra, tennis star and French minister of sports and Madam Borotra; French fascist Colonel de la Roehe; Michel Clemenceau, son of the French leader during World War I, and a few others who were lesser known.

To this impressive list must be added some unnamed but very important people. There was a second German major and his dozen Wehrmacht soldiers who had guarded these prisoners for many months. They had surrendered to the inmates just before the American tank arrived at the castle gate. These German soldiers were afraid the SS would now kill them for not continuing to fight, so they volunteered to help fight off the SS that were attacking the castle

from all sides. Captain Lee immediately gave the Germans their rifles and assigned them to windows where they began to take a toll on their former brothers-in-arms.

It was a strange alliance of American, French, and German peoples: soldiers, diplomats, politicians, and ordinary citizens, fighting together in common defense against a hated, vicious, and unscrupulous enemy.

That night the battle tapered off, and little firing took place. With the dawn the SS moved in. They were crack shots, and the number of wounded within the castle began to mount. The ladies within tended to the wounded and tried to rouse someone at the telephone exchange in Wörgl. As the morning wore on, the situation became truly serious. Their only link to the outside world was that one telephone line into the castle, but no one in Wörgl was answering.

When things looked bad, Jean Borotra volunteered to jump over the castle wall, run forty yards across an exposed field to the woods, and dash through the mountain pass to contact the troops in Wörgl. Lee vetoed the plan, saying it was suicide.

Half an hour later, however, their ammunition was low; there were more wounded; and the German major who had led them to the castle had been shot in the head and killed as he fought alongside Lieutenant Basse. Lee concluded that they might all be annihilated if help did not arrive soon. So Borotra took off.

As Borotra disappeared over the wall, the women yelled that someone in Wörgl had opened the telephone line. They would be rescued after all! But before they could utter a word, the line went dead. Borotra's dash was not suicide, for he was reported to be with the rest of the released captives that night at a hotel on the shore of Lake Constance where they were welcomed back by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny.[37]

That little coalition within Castle Itter had held off the SS for sixteen hours before they saw Sherman tanks working their way up the road. Lee assumed the tankers coming up the road did not know who was in the castle. But he knew his tankers would see the burned-out hulk of the "Besotten Jinny" and, assuming the castle was still a German stronghold, simply blast away at him.

Lee and General Weygand teamed up on the thirty-caliber machine gun and opened fire into the woods far ahead of the lead tank. This message was understood. Sergeant Elliot in the lead tank had his ninety-millimeter gun trained on the castle when he recognized the sound of the American machine gun and decided it was a signal instead of a threat.

The relief column, assisted by men from the 36th Infantry Division, broke through at 3:00 p.m. on May 5. They rounded up the surviving SS and took them prisoner. Lee and his men returned to

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[37] *Ibid.*, 122.

Kufstein to learn that the Germans had signed a surrender document and that the war was to end at noon on May 5. These men of the 12th had gone into "overtime" by three hours!

This was the last combat sortie on the southern front of the European theater in World War II.

Peace

What a time. Hoop and I sat down and tried to figure how many days we had spent behind the German lines. We agreed that it was up to thirty, but from there on our memories differed. But we had survived. We had to drink to that! (Just about everybody drank. Some drank to forget what they had seen, and some drank to forget what they had done. Some fellows said only a fool had a hangover: you should never sober up in the first place!) We quickly worked our way through that phase of life and settled down to occupation duty in a small town of Sneidheim, just north of Heidenheim.

Late that summer I was notified that I had qualified for the Combat Medic Badge, which later led to my being awarded a Bronze Star by direction of President John F. Kennedy.

The 12th was then broken up, and the GIs sent to various military outfits. I went to the 47th Medical Battalion of the 1st Armored Division, then based at Mannheim, Germany. Most of the men of the 1st had seen combat in North Africa and Italy and in the invasion of southern France. They had earned their trip home and left early that summer. I spent a couple of months in Idstein before moving to Bensheim.

My turn to go home came in February. I arrived in Antwerp, Belgium, ready to board a ship when they declared me "essential." I had to work at the dispensary at the port until another surgical technician came through with fewer points. After a delay of a couple of weeks, I boarded the *Robin Victory* bound for New York. I was now a part of the three-man medical staff of the *Robin*. After a stormy crossing, we passed the Statue of Liberty and disembarked at Hoboken, New Jersey. After a fast train ride to Fort Dix, I was informed that they would fly me to California that night on an Air Transport Command DC-4. During the last days in the Army, I finally got to fly—as a passenger. That was okay with me. I was discharged on March 23, 1946, and spent the day riding a bus back to Van Nuys, California. I returned to Indiana the next week.

Looking Back

December, 1997, will mark the fifty-fifth anniversary of my induction into the Army. Looking back, it seems as though I am watching a young man I used to know go off to war. I had no idea when I left home that I would share experiences that would last a lifetime. I am amazed at the depth of feelings born of those days in com-

bat. For the first thirty-five years after the war, I tried desperately to forget. I was only partially successful; there was much that refused to be forgotten. When I was contacted in 1980 to attend a reunion of the 82nd Medics, I had no interest in stirring up old memories. My wife Norma, however, wanted to meet the men I had mentioned over the years. We went. I found it to be good therapy. I learned that I had handled things pretty well by myself, although not as well as Tom Rhodes and Art Long, who cannot recall much about being prisoners of war. I met once again Truman Stivers; Max Eagelfeld, a genius who could not dig his own foxhole; Eddie Sorola; Sergeant Curtiss Slaughter, who was never born but quarried from solid granite; and others. Many more are simply among the missing.

At our first reunion I asked one of my old sergeants why he had sent Hooper and me out on what looked like suicide missions, those days with the reconnaissance troopers when we had to fend for ourselves in enemy-infested territory. His answer was simple: you kept coming back!