

WORLD WAR II EXPERIENCES OF CARL J. LYONS – MANUSCRIPT

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Mr. Kenneth G. Bradstreet

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Dear Mr. Bradstreet

I understand you are looking for material for a new history of the 12th A.D. With this I am sending a copy of my "diary" written in June 1945 for my parents. I also have a lot of pictures in an album which I will bring to the reunion in San Antonio.

The diary was based on my best recollections after combat. My unit was 1st platoon, Company A, 17th AIB. I started out as a Pfc machine gunner and wound up T/Sgt of 1st platoon.

Hopefully, this may be of some use to you. If not, send it back, my family can always use a copy.

Sincerely,

Carl J. Lyons

THE GREAT DAYS

Personal Experiences in World War II

Carl J. Lyons

DECISIONS AND OPERATIONS OF
CO. A, 17TH ARMORED INFANTRY BATTALION

Camp Parzolos, Sept 8, 1944	Boulay	Mar 11
Camp Shanks, N. Y., Sept 11-19	Bouzonville	
Embark NYPC E HMT Empress of Australia, Sept 20 th	Sierck-les-Bains, France	
Disembark Liverpool, Eng. Oct 2	Berg, Germany	
Camp "R", Oct 3-6	Remick, Luxembourg	
_____ Camp Tidworth Barracks, Oct 6 – Nov 11	Saarburg, Germany	
Embark Southampton HMT Antenor	Trier	
Disembark Le Harve, France Nov 18	Hofchen	Mar 18
Chateau de Bosmelet, Auffay, Seine Inferieur, Nov 13-30	Birkenfeld	Mar 19
Campaigne, Nov 30 – Dec 8	Baumholden	
Scissons	Otterberg	Mar 20
Rheims	Eisenberg	
Bar le Dun	Vicinity of Worms	
Luneville, Dec 3-6	Monsheim	Mar 21
Binning, Dec 7 – First Action	Grunstadt	Mar 22-24
Rohrback, Dec 9-10	Bad-Durkheim	
Hoelling, Dec 10-16	Iggleheim	
Eywiller, Dec 16-20	Hanhofen	
Rohrback (or Binning) Barracks, Dec 21-27	Lustadt	
Insviller, Dec 27 – Jan 7, 1945	Germersheim	
Schweighausen, Jan 7 – 16	Neustadt	Mar 25
Offendorf Plain, Jan 16	Mussbach	
Herrlisheim, Jan 17	Hassloch	Mar 26
_____derheim, Jan 18	Mussbach	Mar 27
Weyersheim, Jan 19	Cross Rhine, south Worms	Mar 28
Schwerighausen, Jan 20	Lampertheim	Mar 28
Geugenheim	Lorsch	
Kleinfrankenheim, Jan 21-25	Beerfelden	Mar 29 – 30
Breuschwickersheim, Jan 25 – Feb 2	Mudau	
Colmar, Feb 3	Schillingstadt	Mar 31
Eguisheim, Feb 4	Boxberg	
Obermarschwith	Sachenflur (Koenigshofen)	April 1
Herrlisheim pres Colmar	Herrnberchtheim	Apr 3-4
Niederhergeheim, Feb 5	Seinsheim	Apr 5
Niederentzen, Feb 6	Einersheim	Apr 6
Cherentzen	Unter Ickelsheim	Apr 6-8
	Ippesheim	Apr 9

Voegtlinshofen, Feb 7-9	Wergenheim	Apr 10
Eywiller, Feb 10-13	Scenheim	Apr 11
Zimming Barracks, Feb 13 Mar 9	Ober Schechpach	
Karlsbrunn Forest – vicinity of Gross Rosseln,	Aub	Apr 12
Zimming Barracks, Mar 14-17	Rudolzhofen, vicinity	Apr 13
Westheim, Apr 15	of Uffenheim	
Virnsberg, Apr 17	Bergbernheim	Apr 14
Neustetten	Bergel	
Brunst, Apr 17	Cross Lech River north	Apr 29
Lehrberg, Apr 18	of Landsberg	
Ansbach	Weilheim	Apr 29
Lauterhausen, Apr 19	Starnberg	Apr 30
Schillingsfurst	Crossed Tsar River north	May 1
Scbach bei Feuchtwangau, Apr 20	Wolfratshausen	
Dinkelsbruhl, Apr 21-22	Pfraundorf	May 1
Kerkingen	Redenfeld	May 3-5
Dopfingen	Fischbach	
Lauchheim, Apr 23	Out of combat	May 6
Lauingen, Apr 24	Munich	May 6
Gundlefingen	Augsburg	
Cross Danube at Lauingen	Donauworth	
Schmittentbach, Apr 25	Pappenheim	May 6-9
Vallreid Air Strip, Apr 26	Monheim	May 9-17
Jettingen, Apr 27	Westheim bei Augsburg	May 17-24
Thannhausen	Augsburg	May 24 – Jun 13
Ettringen	Wort	Jun 13 – Jul 4
Klein Kitzinghofen, Apr 28		

In most cases a single town followed by a single date indicates that the company remained in that town the night of that date. In a series of towns included under a single date, the location last mentioned is the place the company remained in overnight. This list is unofficial, and is not claimed to be correct. However, inaccuracies have been kept to a minimum, and it is as exact as possible under the circumstances.

September 7, 1944

All day we had been busy with last minute preparations for the big move. Finally in the afternoon the company assembled in platoon formation on what was formerly the battalion motor pool for a last minute check. Each man had his entire equipment. After the evening meal, Jensen and I went over to the PX for a couple of beers. We then waited around until 2 in the morning waiting for orders to move down to the trains. It was cold on the gravel of the motor pool but I managed to get in about two hours sleep. Men were crowded into a latrine at the further end of the motor pool trying to get some rest on the cement floor.

Finally early on the morning of the 8th we slung our packs and rifles, grabbed our barracks bags and started the trek to the train. Backs creaked and groaned, but we managed to struggle down to the train. The car I drew was a Pullman and not one of the troop sleepers. Ward and I shared the bottom bunk and Fuchs slept over us.

The train trip was long and hot. Money changed hands every day. T/Sgt. Funk fell sick but upon the insistence of Capt. Helton was retained with the company. I just loved the frequent stops for calisthenics. The only person I could see that enjoyed themselves was Lt. Ebbage; he would trot up and down the length of the train at each halt. It wasn't long before we were thoroughly covered with dirt and grime.

It was a blistering hot day that we pulled into the railroad yard at Camp Shanks, N.Y. Everyone was thoroughly covered with sweat by the time we had struggled up the hill with all our equipment to our barracks. We passed long lines of troops going down to the trains to be taken to the boats. The first few days were spent in checking clothing, insurance, allotments and taking a tough physical. I was lucky enough to get one of the first 12 hour passes issued to the company. Got to New York in the midst of a hurricane and was unable to get home because of the curtailment of trains. Went to see Zula who happened to be in New York; managed to get dried out and get some sleep.

The next night Collier gave me his pass and Jensen and I went into New York to see if I wouldn't have a little more luck at getting home. Missed the train to Red Bank so called Francis and had him meet us at New Brunswick and drive us on to Little Silver. Got the folks up in the middle of the night, ate some cold chicken and spent three hours with them and then Mom and Dad drove John and I up to Jersey City where we caught the train back to Shanks.

Those were the last passes issued to A Company so we knew that it wouldn't be long now. The war news was good. Patton was racing for the Siegfried and everyone knew that all we were slated for was the army of occupation. We were going to do some occupying but some a little different than others.

The chow was wonderful at Shanks; guess all they were doing was fattening us up for the kill.

September 19, 1944

In the evening we picked up all our gear and marched down the hill to a waiting train that took us to Jersey City. There we filed onto a waiting ferry, the send-off was not too terrific; a crowd stared at us as we filed onto the ferry more as if we were a side show at some carnival. The ferry dropped us off at a huge pier in New York while a band played a few numbers and the Red Cross passed out doughnuts and coffee. M.P.s with tommy guns made sure that we were all willing to go overseas. It wasn't long before A Company was filing past the checking officer and I shouted out my name, tugged hard at the duffel bag and started up the gangplank. Before long I found myself in a compartment on E deck right at the water line, a consoling thought. Ward, Fuchs, Gardner from my squad were there.

Early the next morning we sailed out of New York Harbor. None of us poor enlisted men got to see the Statue of Liberty, only the officers. We learned that we were now on the English liner, Empress of Australia, a former luxury liner that before the First World War had been the Kaiser's private yacht.

As soon as we were allowed on deck there was a mad scramble for places at the railing as we were eager to see the convoy form. The fog was thick so we only had occasional glimpses of the ships moving around, but every now and then a fast destroyer would pass us. We soon learned the misery of being guests on His Majesty's Ship. Chow was served twice a day, if you cared to eat the slop. I was fortunate enough to become a table attendant in my compartment, relieving me of any other duties on board the ship. If it wasn't for the PX which sold American candy, we would have starved before the voyage was half over. Sweating out the mesh gear wash line was tortuous because of the steam in the wash room. I guess the officers ate fairly well, at least, they looked better than we did.

In order to pass the time, Jensen and I took to playing gin rummy, before the trip was over I owed him 30 dollars. We studied the stars at night and would have thoroughly enjoyed the trip if it hadn't been for the army and the food.

October 2, 1944

Rumors had been rampant on board ship as to our destination; one minute it was Cherbourg and the next England. By this time anything that smelled of land would have been fine. Boat drill and scrubbing the compartments each morning had everyone in a bad frame of mind.

October 1st we saw the English coast and all evening we seemed to be passing between land which rose on both sides of us. The morning of the 2nd found us anchored off the port of Liverpool. In the evening we docked and were soon disembarking. We struggled up from E deck with all our equipment as an English band vainly tried to cheer us up. Groping our way down an alley we soon were at the rail yard. Through the silence of the night you could hear the cursing of tired GI's as they dropped equipment along the alley. Cozzie was in rare form as he cursed the Army up and down. We got rid of our duffel bags and climbed on an English train. The Red Cross was there with coffee and doughnuts. All night long we flew through the English countryside. The next morning we detrained at Hungerford, a typical little English village. We spent a good part of the day in a grassy field above the town, it was beautiful, just as everyone had pictured England. Overhead droned fleets of C-47's either going to or returning from the bloody fields of Arnheim.

Finally some busses arrived and took us to a muddy camp, Camp "R," where we tried to make ourselves comfortable in the damp cold tents. This was our first experience with the "bucket" type latrine, not too pleasant, I assure you. Johnnie Mazzant was soon proudly telling everyone he was the first one in A Company to have some English money; he kept telling us there wasn't anything to understanding it, but I still haven't become very adept at using it. Jensen and I sneaked off that night and found an English pub and tried their beer; it tasted good to me but John didn't like it too well. It rained all that night and as luck would have it I had to make a few trips suddenly in the middle of the night; before the night was over I was thoroughly covered with mud, tired, cold, and disgusted with the war.

It wasn't really so bad though, just a mile away over on the flight strips the wounded were being flown in hourly. On October 5th we loaded on another fleet of busses and after circling around a few times we were dumped at Pennings Camp just outside of Tidworth. The camp consisted of double rows of squad tents set among the woods. Kelley, Wolfhope, Pap La Rin, Richards, Harding, and I shared a tent. Life here wasn't too bad; it rained too much, the nights were too cold and damp and it was too far to the latrine, the kitchen was in the midst of a sea of mud, PX rations never seemed to come in, but there were better things. Most of us sneaked off to places like Salisbury, Andover, and of course Tidworth. We soon found out about the girls in brown uniforms. Passes started to London and everyone was anxious to find out about the Piccadilly Commandos. I got a pass to London and met a buddy of mine who had been in my platoon during basic training; he was in the artillery of the 12th. We spent a good three days in London seeing the sights but staying out of mischief. We were disappointed that there were no bombing raids while we were there.

A training schedule had started and finally a few half tracks arrived; it was like getting your home back. Finally on November 8th, what few half tracks had arrived took off and we prepared to follow them.

November 10, 1944

In the afternoon we were all packed and ready to move out. In the evening we slung our packs and trekked into Tidworth where a train took us to Southampton. We lugged our equipment miles through the cold, damp morning down to the docks at Southampton. There we got about two hours sleep on the concrete floor of the pier.

Finally on the morning of November 11th we embarked on the HMT Antenor, another English ship. The chow was as lousy as ever and sleeping facilities seemed non-existent. Jensen and I found some slats and managed to get a little sleep. Luckily I managed to pull no details on this short trip across the English Channel.

Late the evening of November 12th we anchored off Le Havre, or to be more exact what was left of it. After about four hours of waiting a large landing barge pulled alongside and we slung our packs and filed down the ladder and jumped into the barge. The sea was rough, and it became dangerous to jump between the ship and the barge, but no casualties were encountered. It was soon pouring rain and after what seemed like an eternity of standing on that swaying barge we heard it hit ground and we commenced to file off. France gave us a roaring welcome, pouring rain and the mud a foot deep. I gave my pack a hoist and slogged through the mud following Gardner past the knocked out pill boxes and the ruins of what must have been a very large port. We soon found ourselves standing in mud puddles in what was once a street; almost all the buildings were demolished and what was left was covered with signs – Watch Out For Booby Traps. It wasn't long before a convoy of trucks picked us up. I was the last one in the truck so I had to sit on the floor which was covered with mud; Broc laid down along side of me and we managed to make ourselves comfortable among the mud and rifles.

After three hours of traveling we were dumped along the road at what appeared to be a desolate spot; it was dark and still raining. We slung our packs and took off cross country; arriving at a huge field in the middle of a woods we were told this was it. Ward and I were too tired to make a pup tent, so we laid my shelter half on the ground, put our sleeping bags on it, pulled his shelter half over us and went to sleep.

Early the next morning I awoke to find myself sleeping in a mud puddle. After getting my equipment together, Wolfhope, Ward and I went looking for wood. We brought plenty in but it was all wet, but it wasn't long before we had a roaring fire going. After that I never was able to get next to it to dry off, all the officers in the battalion seemed gathered around this one fire, guess they couldn't make one for themselves.

In the afternoon company areas were designated in the immediate vicinity. We found that we were on the grounds of the Chateau de Bosmelet. Before the war it must have been a beautiful place, but the Germans had used it as a rocket launching site and it was pretty well bombed out. Nearby was the town of Auffay, France. Most of A Company was billeted in a concrete tunnel the Germans had built to store ammunition. It had an earth floor and was wet. I wasn't lucky enough to get in there so the first night there Kelley, Ward, Fuchs and I pitched our tents together and we slept reasonably well. The next day we found large sheets of tin that we made into what resembled a quonset hut. It was only

four feet in height in the middle and leaked a little, but we built a huge stall in it and filled the stall with hay making a pretty fine bed. Kelley, Ward, Fuchs and I slept here.

We had thought that England was wet, but it had not stopped raining since we had landed in France and the ground was just a slurry of mud. I soon had a fire place built outside our hut and some gravel so that it wouldn't be too muddy. Gardner and I took a long walk after being there about three days through some of the surrounding towns. We hunted for cognac but found calvados instead; we liked it but soon found that it was pretty potent stuff. Their beer was like fizz water.

Most of the time was spent in adding improvements to the huts that had mushroomed all around the Chateau. Gardner and I went hunting a few times but didn't make out too well. Jensen and I went into Auffay three times and had a few beers. Everyone was busy sharpening knives and bayonets now so I got into the swing of things and got mine to a razor sharp.

Jensen and I managed to get a pass to Rouen. We had a great time; it didn't appear that France was too hard hit by the war to see the things to buy in the stores, but the prices were terrific and they didn't have anything to eat. We finally wound up at a good little bar off the main street and had a swell time. It was here that we got introduced to Pasties; we weren't able to buy any, but a Frenchman bought us some. It was the best tasting stuff we had had.

Thanksgiving was great, that is if you didn't mind the rain. We ate in the rain, wrote letters in the rain and just loved the mud. The company had received all of its half tracks and guns by now so we knew it wouldn't be long. There was some rearrangement of the platoons to try to make them more efficient. For a while I thought I would get shifted to a rifle squad which pleased me very much, it would be a lot easier carrying that rifle around than a machine gun, but at the last minute I stayed in Kelley's machine gun squad of the first platoon. Ward and I were on one gun, Wolfhope and Richards on the other, with Kelley as squad leader and Pap La Rin his assistant. Fuchs was going to drive the track. The machine gun half track was made the platoon CP half track so we carried Lt. Drum, Moore the navigator, and Ceanci the radio man.

November 30, 1944

Early in the morning we loaded all our equipment in the half tracks and mounted up and moved out of Auffay and headed across France. The tops were pulled down so we didn't get to see much of the country. Across France, through Compaigne, Soissons, Rheims, Bar le Dun, and finally to 7th Army Headquarter and staging area at Luneville, France. It was a tiresome trip, taking three days; we slept along the roads at night.

It was December 2nd that we pulled into the old German barracks in Luneville. Our stay was short lived. I managed to get a cold shower, deposit my money, Gardner and I took in a movie and we dropped off all excess equipment.

The 12th Armored Division originally scheduled for the 9th Army was now in the 7th and attached to the XV Corps. Most of the men had been too busy to do much thinking, but as the last letters were written and we knew it wouldn't be long now, tension rose rapidly. How we wished we were cooks now. The big rumor was that the Germans were going to lay down their arms Christmas and go home; it sounded good, just sweat it out until Christmas.

December 5th was cold and rainy. The tops were still pulled over the half tracks, and the tension mounted steadily as we moved out of Luneville. The first night was spent in a muddy field just outside the city, men slept where they sat in the tracks. Early the next morning, the tops were pulled back and we started moving up. The first night we slept along the road near a ruined farming village; in the distance we could hear the rumble of artillery and see the flashes of light in the sky. The next day we moved on through a driving rain, past what had been terrific battles, knocked out tanks and vehicles and rubble of war was everywhere.

I sat through the driving rain manning the 50 on the skate mount in case of a strafing attack, so by nightfall I was soaked to the skin. That evening we drew up in a field and parked. We tried digging slit trenches but they filled up with water so we gave it up as a sad job. Artillery was shelling the town ahead and we seemed to be in the midst of our own artillery locations.

December 7, 1944

In the evening the order was received that we were to go up on line that night. Capt. Helton had already gone forward to look at the positions we were to take over from the 26th Division. Things in our track became a mad house as the orders were issued as to what to carry, like stupid fools that they were we were to take bed rolls and musette bags. Darkness came and nobody could see what to put into what. The first platoon tracks soon moved out, but we got lost on the way up, but after driving around awhile we found ourselves at the jump off point.

The only thing good about the night that I could see was that it wasn't raining. Lt. Drum came back from up forward and told us that we were to relieve elements of the 26th Division in Binning, France. We held half the town and the Germans the other; he told us that the entrance to town was under constant artillery barrage and it might be rough getting into town. By now I had tossed in my chips and punched my card.

I can remember getting at the bottom of the hill where we were to leave the tracks; Kelley was nervous and didn't know quite what to do. I got my equipment together and got ready for the order to move out. Went up and talked to Fuchs and told him what to write my folks since I expected to be walking the last mile soon. Soon Lt. Drum came back and said not to get scared when we passed all the dead Germans and knocked out Tiger tanks. It was only the live ones that had me worried.

Soon the trek started, up the hill we slogged, the terrific amount of equipment soon began to tell on us as we straggled all over the place. The machine gun I carried in addition to my regular gear soon weighed a ton. It was two miles across the top of this exposed hill to the town of Binning. We felt naked walking across there since the Germans were just across the valley.

At the entrance of the town was a peep that had hit a mine; not much left. The boys of the 26th passed us as we went in. Not much had happened so far, although every now and then a kraut burb gun would let loose in the distance. The first platoon moved into the first building on the left of the road. The 3rd and AT platoons were in the forward positions on the right side of the main street; C company was on their left, the 1st and 2nd platoons were in reserve which put us barely in town; it seemed as if the two platoons were split between about five houses. The company CP was across the street from us, with a TD sitting in front of it.

The machine gun squad was put in the cellar so I felt pretty good, especially after Ceanci and I found a case of C rations, at least we wouldn't starve as long as we stayed here. The French family that owned the house was in the cellar with us. Guards were posted around in case of infiltrating patrols.

We had already suffered some casualties when a wire laying detail led by S/Sgt Ruma was shot by a kraut patrol. It was early in the morning, still dark, as I set at the bottom of the cellar steps with my shoes off trying to dry my socks that the first fire hit us as the Germans threw a mortar barrage at us.

Soon everyone was running to the basement and I just about got killed in the rush. Ward who was on guard came running down crying that he had been hit, but he wasn't.

In the morning I found that I had lost my musette bag and bed roll, a big help. Heavy sniper fire was being received from the other end of town so a TD that was parked in back of the house let loose with an occasional burst from his 50 at the Church steeple at the other end of town. It wasn't long before there was a terrific explosion out front and we soon found out that the TD that had been sitting there was knocked out, probably by a bazooka. Casualties were being reported all the time as nervous GI's shot one another, so far the first platoon had made out all right. A medic from another outfit got to fooling with a German rifle laying in the house and shot a bullet into the floor which went through and hit Wolfhope; he died shortly after on his way to the aid station.

A Frenchman came down the street under a white flag and told us that there were 300 Germans on the hill who wished to surrender. We set up our machine gun in case it was a trick, but no krauts came in.

That evening the first platoon was alerted, it wouldn't be long; the tension was terrific as we all sat there in the cellar waiting for the orders. Lt. Drum came back from the company CP and told us that the first platoon was going to make a night attack on the German barracks on the other end of town and seize them, if possible; we were going to do that all alone, at night, it sound great. Kelley showed us a sketch of what they thought the arrangement of the barracks was and where we would follow the first squad and lay down a base of fire, but no one seemed to know too much. The tension was terrific as everyone was nervous; not a sound was made as we waited for further word. Finally Drum came back and said the attack had been called off; the sigh of relief sounded like a hurricane, at least we weren't going to be slaughtered tonight.

The attack was to be made next morning at daybreak with A and C company abreast supported by tanks. The 1st platoon was to be in the assault, the machine gun squad was to be split and follow two of the rifle squads. Ward and I with our gun were to follow Sgt Williams' squad and help him out. Early in the morning we filed out of the cellars of the various houses and started down the main street. I was carrying the machine gun and was sticking pretty close to the buildings as we filed down the street; in the middle of town I stepped over three dead Americans laying in the mud, the stench was terrific, well that will be me before very long. We swung to the right and the first and second platoons commenced their advance abreast up the slope that led to the German barracks; three tanks had come up and were with us. As we advanced through an orchard three hundred yards from the barracks a terrific outburst of enemy fire met us; bullets were snapping everywhere, luckily when the first burst of their machine guns opened up I was behind a pile of rocks, so I simply fell flat right in a mud puddle as the kraut tracers snapped past my ears. Kelley was cursing because he thought he was in an exposed position because of the heavy enemy firing coming from over in C company's area. The tankers opened up with their machine guns and commenced to spray everything; one tank as it advanced struck a mine and blew the track off, but he still maintained a steady firing; he finally located two of the enemy machine guns and blew them to smithereens with his 76mm.

We then commenced to advance up the hill, running and flopping in the mud, bullets continued to snap around us and the firing was terrific. I got so damn tired running and flopping with the machine gun that the next fence I came to instead of crawling under it so I wouldn't be hit, simply set the gun down and crawled over it, fully exposed to the enemy's fire; it didn't seem to matter then whether I was dead or alive I was so tired. The first group of houses were secured and Ward and I moved up to cover the advance of the other squads; we shot at every likely spot and then Williams' squad would rush the next building. The entire German barracks was soon in our hands and we were now overlooking the town of Rohrbach. I was tired and muddy as the dickens. We had no sooner secured the barracks than an artillery barrage came in sending everyone to the cellars.

A defensive position was immediately set up and Ward and I put our machine gun in the doorway of an underground garage that overlooked the slope in the forward area. Night soon was on us. It was colder than hell. Ward, Moore and I took turns manning the machine gun. While one of us was on guard the other two would try to sleep curled up together on a couple of slats on the cold concrete. I changed socks, wrapped my feet in toilet paper and did everything to try to keep them warm, but they were frozen. During the night scattered rifle and machine gun fire was heard, and some interdiction artillery fire was received. Some nervous men off to our right shot five sheep for a German patrol.

The attack was continued the next morning on Rohrbach to our direct front. A Company made a wide flanking attack on it while C Company assaulted it from our previous positions. The artillery support was good and the tankers sitting in the barracks overlooking the town were able to help immensely. My platoon was not in the assault so things weren't too bad, but the mud was terrific and loaded down as we were I was thoroughly exhausted upon reaching the town. We cleaned out the town of a few snipers; I just about shot an old Frenchwoman when she parted a curtain and looked out. I had the machine gun and was carrying it on the hip, another second and she would have been a dead pigeon.

We continued the attack against the high ground two miles to the north of Rohrbach, this time the first and second platoons were once more in the assault. We could see a tank battalion attacking off to our right. On the high ground we could see the first pill boxes of the Maginot Line.

As we advanced toward the high ground, 8 enemy machine guns opened up on us pinning the company down. Ward and I on the right flank of the company set our gun up and were soon answering their fire; everytime we'd let loose with a burst they'd send three or four snapping around our ears. We weren't sure where they were, but must have been causing them some trouble. Off to our left just a little artillery was landing up and down the road. Men were cursing up and down as we lay there under that withering enemy fire unable to do too much. Finally we received some support from our mortars which began to roll up and down the hill. Every now and then a kraut would get out of one of the pill boxes up ahead and run up over the hill. Ward and I must have got four of them as they tried to make a get-away.

Our mortar dropped 8 rounds of smoke shells and while we had some covering smoke the order came to assault the hill. We had no sooner started the assault than a terrific enemy artillery barrage struck us inflicting numerous casualties; we continued to advance through the barrage, at least their small arms fire was diminishing. I was completely exhausted upon reaching the top of the hill.

Amid a rain of enemy machine gun fire and artillery fire, A Company dug in between B Company on our right and C Company on the left. The line of defense followed a railroad embankment to our immediate front. Ward and I were fairly lucky, we set our machine gun up in the pill box we had just captured and rested a little while everyone else was trying to dig in amid the barrage that swept up and down our front. We were now in the edge of the Maginot Line. We were overlooking a huge valley, studded with huge pill boxes, across the valley could be seen the frequent flashes of the German 88's. Our position was completely exposed to enemy observation accounting for the terrific barrage that rained on us. Off to our right where the tank battalion had been attacking were six of our tanks burning fiercely. The cry for medic went up and down the line. B Company on our right was suffering tremendous casualties from the enemy's artillery and a machine gun opened up on us off to the left every time someone stuck his head up too high.

By nightfall it was snowing and raining; everyone was miserable, wet to the skin and cold with no relief from the elements. Men were being evacuated for trench foot right and left. One man was so cold that he couldn't move out of the foxhole, but had to be picked up, being unable to move a muscle. During the night numerous enemy patrols struck our defense but our artillery was keeping a steady barrage out in front of us, helping somewhat.

The next morning the fight was all out of us. We were weak, hungry and cold, and the company strength was diminishing rapidly. Early in the morning I was standing at the large aperture of our pill box showing some Major from Hdq. some German activity when a shell stuck a yard to my left against the edge of the opening. The Major was killed and five men injured in the pill box; the force of the explosion picked me up and hurled me ten feet against the rear wall. I was temporarily blinded and figured my face was blown off, but soon found I had only a little cement in my face. Four phosphorous shells struck just outside sending streams of burning phosphorous in at Ward and I as we stood against the rear wall; everyone else had taken off.

In the afternoon, disregarding an artillery barrage, ten of our half tracks came up with supplies. It had started to rain again. I was so weak that I couldn't carry a water can up the hill to the pill box where we were. It had been a long time since most of us had eaten so our spirits were revived immediately.

At 4 o'clock that night we made a night attack to seize high ground to our north. There was no opposition luckily since we were in exposed positions all during the advance. By daybreak we had reached the high ground thoroughly exhausted from slogging through muddy fields. We withdrew slightly and started to dig in. Ward and I started to dig a hole which immediately filled up with water. It was pouring rain and I was wet to the skin. An enemy artillery barrage started landing off to our right so I sat down on an ammunition box and read the bible a while, too tired to try to dig a hole. We moved to a better location and dug a good hole; the sun came out, and rations and dry socks were passed out.

In the afternoon we moved forward and seized the town of Hoelling, having cleared the Maginot Line. Our only opposition was a terrific mortar barrage that swept up and down the roads leading into the town. The first platoon holed up in a building and barn on the outskirts of town on a road leading toward the front and the Seigfreid Line. Ward and I dug in our gun covering a large field, an anti-tank outfit from the 44th Division set up their gun covering this field and we settled down trying to get some rest. The days weren't too bad, but at night the enemy would shell the place all night. A few enemy patrols gave us some anxious moments and a German breakthrough up ahead had us worried, but it was taken care of before reaching us. We stayed here until December 15th. I saw Jensen occasionally now when I went into town; he was acting as the 2nd platoon's runner and stayed at the company CP. The company strength was now 50% of that which had started the fight.

A few hot meals were brought up and some PX rations; some of the men even shaved. It wasn't too bad, but the cellars were too small to accommodate all the men at night when the artillery would search us out.

December 15th, 1944

Early in the morning our half tracks picked us up and we headed for the rear for a little rest. We passed through Rohrach, and Binning, scenes of our earliest fight; the stench of war was still there; mud, rubble, devastated homes, dead animals, constant flow of equipment in the rear areas.

In the afternoon we reached the town of Eywiller where we were billeted. Ward and I managed to get a bed to sleep on. It belonged to a nice-looking French girl who didn't seem to like the idea of having the two of us, as dirty as we were, sleeping on it. The town was nothing but a mud hole invested with manure piles, but it was great besides the holes we had just come out of. Packages were received from home and we ate three hot meals a day. Schumaker joined our squad, the first replacement we had received. Mazzant was back from driving with Division so Fuchs was placed on a machine gun with Schumaker. Ward was made assistant squad leader and Gardner came in the squad to be on a gun with me. I was glad to be working with Flip since he and I got along fine together, but couldn't quite understand how Ward got to be a Sgt; suction did it.

The ground was covered with snow by now and it was frightfully cold. On December 21st we moved back to Binning Barracks; we were in Division Reserve. Flip and I went hunting a few times but didn't have any luck. There were continual paratrooper scares which made everybody nervous. Christmas dinner was really good considering we were at the front, but the whole company had a case of the GI's which left us all weak.

On December 27th we moved back to another little town of Insviller. Snow was on the ground now and all anybody was interested in was getting a house with a stove in it. Our squad got a lousy deal but wasn't too bad. Manure piles were out in front of the houses just as they were in all these little French towns. The woods soon echoed to the sound of M1's as the abundance of deer was discovered. Men trickled back from the hospital and reinforcements were received, bringing the company back to near strength again. Everybody got to like it here at Insviller. The first Combat Infantry Badges were awarded. Jensen was having his usual troubles with the big boys in the 2nd platoon. I couldn't blame him much, I didn't particularly like the big boys myself. Paratrooper scares and reports of infiltrating Germans in peeps gave everyone a scare but all it meant to me was that I'd have to stand a lot of unnecessary guard.

January 7, 1945

Unexpectedly, orders were received to move out; we loaded hastily and took off. Some of the men were out hunting and we left without them. We picked Gardner up on the run. Through a blinding snow storm we moved to Schweighausen just south of the Hageneau Forest. Outposts were set up on all the major roads leading into town and a defensive position set up since we were supposed to be waiting for a big armored thrust in this direction. Our squad got the last house in town, but it had a nice stove in it and I liked it immensely, but the six hours that were spent in the holes down the roads manning the machine gun were terrific in that cold. Tanks, artillery and other guns were placed all around the town. It looked as if they really expected something. A couple of enemy planes were shot down when they tried to come over and take a good look at us.

Jensen's squad was staying in the cellar of a house up the road from me and one day he told me to come over with a few bottles. No one had been able to find any liquor in the town so I thought maybe he had something and was keeping it quiet. Sure enough there were three huge kegs in the cellar where he was staying. After that I managed to get four bottles of the best red wine I had ever had every day. It made the rest of my squad green with envy especially since I wouldn't tell them where I was getting it. Before going out on guard I'd have a couple of canteen cups full, fill my bottles and take off down the road, high as a kite.

By now we all had pack shoes, and liners, and decent gloves, which helped us immensely to stand the cold. It was about time the combat troops were getting them, all the rear echelon had had them long ago, but that's the way the army operates.

Rasmusen was sent away on a patrol mission so we knew that something was brewing. It was something bigger than we expected, though.

January 15, 1945

That night we moved out of Schweighausen in a light snow storm.

All through the latter part of December the famous Battle of the Bulge had been in progress. By now it had ended, a victory for us; consequently a new victory was required by the Germans to bolster homefront morale. As their objective they picked Strausbourg, famous French city of the Alsace; part of their plan was to recapture the entire Alsace-Lorraine plain, recapture the Saverne gap, forcing us back into the Vosages, and annihilate the American XXI Corps. The Germans had secretly built up strength in their bridgehead on the Rhine; this included two Panzer divisions supported by three Volkstrum divisions.

This was unknown to our intelligence at the time. We were told that there were only 15 Tiger tanks this side of the Rhine and that the 7th Army in conjunction with the French were going to eliminate this German bridgehead, the 12th Armored being the spearhead in this attack. The French were to clear the town of Gambsheim to our right, the 66th Armored Infantry Battalion supported by some tanks would clear the Steinwald Forrest; as soon as this was completed, the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion (of which we were a part) would combine with the 23rd Tank battalion and advance against Offendorf, seizing it and arriving at the banks of the Rhine.

We left our half tracks near Weyersheim and filed on for about four miles through the town and onto the plain beyond. Daybreak found us spread out along a canal with the Steinwald Forrest rising off to our right. P-47's were out, firing was heavy off to our right, and a constant flow of tanks was moving past us on up ahead. We soon moved out, crossed the canal and started moving in the direction the tanks had gone. Pretty soon we heard firing up ahead. We crossed a Treadway bridge the engineers had just erected; saw Jack Ennis whom I hadn't seen since we were in basic training. A company was on its right flank of the battalion in a column of platoons with the 1st platoon in the lead. We found ourselves spread out following the 23rd Tank Battalion advancing across the plain in front of Offendorf with the Steinwald Forrest on our right.

The tankers were firing at everything and long lines of prisoners were coming in; we were soon advancing right with the tanks, a few of them had broken through the ice and were abandoned. The ground was hard and covered with snow. It wasn't long before an enemy artillery barrage started rolling up and down the plain, inflicting some casualties on the infantry; the new men we had were scared and hit the ground but Flip and I told them to just keep walking; if you're going to get it they'll find you. We stopped for a short while, and while lying there a shell bounced fifty feet in front of me and another bounced two feet to my right. It didn't explode, why I don't know. A bunch of krauts came running out of the woods on our right so Flip and I set our gun up and opened up on them. We were the only ones firing on them in the whole company. Kelley was too scared to do anything. They soon surrendered to the 2nd platoon which was following us.

We were receiving mortars as well as artillery now and the cries of the wounded could be heard as we advanced toward Offendorf. The leading tanks had crossed a railroad embankment 800 yards from the town and the scouts of the 1st platoon had almost reached it when orders were received to halt. There we sat like ducks on a pond. Flip and I set up our gun but were unable to dig in because of the hard ground. The barrage steadily increased and the cries of the wounded over in B company's area to our left were increasing. Six tanks were burning up ahead. Suddenly there was an explosion in the tank fifty feet ahead of Flip and me. It had been hit, and screaming tankers crawled from the tank. One man thrashed on the ground as he died. Two hundred yards in front of us, in the corner of the forest, a

couple of hidden Tiger tanks were raising hell with our tanks. Our tankers were backing up and firing madly at all possible locations; shells were flying over our heads about three feet off the ground, tanks were being knocked out right and left, the artillery was terrific by now, and the screams of the dying men were increasing. The tank in front of Flip and me was starting to explode and burn, adding to the flying lead. Shrapnel bounced off our helmets as Flip and I lay there with our heads together. Flip got a small piece in his face which I pulled out and he was back and had a piece of bandage put on it.

We had been caught like rats in a trap; the 66th had failed to clean out the Steinwald Forrest on our right, but had been slaughtered in trying to get in. We had then been caught in a cross fire and were just laying here taking it. Those tanks were being knocked out one after another, but they were moving back and we still laid here. A tricolor artillery marker landed over in the woods near one of the enemy's tanks and soon a flight of P-47's peeled off and dropped six 500-pound bombs not 200 yards away; they really shook the earth. A man on my right shouted and said they had got that machine gun. At first I couldn't figure what he was talking about since no small arms fire had been received. Then I looked over to where Fuchs and Schumaker's gun was and saw nothing but a heap of clothing. I got up and with all those shells flying went over and saw the remains of Fuchs and Schumaker; they had been laying like Flip and I, together behind their gun, and had received a direct hit. I went back to here Funk was lying and told him they were dead.

Finally the order came to retreat, the 1st platoon being the furthest advanced would withdraw first, followed by the successive platoons, but it ended up by being a running marathon toward the rear. Flip and I were handicapped from the start since we had a machine gun to carry. Lord, I thought, if I'm hit now they'll just leave me out here. The enemy's barrage swept up and down the retreating columns of infantry and a company of light tanks scurried all over the plain covering our withdrawal. Finally the artillery stopped and we reached the edge of the canal which we had crossed; here we set up a defensive position and dug in for the night. Saw Jensen a short while and he said Collier, one of our buddies, had been badly hit and taken back. Flip and I crawled into our hole and tried to get some sleep; it was so cold that our pants and gloves were frozen stiff, the coldness freezing the sweat on us. All through the night the whistle of artillery shells could be heard as they passed over us.

January 17, 1945

Early in the morning orders were received to attack the town of Herrlisheim which was about three miles north of Offendorf. During the early part of the morning we moved into position across the plain we had left the preceding day. A battalion of our tanks passed us; they were moving into position to attack from further north. We were attacking with two companies of infantry and a company of tanks from the south of town. A Company was on the right and B Company on the left with the tanks moving in with us. The 2nd and 3rd platoons were in the assault with the 2nd on the right flank of the attack.

By daybreak we were in position for the attack; after the town had been thoroughly worked over by our artillery and tanks we commenced to move in. Heavy small arms fire was encountered in front of the town, which held us up for a while, but the tankers moved in and cleaned this up; by now many prisoners were coming back. The 1st platoon was waiting on the outskirts of the town until the other two platoons had advanced into town. A bunch of krauts off on our right commenced to give us some trouble and the AT platoon moved over to eliminate them. An enemy artillery barrage started landing near us. Flip and I had our gun set up covering the woods off to our right where the trouble was coming from; we were having some difficulty firing the gun since the belt was wet.

The 3rd platoon had advanced to the center of town but was now held up by strong resistance including a Tiger tank in the center of town. Our tankers wouldn't go in after them since they had such light armor and small guns compared to the Germans and our speed meant little in town fighting; however the tanks were in town backing up the infantry. The 2nd platoon had met strong resistance and had only just entered their section of town; this left a huge gap in our lines. The 1st platoon was sweating out a terrific artillery barrage that was covering the road leading into town; Ceanci and I lay in a ditch for half an hour and fully 30 shells landed in a vicinity of 50 feet. By the time the 1st platoon was moved in to cover the gap between the 3rd and 2nd platoons, I was thoroughly covered with dirt. Shelling was light in the town, but a patrol soon discovered a German tank down the street from the 1st platoon's position; one of our tanks was sitting at the head of the street but didn't dare move around to take a shot at the kraut.

Flip and I had our gun set up in the window of a house covering a long street off which the kraut tank stood. The 2nd platoon off to our right had run into serious trouble. They had been advancing along a railroad embankment into town and had managed to take the first few houses when a strong enemy force of 200 krauts and 4 tanks attacked them from their rear and flank. They were literally chopped to pieces in fifteen minutes; our artillery and some tankers guarding the rear of town drove the krauts away, but there wasn't much left of the 2nd platoon.

Our machine gun squad and two rifle squads were moved out in an orchard near the railroad tracks to protect this right flank and rear now that there was nothing left of the 2nd platoon. Jensen and Little came by and told Flip and me what had gone on; they decided to stay with us there in the long trench we were in. By now no one seemed to know what was going on. Our left was completely undefended now since no one seemed to be stationed on the street that Flip and I had been covering before we moved out in the orchard. I was thoroughly disgusted since all the old Biddies, the squad leaders, etc., were running around and were grouped together in a house 50 yards to our rear. Kelley was there instead of being out with his squad.

About 5 o'clock in the afternoon six Tiger tanks came over the railroad embankment only 200 yards away. The closest one to us was just a little over 50 yards away; they came in a perfect line

attacking our flank and rear. We could see a huge force of German infantry getting ready to follow the tanks. Flip asked me what I was going to do and I told him sit tight. The two rifle squads that were with us got up and ran for the town when the tanks first appeared. Jensen and Little lay crouched in the trench waiting for the end. The German infantry started to cross the railroad embankment so I squeezed the trigger and kept it down. My tracers were flying up and down the embankment throwing the kraut infantry into confusion; they were screaming and running and falling in all directions. I fired two belts almost continuously; I heard Jensen swear and looking up saw the tank that was nearest us start to move his long gun around. About that time a tank exploded down the line, being knocked out by one of our tanks guarding the rear. The 88 on the tank not 50 yards from us started to slowly move toward us; it looked like it was going to reach out and tap us on the head. I still kept the machine gun spitting lead but tossed in my chips. Jensen told me this is it and I watched the 88 spit flame, as shell exploded 15 feet to our right. It fired again, missing but a little closer this time. Please dear Lord may it be quick and painless. Just then a terrific barrage landed in among us and the tanks; it must be our supporting artillery. Luckily they dropped a white phosphorous shell between us and the tanks; they continued to pour shells in against the railroad embankment where the infantry was; by the time the smoke cleared the enemy tanks had gone and the four of us were still in one piece. The two rifle squads came back out and got into their holes.

In an hour we saw four enemy tanks approach the railroad embankment, but instead of coming over turned and moved off to our left behind a group of buildings. In another half hour we looked around and saw men moving through the houses fifty yards to our rear. Upon looking closer we saw they wore camouflage suits; they were krauts. A few shots were exchanged but nothing serious. They were now in position to cut us off from the company and split the company in half. A Tiger tank moved up the street with these krauts and was soon pumping shells into the houses where our men were staying. Two of our tanks in town were burning, bazookas just bounced off the sides of these tanks. By night fall things were confused, kraut patrols walked the streets; they had split the company in half and just about cut us off from the rest of the company. We sat there on the outskirts of town wondering what was going on; heavy firing could be heard, screaming of the wounded, an occasional burst of flame from some house, and the continued crackle of our burning tanks. Jensen and Little left soon after nightfall saying they thought it would be better to look for the remainder of their platoon. We sat in our holes and waited for some word from the company, surely they hadn't forgot about us.

About 11 o'clock I laid down and want to sleep, but Flip soon kicked me awake saying I was snoring and surely the krauts could hear me since they were moving about only 35 yards away. After a while I got up and went over to the hole where Williams was and told him he had better decide to do something pretty quick because before daybreak Gardner and I were moving out. There were at least a hundred krauts just a few yards away and a couple of tanks with their guns staring us in the face. After much hesitancy on his part, I told him to give me a couple of men and I'd see if I couldn't contact the company. So I got two men and we crept toward town and some buildings our troops had occupied before; we were scared not only of being shot by krauts but by our own troops as well. Approaching a barn someone shouted halt so we answered; it wasn't long before we were talking with Funk who told us to lead the rest of his men in; we went back and soon Flip and I were setting our machine gun up in a house on the further edge of town. This was the greatest stroke of luck we had had.

At 0330 the morning of the 18th, a terrific barrage landed on top of us. Flip and I moved into the cellar and sat next to a huge hole in the basement; shells were coming in thicker than rain. It continued for half an hour, leaving most of the men dumbfounded. When it stopped Flip and I crawled back upstairs to our gun but found it destroyed; krauts were screaming out in the street and a solid rain of enemy machine gun fire was being poured into our house; the krauts had attacked the minute the

barrage had lifted and had just about overrun the company in two minutes. We went back down in the cellar and crawled out the hole in the cellar; there were Germans moving not 5 yards away around the corner. I waited patiently for them to come around, you could hear them shouting and giving orders and shooting up everything. Flip came and tapped me on the shoulder and said let's go; we moved back to the barn in the rear of the house, but seeing some krauts moving around on both sides of us let ourselves out of the barn and into the orchard in the rear. We had trouble getting over the fences and out; a couple of times we had a slight run in with a few kraut patrols but managed to get to the open plain over which we had advanced on the town. We looked back and all we saw was a burning inferno; we had no idea what was left of the battalion so we struck out across the plain in the direction of the canal. We walked for hours through the snow, being hungry and thirsty we ate snow. We could hear patrols moving around us but we managed to stay clear of them. Reaching the canal we turned and followed it, knowing it would eventually bring us back into American lines.

Toward morning we heard vehicles approaching and hid in some bushes; soon an armored column appeared moving across the plain right in front of us. Pretty soon a tank got stuck and we heard cursing in English so we knew it was American. Before they had a chance to take a shot at us we had come up to them and told them who we were. They told us that they were going to attack Herrlisheim, the town we had just come out of; they also told us that the American forces in there had been wiped out.

We joined a squad from the 66th and told them we would go back into Herrlisheim with them; there wasn't much left of the 66th and they were using anything that could carry a rifle. By morning they had received orders to move back into Weyersheim, so they took us with them and we found ourselves in the CP of B Company of the 66th. Their first sergeant told us that reports had come in that there were only a couple of survivors of the 17th Battalion, the whole situation was in a mess. The 43rd Tank Battalion hadn't been heard from in 12 hours and was presumed to have been caught and annihilated. Things were in a critical condition since a huge German attack was coming and there was little to stop it since the 12th was just about in ribbons.

Flip and I got an hour's rest and some good food. The 66th was moving everyone back out on line to fight, cooks, bakers, armorers, anybody, so we volunteered to go up with them; we soon arrived back at the canal. All along the canal were vehicles, dug in just in back of its high banks, AAA outfits with their guns pointed to the ground instead of the air, tanks, armored cars, anything with a gun on it; things must have been in tough shape when they threw this conglomeration together. We commenced to dig in along the canal, all along the canal men were digging, scattered far apart since there wasn't many men.

A group of 18 men went past us and we recognized them as A Company men so Flip and I said goodbye to the 66th and took off with our men—that is, what was left of them; only 18 had been able to get out of the town. We moved along in back of the canal under a heavy enemy barrage. It wasn't long before a long line of half tracks came racing out to pick us up. They raced us back into Weyersheim and then further back to a little town of Geugenheim. It was there that we began to realize just what had happened: all that was left of A Company was the cooks, half track drivers and maintenance men and 18 of the fighting men; not even enough if one man rode in each half track. Flip and I fell in a bed and slept until morning.

In the morning we were told that we were going back to Weyersheim to help defend the town against the impending German attack. Some cooks and drivers and maintenance men volunteered to

come with us. During the morning Flip and I dug our gun in and tried to get some rest; we were the only ones left in the 1st platoon.

In the afternoon the remains of A and B companies was to make an attack on a bridge across the canal about five miles away that the Germans had captured. We formed for the attack and started across the plains but were soon held up by artillery fire. Orders were then issued to hold up the advance for a while.

I tried to dig a hole, but at the first swing broke the shovel on the hard earth, so I sat down on an ammunition can and watched the 88's exploding among us. Up ahead a terrific tank battle was raging; we could see an occasional American tank knocked out, saw the tankers come running to the rear. The P-47's were up there bombing and strafing and our artillery was sending over a constant barrage. The krauts were attacking and had been caught in the open on the same plain that we had three days ago. The Germans withdrew with terrific losses and we filed back into town and spent the night ready to go out in case of an enemy attack.

On the 20th while an enemy artillery barrage swept the town, our half tracks came in and we mounted up and took off back to Schweighausen. It was a bitter pill to swallow as we walked into the houses where once had been squads of men, now only one or maybe two walked in. The French looked at us; what they thought I don't know, but it didn't make us feel too good.

January 20, 1945

Spent most of the day getting my equipment in shape; in the afternoon Flip and I managed to get in a convoy leaving for the rear and went and took a shower. When we came back, the company was getting ready to pull out.

By nightfall, we were moving to the rear in a blinding snow storm. Many of the half tracks slid into ditches. I was left as a guide at one of the steeper hills to warn the rest of the convoy of the ice and dangerous curve ahead. That night we stayed in Geugenheim and managed to get some much needed rest.

On the 21st we moved to Kleinfrankenheim and what was left of the company was put out manning some road blocks in case of an enemy breakthrough. The snow was really deep now and it was cold. There were 8 men in the 1st platoon's road block; we manned it for three days. During this time when we weren't on duty we went out hunting. Williams brought in 8 quail so we had plenty to eat that night. Funk came out and brought us two bottles, one champagne, the other whiskey so we were fixed for the night. Funk was being made 1st Sgt and Williams was going to be made platoon sergeant. We wondered what would become of the rest of us that were left; at first we had thought that this was the end of the 12th Armored Division. When we were finally pulled off the road block and came back to our billets we found almost 100 new replacements. The company was rapidly being organized again. These men were fresh from repo depots and some of them had been in the army only 4 months; they weren't feeling too good after they heard what we had just been through. I was put in charge of the machine gun squad of the 1st platoon with Gardner as my assistant, the other few men left took over the rifle squads and Burdett came from the 3rd platoon to take over the mortar squad.

January 25, 1945

In the morning we moved to Breuschwickerheim and started receiving more reinforcements. The 17th was now under CC R. The company was just about up to strength again and daily we took the new men out in the snow and trained them. I took the machine gun squad out, but you couldn't do too much because of the snow and I was too tired and disgusted to care too much. One day I took the whole platoon out and ran them through a problem. We attacked the town a couple of times to develop team work within the company. Lt. Ferguson had taken over as company commander. So far the 1st platoon hadn't received a platoon leader. The nights were spent drinking and going to the movies.

We received plan B and gave it a dry run. It consisted of moving 10 miles to the north to reinforce a French outfit and counterattack in that area in case of a German breakthrough south of Strasbourg. The French army seemed a slap-happy outfit.

On February 2nd I received the rating of Staff Sergeant and Gardner became a Sergeant. We were pretty well pleased with ourselves.

On February 3rd I was evacuated to our medical battalion because of a terrific cold.

February 4, 1945

During my absence from the company the 12th had been attached to the 1st French Army and was aiding them in eliminating the Colmar Pocket. The company by now was in the thick of the fighting south of Colmar. The medical battalion I was with had followed the 12th and was now in Colmar where Coney, a man from the 1st platoon, and I was released. We were anxious to get back to the company but spent half the day wandering around Colmar searching for a means to get back. The 17th was now attached to the 23rd Tank Bn. and we went to their headquarters in Colman but they didn't seem to have any means of getting us back. We finally located an aid station that was receiving wounded from the 17th so the next time an ambulance went to the front we hopped in and soon found ourselves back at the A company CP. We reported to Sgt. Funk and he told us we could rejoin the company which was fighting up ahead, dismounted in a town called Herrlisheim pres de Colmar. We would have to wait until nightfall and go up with a track carrying supplies. I went to my track and got what equipment I would need and went to the CP and went to sleep until time to go up.

Kulikowski, a new man in the 1st platoon, came back with a bunch of prisoners and from him I learned that things were in a mess with the company. The company had been thrown into this enemy strongpoint to help B Company and a company of tanks clear it out, but had been cut up pretty bad getting in and now all that we held was the edge of town with A Company in confusion—especially the 1st platoon. The platoon leader we had got had been killed and Williams had been wounded and evacuated and the 1st platoon was in little groups without a leader. I asked about Gardner and he said he had done a swell job the day before rallying the platoon, but it seemed that everyone, especially the new men, were demoralized.

When the track went up with supplies Coney, Kulikowski and I went with them. We crept into town and I hunted for the CP to report to the company commander. Things were in a mess; the town was on fire and scattered firing was going on and the krauts were throwing mortars in now and then. The CP was in the basement of the first house and it was jammed with everyone, the battalion commander and B Company's CO. I reported and went out to look for the 1st platoon. Having no luck I went back in to ask where they were. The company commander told me to go out and take over the 1st platoon. When I asked him where they were, he said he couldn't tell me, but told me to get them organized and report back at 4 in the morning to receive the order for the next day's attack.

With the aid of Kulikowski I was able to locate the various groups and bring them together. Casualties had been pretty high and the men were shot. I passed out K rations and blankets to them and then made sure they all had ammunition. I got Sgt Genelli and Gardner together and we reorganized the platoon into two rifle squads of ten men each and a machine gun squad of ten men. Genelli was to act as my platoon sergeant and a new man, Frank, took over one rifle squad, Cox another and Flip the machine gun squad. There wasn't anything left of the mortar squad and they had lost the mortar and most of the men had thrown away all excess equipment being so tired from the previous day's fighting.

The other platoons had been hit just as hard; Semprini was now leading the 2nd platoon and Ruma the 3rd. I got a half an hour's sleep before it was time to report to the CP. The order was to attack at 5 o'clock and cleanout the town and then press the attack to the south; we would be supported by the company of tanks. It was my luck to have the 1st platoon in the assault, the very first time I had ever led a bunch of men. Until 5 I was busy getting the platoon in position, but at 5 we jumped off supported

by the tanks which moved down the streets shooting everything. We cleared the town encountering only light opposition, much to my relief.

The roads to the southeast of town were mined and a bridge blown so we rested until afternoon while the engineers cleared the mines and threw a bridge. We received occasional artillery fire, but this gave me a chance to look the men over since most of the men were new replacements. In the afternoon we continued the attack to the Southeast along the main road in a column of platoons. There were swamps and woods on either side, but the AT platoon had been out on a patrol to make sure there wasn't too much ahead. We crossed two swollen streams where the krauts had blown the bridges. We must have been close on their heels because they were throwing everything away in their haste to leave.

We halted at the edge of the woods and I was sent out with five men on a patrol to watch the main highway ahead of us and the big intersection it made with the road we were on. I reported back every 15 minutes with my radio. Off to our left a friendly task force was clearing a town and to our front an enemy barrage was covering the intersection.

At dusk we could see a friendly unit on our right moving into position to attack the town to our front. At dusk a platoon of tanks came behind my patrol with the remainder of the platoon on their backs. Genelli told me the 1st platoon was to make a mounted attack on the town ahead, so I climbed on and made sure the platoon was ready and told the tanker to take off right for town. We ran into the town, meeting only scattered fire and a mortar barrage; upon reaching town we jumped off and secured the first few houses; the rest of the battalion moved in after us. By now a regiment of the 28th Division was really cleaning out the town from our right flank so there wasn't much for us to do. We sat there in the dusk along the stone wall of a church and the mortars grew in intensity. Brogni, a man in my mortar squad, asked what to do and I told him to just sit tight – where else could you sit along a wall in the cool of the evening and talk with your friends while mortar shells were landing all around you.

The 1st platoon was soon placed in a basement and I put out some guards for the night and got some rest. Was up at 4 to receive the orders for the next day. The town we were in was Niederhershheim.

In the morning we mounted the backs of the tanks and sped to the south and into the town of Niederentzen, but the krauts had just left and blown up the bridge across the canal so we couldn't press the attack in that direction. We then moved further south against the town of Oberentzen and made contact with a Moroccan outfit coming up from the south. The bridge was blown here, too. We setup a defense for the night and got some rest.

February 7, 1945

Our half tracks picked us up in the morning and we moved to the town of Voegtlinshofen in the foothills of the Vosges Mountains. Roadblocks and patrols were sent out to rout out any pockets of Germans.

I started to work on the reorganization of the platoon, but not receiving any replacements didn't get too far, but at least the platoon straightened out so that everybody knew where they were. Got some much needed rest, at least I slept in a bed for a couple of nights.

On the morning of February 10th we commenced to move northward; the Colmar pocket had been eliminated and the krauts were now on the other side of the Rhine. We traveled all night long, the convoy managed to get lost a few times, but we arrived back in the town of Eywiller. The little "manure pile" hadn't changed much. We spent the time getting our equipment cleaned up and getting some rest; although I had to go out with the leaders of the other platoons and lay out a defensive position nearby in case of a German breakthrough.

On February 13th the battalion moved north to Zimming, France where we occupied the former German barracks on the outskirts of that town. The whole of CC B was located in the barracks.

The 1st platoon got a whole house to ourselves and away from the CP which impressed me. Reinforcements were received and I was busy training the new platoon so it could function as a team. The division was placed in ETO reserve which was just about the best we could expect. The company was brought back to strength. I was made a T/Sgt., platoon sergeant of the 1st platoon. We got a platoon leader, Lt. Warren with whom I got along really good; he and I were the youngest men in the platoon. Most of my men were married and had children. Gardner was made a S/Sgt.

One day while showing the new men a bunch of tanks to familiarize their operation with them, I met Don MacConnell, a fellow I had gone to high school with. He was soon coming down to my CP every night and we would go to the movies together. Things were good at Zimming, passes were issued to Nancy, and Kulikowski and I went over and promptly fell asleep listening to the music at the Red Cross. A few of the men got to go to Paris. We ran problems every day with the tankers, we must have attacked the town 20 times; my men were soon cursing me for pushing them to hard, but at least it was getting to be a top-notch platoon.

The three "old soldiers" were now platoon sergeants, Semprini, Ruma and myself; it was some combination, but we pushed the kids through their problems. I had a navigator now named Cross, the only fellow younger than I in the platoon; on some of the problems he would get pretty scared and he used to follow me like a shadow.

I learned that the 26th Division was on line and not far from where we were so I managed to get a peep and Gardner and I went up to Saurlautern to see Lunt. We drove the peep right up to the front lines, that is as far as vehicles could go, but when we got there no one would take me up to the front which was only 300 yards away so I could see Bob. We received some artillery fires. Next week Lt. Warren, Don, Flip and myself all drove up and this time a runner took me up to see Bob. The rest stayed back since they didn't believe in getting killed on their day off. I had a nice long talk with Bob in a wrecked house while the fighting was going on outside. We managed to get back without any mishap.

This life couldn't go on forever. Besides, there was talk of the spring offensive which would knock Germany out of the war.

March 9, 1945

Early in the morning we moved out of Zimming Barracks and moved toward the front. The convoy moved through dense forests most of the way. We were to relieve elements of the 101st Cavalry Group in the Karlsbrunn Forest in the vicinity of Gross Rosselin.

The company CP was set up in a "baby factory" and the platoons went out to relieve the 101st. The 1st platoon went out to take over outposts to the north. Lt. Warren and myself went out and surveyed the ground we were to cover. Our platoon was to maintain a group of outposts covering almost a mile of the front. The woods and paths were heavily mined and booby-trapped by both the Americans and the Germans. By nightfall we had relieved the Cavalry groups and had our men in the outposts. The platoon CP was set almost 500 yards to the rear of the outpost; in a group of buildings, the drivers, Lt. Warren, and myself stayed there and we set up as watch to maintain telephone communication with the outposts. During the first night some mortars were received in our sector and a couple of trip flares were set off, but no enemy patrols came in.

In the morning we shifted some of the outposts and strung new wires so that we had better communication with the outposts. Feeding the men was a problem because of the distances between outposts. The 3rd platoon over on the right flank and near the town had received some heavy shelling and a few casualties.

On the 11th the 1st platoon was relieved by C Company of the 17th and we moved into the "baby factory" to get some rest. In the afternoon Lt. Warren went out to the 3rd platoon sector since orders had changed and we were to relieve them. While inspecting the outpost that touched the German-held town of Gross Rosselin, he was wounded by a shell from an SP gun. I immediately went out with Cross to look the positions over and in the afternoon moved out and relieved the 3rd platoon.

We had some time maintaining communication with the machine gun squad which I had sent down into the town. They were under almost a constant barrage which kept knocking out the wire from my CP to their outpost. I went out three times during a barrage to repair the wire. We received fire occasionally from the famous German Nerblerwerfler; whenever that went off everyone would jump for a hole. It had a weird sound and terrific explosive power which had most of the men scared to death, especially the new men.

The next day we moved out of the outposts as all the line platoons were withdrawn from outpost duty and the cooks, drivers, and maintenance men went out to man the outposts as best they could while we got ready to make an attack against the German stronghold across the valley. The same day I went up to the battalion CP to be interviewed; the Colonel wanted me to accept a commission, but I managed to discourage that.

On the 13th I was busy out at the forward CP looking over the terrain over which we were going to attack. The 1st platoon was to jump off first and seize a group of houses and a small bridge over a stream which ran through the town; the company would then pass through us into the heart of the town and we would then move out and mop up the left side of town; all this to be done at night. It looked like no simple job to me, especially since most of the men were green troops and control is so difficult on a night attack.

In the evening I called the squad leaders together and gave them all the information that was available and went over with each of them what I wanted them to do, but one hour before we were to jump off word was received that the 71st Division had broken through and had outflanked the town causing the krauts to withdraw. That didn't bother me in the least.

On the 14th we mounted the half tracks again and moved back to Zimming Barracks.

March 16, 1945

Upon our arrival back at Zimming we found a Provisional Company of colored troops had been added to the battalion. We spent most of the first few days getting things in order for another pleasant stay.

On the night of the 16th, the telephone in my CP rang continuously as orders were received from division getting us ready for the Big Thing. Cross and I lying there on the floor would just get off to sleep when the telephone would ring and we'd jump and try to find the receiver in the dark. Orders came for two men for an advance party, orders to eradicate all markings from the half tracks, orders for a man to report here, and finally orders for me to report to the CP for the march order.

Early in the morning we moved out, the 17th was part of a task force under CC R. Our task force consisted of A and C companies of the 17th and C Company of the 23rd Tank Battalion plus battalion headquarters of the 17th. A Lt. Williams was attached to the 1st platoon just before we left, but I wasn't much impressed.

The convoy headed north, all day we moved, through Boulay, Bouzonville, Sierck-les-Bains, then into Germany and stopped at the town of Borg. We were in the midst of the Siegfried Line. War must have just passed through this town; it was devastated and the smell of war still hung over the place. After pausing here some, we moved out again and moved all night, through Remick, Luxembrough through Trier and on the morning of March 18th we were in an assembly area in the vicinity of Hofchen, Germany.

Everyone was worn out from the long drive; it had been especially perilous at night as we moved up along the banks of the Moselle along roads not fit for vehicles. Many tracks went over the embankment and the convoy had many a snarl.

March 18, 1945

During the morning I received the attack order. The division's objective was Worms, 180 miles to the southeast on the banks of the Rhine. We were to capture the bridge across the Rhine at this point; by cutting in back of the Seigfred at this point, annihilate all enemy forces that continued to operate on this side of the Rhine. The 94th Division had just forced a breakthrough and the 12th Armored was to exploit this breakthrough and spearhead the 3rd Army's push to the Rhine and link up with the 7th Army moving up from the south; thus catching the krauts in a huge pincers operation. This would eliminate the Moselle-Saar-Rhine pocket and smash all remaining resistance this side of the Rhine. At last we were to be used as an armored outfit, where we could utilize all the maneuver ability and firepower we had.

At 10 o'clock the morning of the 18th we moved out. The Reconnaissance squadron of the division was out ahead of the task forces and we moved just as fast as possible, passing through one wrecked town after another. Long lines of prisoners were soon streaming to the rear as we caught the enemy completely unprepared for this thrust from the north. We passed long miles of wrecked enemy convoys, artillery pieces, supply wagons, vehicles, all destroyed by our bombers and fast-moving spearhead. Dead horses and burning villages were everywhere.

We moved on night and day. The nights became dreadful as the driver and car commander peered ahead watching the two red lights of the vehicle ahead; losing them meant leading your own spearhead into Germany.

March 19, 1945

During the night we had been passing through a range of mountains over some very narrow roads. One of the tracks just ahead of the 1st platoon got stalled and when it took off again, it made the wrong turn in the road and the convoy went at breakneck speed trying to find the front. We were having a hard time keeping up and as we raced down the mountain side, Broc who was driving my track failed to see a wrecked German van and we sideswiped it, losing all our rations. At the bottom of the valley, the 2nd platoon which was in the lead stopped at a bridge and Semprini got out and went over to a sentinel standing there and asked if the convoy had passed this way. Receiving no answer he looked closer, and cried, why you're a kraut. He jumped back into the track and shot the kraut. An enemy convoy retreating from us had been outrun and was just as lost as we were. Our tankers pulled up and started firing on the kraut convoy coming into the town from the other side. Immediately we set to work and got the tracks turned around and the tankers withdrew slightly. I took my platoon out and posted them around the tanks to protect them from kraut infantry, while passing by my half tracks three Germans came out of the bushes right along the road and surrendered to me; boy, what they could have done to us if they had had any nerve. Communication had been established with the remainder of the company and we moved out of the valley to rejoin them. By morning the convoy was completely snarled up since we had run into a friendly task force moving to our right.

We were soon pushing on, the prisoners streaming to the rear were coming in increasing numbers as a number of enemy convoys and units was caught and smashed before they knew what hit them.

Nearing Worms we passed large groups of Russian, French and Polish prisoners of the Germans. The German towns all had huge white flags flying everywhere as we thundered through their streets. They seemed to watch us in awe. While the convoy was halted in a large town near the Rhine, Wallander and I went into a former Gestapo headquarters and commenced to search it. We battered in one door and found a Gestapo Colonel hiding behind a desk. I got a nice pistol off of him and soon had him walking back toward the PW cage. The people in the town didn't seem to like this fat bloke too well.

March 21, 1945

All night long our convoy had crept through the suburbs of Worms. In the distance we could hear firing and an occasional explosion. In the morning we were parked along an autobahn just outside the city. Friendly armored units were moving all about us; three armored divisions had come together and what a concentration of power. Fleets of enemy planes were soon out bombing and strafing our armored columns. A couple came down and tried to give us a working over, but they were hurried and didn't do any damage. Heavy anti-aircraft fire was keeping them up too high to do much damage.

In the afternoon we moved into a field just outside of Grunstadt. I placed the 1st platoon's half tracks in a perimeter defense and everyone was soon digging a foxhole because of the frequency of enemy air attacks. That afternoon we had four attacks; ten bombs were dropped in our area inflicting casualties on headquarters company. The din of our answering anti-aircraft was terrific.

In the evening I sent Sgt Cox out with a peep and four men to see if the bridge across the Rhine had been blown. It had.

Early in the morning we prepared to move out and attack the town of Speyer to the south, the division's new objective. Just as we started out of the bivouac area an enemy bomber broke through low and dropped four bombs in the 1st platoon area. Nobody was hurt, though, but it gave us a big scare.

During the first part of the day A Company was in reserve, but early in the afternoon the leading elements ran into strong enemy resistance in the town of Iggleheim. Because of mine fields, the tanks were unable to maneuver and two light tanks had been knocked out. A Company started to pass through the 3rd tank battalion in the town of Bad-Durkeim to help the advance elements and came under an artillery barrage covering the roads. We moved forward in the town, but the 1st platoon wasn't committed but stayed in reserve. I did send the mortar squad forward to help the 3rd platoon. The 1st platoon moved into the town after it had been partly cleared to aid in the mopping up. Two of my half tracks just about hit mines at the entrance to town. After clearing the town and knocking out an enemy tank, we outposted the town and settled down for an uneasy night.

March 23, 1945

In the morning we continued the advance mounted with A Company in the lead. The AT platoon had been sent out in advance and had pulled too far ahead of the company and had almost been ambushed in the town of Hanhofen. The 1st platoon was following, reinforced by five tanks. Just as my leading track cleared the woods in front of the town, a terrific barrage landed on top of us, getting the leading track and killing Gardner and wounding five of the men. Men scattered in all directions in the woods, leaving the tracks sitting in the middle of the road. The mortar barrage was terrific. I dismounted and stood in the middle of the road cursing the men; it took me 15 minutes to get the men organized into a defensive line and get the tracks moved back down the road a ways and the tanks into position in case of attack. I then went forward through the barrage to where the first track was and moved the wounded men to safety and went out into the field and found Gardner and then looked around for Lt. Williams but was unable to find him. I went back and got Cross and we went out in the barrage and moved the leading track back. By this time things had quieted down somewhat and I managed to get the platoon organized in case of an enemy attack. Capt. Ferguson came forward to see what was going on and told me to remain fast.

Major Cunningham came up and asked where the Captain was; he had gone forward of my position to where the AT platoon had holed up in a group of houses. I took him forward and then came back to the platoon. We were unable to advance across the open field in front of Hanhofen because of the terrific mortar barrage and the AT fire directed at the tanks.

The 2nd platoon was sent on a large flanking movement, but they were unable to penetrate the town's defenses to enable the main force to assault the town.

Unable to advance in this direction, the axis of attack was changed and we mounted up and commenced to move to the East with the 3rd platoon in the advance guard. I almost had the misfortune of getting this assignment but because I was so hard hit over Flip's death, the Captain put me second in line.

As the advance guard topped a rise in the ground in front of the town of Zeiskam, they came into an anti-tank screen and I immediately knocked out the leading three half tracks, inflicting large casualties. Enemy infantry also attacked these men. After much hard fighting, the 3rd platoon was able to withdraw to the hill where the rest of the company had drawn up to cover their retreats.

We dug in on that hill to spend the night. By this time I was thoroughly exhausted and not feeling too good about the whole business, but I crawled into a hole with Moore and Gut and in the morning went to the CP to receive the attack orders for the next day.

We withdrew from our position and moved three miles to our left to attack the town of Lustadt. We had been promised an air strike on the town which failed to come off. Following an artillery and mortar preparation, A and C Companies, supported by the tanks, moved into the town abreast. The 1st platoon was in the assault and I had some job keeping the men going since they were pretty well shaken from yesterday's mishaps. We soon had the town cleared and I moved the platoon on to a railroad embankment on the other side of town where we prepared a defensive position in case of counter-attack. The half tracks were brought forward and we continued the attack toward Germersheim, CC R's objective. C Company fought through thick woods in front of Germersheim, but upon meeting heavy resistance A Company was thrown in and dismounted to clean out the woods. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd

platoons were moved abreast. I was on the left maintaining contact with C Company; we soon cleared the woods and halted at the edge where I set the platoon in a defensive position and we all laid down for some rest. In the evening I sent three men out three hundred yards to our front for a listening post and tried to get some much needed rest. This business of living on two hours' sleep a night and running all over the countryside setting up a defensive position at night was wearing me out.

In the evening orders were received to attack Gernersheim to our front. From where we were we could see it was taking a terrific beating as the Germans were shelling it with rockets since they thought we were in the town. We crept into the town with the tanks and after seizing the edge of town, orders were received to withdraw. We withdrew to our former positions and got a couple of hours rest before morning.

March 25, 1945

After a cold night, we moved to Mussback to get some rest. The 1st platoon managed to get some fairly nice billets and I enjoyed a short sleep in a bed. We spent the day cleaning up, getting equipment in shape, and shifting some men around within the platoon.

The next evening we moved to Hofback to clear out a pocket of enemy resistance. During the night I took the 1st platoon out and we moved through heavy woods in search of enemy stragglers. In the morning we turned around and went through the woods again, but found nothing. About all this did was to get the men thoroughly wet in a driving rain and rob them of some much needed rest.

March 28, 1945

We had moved out of Mussback during the night and at dusk we were moving near the Rhine River. Under cover of a smoke screen the company crossed the river on an Engineer Treadway. The long lines of tracks and tanks moved across as the 12th crossed the Rhine and prepared for the final plunge into Germany.

CC R assembled at Lorach not far from the Rhine and we waited for the other combat commands to get started. CC R was to be in reserve until we had broken out of the hills just east of the Rhine. Lt. Bauersveld came into the company and was assigned to the 1st platoon; maybe I would get a little rest now with him taking over the responsibilities of the platoon, but after talking with him I found he didn't know too much about tactics so I guess I would still do most of the work.

In the afternoon we moved out following the other combat commands who were miles ahead of us. The objective was Nurnberg. We traveled through a driving rain over the hills, over roads that were meant for horse and ox cart and not an armored column. At various points we passed through intermittent artillery barrages from enemy pockets that hadn't been cleaned out, but that we were leaving behind in our fast push toward Nurnberg.

March 31, 1945

Early in the morning our task force was sent out to spearhead to the southeast. C company took the lead as we moved rapidly toward the Tauber River. In the afternoon, meeting heavy resistance, C company dismounted and supported by tanks prepared to attack strong positions to our front. Before the attack could materialize, orders were received to move to the support of the remainder of CC R to help those elements clean up enemy strong points in Boxberg. A company immediately took the lead and we arrived at the outskirts of Boxberg which was burning furiously as the 23rd tank battalion and A and D Companies cleaned up the town. The 1st platoon dismounted immediately and we moved in to support the attack, but had little to do but to clean out an occasional sniper.

In the middle of the night we went back to our vehicles and moved out with the mission of crossing the Tauber River at Konnigshofen and continue the advance to the East. A Company was in the lead, the 2nd platoon and a platoon of medium tanks were in the lead. After getting lost once, we were soon traveling fast toward the Tauber through the night. Most of the men were asleep. I told Burdett to take over the car commander's job and set down and pulled a blanket over me for a few minutes' sleep. Three miles from the Tauber our advance guard was ambushed. Three of the leading tanks and the leading jeep were knocked out by panzerfaust fire and a terrific enemy small arms fire raked the column. When the first panzerfaust went off, I hurled the blanket in one direction and went over the skate mount and jumped to the ground and moved forward to see what the trouble was. The 1st platoon immediately received orders to move out to the right flank and protect the convoy. I dismounted the men and moved them to the other side of a railroad embankment to protect the column. We encountered heavy fire from all directions. The vehicles were withdrawn and the tanks moved to more protective ground. Don was seriously injured in one of the tanks, I learned in a few hours. As daybreak came we were able to spot a kraut line of defense to our front so I had the machine guns open up on them and moved the platoon behind the railroad embankment where we were able to lay down a withering fire on the enemy. The 2nd platoon was holding the road but was forced to withdraw almost to our position because of heavy fire; they suffered a few casualties.

We had killed quite a few of the krauts who had tried to run to the protection of the woods on the other side of the valley. All the platoon were soon withdrawn, and plans were made to attack the high ground to our front which commanded the road leading into Konnigshofen. Early in the afternoon the 1st and 3rd platoons jumped off against the high ground behind a rolling barrage. The 1st platoon was guiding on the road. My leading scouts had just reached the foot of the hill when one of our barrages landed fifty yards short, right in the middle of my platoon. It killed Bert 30 feet in front of me, killed three men in the 3rd squad to my right, and wounded a few. I was never so scared of the enemy's artillery as I was that day of ours. When the barrage came in, I ran for the rear pretty fast, but the range had been corrected and once more was leading the platoon by about 25 yards. I shouted at the men and once more we were moving against the kraut emplacements. Ten krauts were killed in the trenches on the hill and we gained the top of the hill and were pushing on when four enemy machine guns opened up on us, pinning the company to the rear. Capt. Ferguson who had been up with us, immediately got out. I crawled back and told him it was impossible for me to advance and I thought it best to withdraw the platoon to the crest of the hill. He said OK so I went out and moved all the men back and set up a defensive line. We sat there answering the enemy's fire every now and then, but unable to move over the top of the hill. At least we controlled the high ground commanding the road. My platoon had suffered a few more casualties by now.

C Company went roaring by us mounted on the backs of a platoon of tanks, but after entering Konningshofen they were caught in a murderous ambush and suffered heavy casualties before they could withdraw. Our 3rd platoon went in to try to hold the bridge across the Tauber but were caught in an artillery barrage and forced to withdraw. The going was getting tougher as increased enemy resistance was met and more fire was being received. Soon the whole battalion retreated to Rothenburg; it wasn't too orderly a withdrawal.

All day our artillery had hammered at Konningshofen and the roads leading to it since an enemy armored column had been spotted moving away from the town. Two of their tanks were knocked out on the hillside overlooking the town.

In the evening the 1st platoon was sent back to occupy the hill we had taken early in the day. I set up the outposts on the hill and waited and prayed. The Germans were moving around in the valley and it was two miles back to the battalion and we were in danger of getting cut off. While we were out there a couple of jet planes came over and bombed the task force which was digging in around Rothenburg to our rear.

Late in the evening I received orders over the radio to withdraw, so I assembled the men and started to trek back to our lines. Luckily I picked a route across country instead of following the road since the Germans had come in behind us and were digging in on the other side of the road, reoccupying positions we had driven them from earlier in the day. Upon rejoining the battalion I was told that there were reports that an enemy armored column in the area was trying to annihilate our combat command and that a perimeter defense had been set up. The 1st platoon was soon busy digging in its machine guns covering the right flank.

Early in the morning the 3rd platoon sent a patrol into Konningshofen, finding no krauts there, plans were made to continue the advance. In the evening we were moving forward once more with C Company in the lead. Konningshofen was a smoldering ruins by now. Late in the morning C Company cleared the town of Rodheim against scattered resistance. The 1st platoon was then ordered to attack the town of Herrnberchheim, five miles to our front. I placed the half tracks and attached tanks in a huge V and took off cross country for the town. A group of enemy infantry was seen off to the right in thick woods and we gave them a going over but bypassed the woods and moved against the town. We stood for a while on the outside of town machine gunning the place and allowing our artillery to set fire to parts of the town. A railroad embankment prevented a mounted attack on a broad front, so with three tanks in the lead and my half tracks following, we advanced down the road leading under the railroad embankment and into town. The 1st platoon had just entered town when we were ambushed. Firing broke out heavy ahead as panzerfaust lit among the tanks and machine gun fire raked the men. We immediately dismounted and seized the buildings on the other side of the street. All through the night fighting was scattered. C Company was brought in on the 1st platoon's right and we pushed through to the other edge of town.

The 3rd platoon and AT platoons were in our rear but were having a hard time of it. The vehicles had been withdrawn and soon the two companies in town were cut off from the remainder of the task force. All night we fought krauts who kept infiltrating. One tank was knocked out in the center of town by a kraut who had infiltrated through our lines; the whole enemy platoon walked right between the 1st and 2nd platoons but were then shot up by the 3rd platoon in our rear. The enemy counterattacked all night and the going was fairly rough. The town was practically burning down on top of us, to add to our worries. I had lost two half tracks in the initial ambush, they being knocked out by panzerfausts and burned out. Casualties had been fairly light considering the precarious position we were in.

I didn't get any sleep that night for keeping the men under control. Things were in a mess, but we hoped daybreak would bring some relief. Early in the morning the AT platoon went out on a patrol and cleaned out some enemy to our rear and soon the other elements of the task force broke through to us early in the afternoon. All day we engaged in firefights from all directions, but contact had been made with the rear and we received much needed ammunition and gasoline. I was able to get a dozen eggs and eat them and then the machine gun squad told me to come down to their outpost and help them eat some chicken which I gladly did.

April 5, 1945

Early in the morning we made ready to continue the advance and the convoy moved out of Herrnberchthheim. As we cleared the town and were halted waiting for the column to get organized, a flight of enemy planes dove out of the sky and strafed us. Men were running in all directions. When I saw the first plane start his dive I pulled the machine gun around and got off two shots; the gun immediately jammed. The plane was spurting flame and dust was kicking up just outside the track. I knelt behind the shield and tried to get the gun working but six planes went over with hardly a shot being fired at them so complete was the surprise of their attack. By the time we had gotten over our surprise and set up a hail of machine gun fire, the planes took off. Only one man was killed in the company but it had put us all on edge.

Moving on and passing some friendly columns to our left, resistance was soon encountered along a creek bed in front of the town of Billenheim. The 1st and 2nd platoons immediately dismounted and attacked abreast with C Company to our left. We were supported by a company of tanks but they were unable to move along with us because of the hilly terrain. We were soon held up on the high ground overlooking the town by strong enemy fire from the high ground to the other side of the creek bed and from the town. I told Kulikowski to set up his mortar, and soon we were dropping some rounds in likely enemy spots. Soon there were krauts across the valley trying to run away; we started really letting them have it with the mortar and the tanks sitting along side opened up on them. We must have killed 25 as they tried to escape.

Our artillery and mortars were soon giving the town and creek bed a going over and we advanced down the hill and onto the high ground on the other side, killing a few krauts and capturing 25. Gaining the high ground on the other side we ran into heavy fire again and I had one of my squad leaders killed and two men wounded. The AT platoon then came barreling down the road between the 1st and 2nd platoons, mounted and entered the town, clearing it of all remaining resistance.

In the afternoon we seized the high ground overlooking the town of Seenheim which was teeming with enemy activity. Assault guns, mortars and our AT guns plus all the tanks commanded the town. A kraut outpost near us opened up with a burst from a machine gun, putting everyone flat on the ground and killing two men. An assault gun moved up and fired a few rounds where they were but brought little effect. The 1st platoon then moved out to clean them out and as we moved mounted toward them they came running out to surrender.

A few enemy tanks were soon fleeing from the town and we opened up on them. The tankers knocked out one moving across their front, the artillery set one afire moving away to the rear, and a P-47 knocked out another that got behind a hill. As our artillery commenced to soften up the town, streams of fleeing enemy infantry started leaving the town which were thoroughly gone over by our artillery.

A and C Companies, late in the evening, made a dismounted attack on the burning town and we soon had it cleared of the enemy. I suffered three casualties in my platoon. I spent two hours laying out the defense that night because of the large area we had to cover. The men were thoroughly exhausted and the frequent kraut patrols caught coming in kept everyone on edge.

Mail was brought up and one of my men had a discouraging letter from his wife and he went crazy.

April 11, 1945

Early in the morning I was awakened to heavy firing off to my left as the enemy launched a strong counterattack against C Company's sector. It was hard to get the men awakened and to realize the danger they were in, but fortunately C Company was able to beat off this attack after sustaining a few casualties. We spent the first few hours destroying huge stores of enemy equipment found in the barracks area.

C Company pressed the attack against the krauts that had attacked us. Soon A Company mounted up and moved through C Company to continue the attack to the Southwest. The 2nd platoon supported by a platoon of tanks moved into a small town and routed a few krauts. My platoon was ordered in to help them so we dismounted and started to mop up the left part of town. The rest of the company soon passed through us with the remainder of the task force, leaving the 1st platoon to mop up the town. We soon ran into some scattered resistance in a far corner of town and captured three enemy field pieces. We soon had routed out two hundred krauts and huge stores of enemy equipment. I had the machine guns set up covering the main streets and when the first krauts were spotted, we commenced to spray the streets, driving the krauts to the cellars, where a few persuasive grenades brought them all out. We destroyed all the enemy equipment and guns and, leading two hundred PW's, started back to the center of town where we found nothing but our five half tracks; the entire task force had moved on.

A detachment of engineers came by that was taking care of prisoners so we turned them over to the engineers. We had saved one nice German field radio for our use and set it up in the mortar half track. I mounted the men up and tried to make radio contact with the company, but they'd moved too far, so we took off down the roads, following the track marks.

At the next town we ran into the 3rd platoon which had been left to clean up that town. They had had a stiff fight but came out with 300 prisoners and nine field pieces. We drew our half tracks together and waited for word from the front. One of my tracks had broken down and I had managed to make radio contact and send for the maintenance men. While sitting on the outside of this town, a jet plane flew over, sending everyone running in all directions.

A couple of my men got souvenir hungry and went into the town against my orders and stepped on a mine, killing three men.

The 1st and 3rd platoons were soon heading back for the company, my one half track repaired. Late in the afternoon we rejoined the company and parked our vehicles with the rest outside the town of Aub. C Company, the 2nd and AT platoons were busy attacking the town supported by a company of tanks. The resistance was heavy and the 3rd platoon went in to help. I reported to Major Cunningham and he told me that the advance in town was being slowed by continual sniper and machine gun fire from the right flank of town and he pointed out where he wanted me to make a mounted attack and clean them out. He said the mortars were going to give it a working over and that I was to coordinate with them and plan my attack. I mounted the men up and prepared to move out but was unable to make contact with the mortar outfit over the radio to know when their barrage would lift. After a very long barrage I moved out with the half tracks in a V. We soon ran into a deep gully 200 feet deep and 200 yards across, forcing me to dismount the men and continue the attack. I left Broc and his machine guns to cover us and we proceeded to mop up the gully. We routed out 5 snipers and captured a few more hidden krauts. On reaching the other side of the gully, we flushed out some snipers on the high ground which immediately surrendered. Approaching a group of buildings, the platoon was pinned

down by three machine guns. I got up and ran to the gully where another squad was working and got them into position to lay down a covering barrage so the men out in the field could run to the gully. We really let loose and I went out and led the men in. After taking stock of the men we found one man missing. Dusk was approaching and I received orders over the radio to report to the CP in the center of town. I radioed back that I was unable to do so because of a man missing. After a while, leaving the platoon in charge of Burdett, I went out on the field to look for the missing man. The krauts had a field day trying to pick me off, but I moved around and after 20 minutes located the man; he was dead, right through the head. I then lit out of there. We then crossed the gully, and leaving the platoon in charge of Burdett, I went to report to the CP.

The task force was moving into town and a defense was being set up. The remainder of the company had been pretty hard hit during the fighting for this town. The platoon had been shown its billets and Burdett had gotten the men and tracks in, so I took Cross out and we surveyed the ground we were to outpost. We talked to Ruma who was to tie in on our left and the platoon sergeant from battalion headquarters who would tie in on the right. After setting up the outposts it was 2 o'clock and I went back to the billets and got something to eat.

April 13, 1945

Early in the morning we moved out of Aub over territory we had just cleared. At noon the column stopped and the CP was set up in Gustenlor. The different platoons were sent out to patrol nearby woods in search of enemy pockets. We rode out to the woods the 1st platoon was to search, dismounted, and started through the woods in a long skirmish line. We found a battery of abandoned 76mm AT guns, which we destroyed. The 3rd platoon captured 25 men hiding out in the woods and some equipment was found by the AT platoon. Rejoining the company I reported to battalion headquarters concerning the location and number of the captured enemy guns.

In the evening we moved to a nearby town, Rudolzhofen, where we were to get a little rest. We outposted the town and settled down to try and get some rest.

April 14, 1945

Early in the morning the company was alerted for immediate movement and within the hour our task force had assembled and was continuing the advance to the southeast. Late in the afternoon C Company ran into some resistance in the town of Bergel. It was obviously a long string of strong outposts before the long ridge of hills ahead which had been made into a strong point.

C Company proceeded to clean up Bergel and under intermittent artillery fire we moved in to support them. Careful traffic control put us into the town without suffering any casualties. In the town we received a heavy mortar barrage from the hill, wounding quite a few men in the company. Our 1st sergeant was wounded so I took over the job of acting 1st sergeant. It was something I knew nothing about, but since I had known for a long time my number should be up I thought this was a good chance to get away from the very thickest of the fighting.

In Bergberheim, just ahead, C Company had met strong resistance and at nightfall we moved up to help them clean out the town. I spent the night learning what my duties as 1st sergeant would be. Burdett, who had taken over the 1st platoon, and Cross came in; he wasn't too happy about me leaving, but they were glad I wouldn't have to run around taking any more chances like I had before.

Early in the morning we continued the advance, paralleling the ridge of hills to our right. When the first men entered Westheim, a terrific enemy barrage caused them to dismount and continue the advance afoot. The rear of the column was then hit by a barrage throwing it into confusion. The forward elements, aided by another task force on our left, cleaned out the town and I moved the CP half track into town and set up the CP. Soon the company was moving up forward dismounted against the hills. I sat back in the CP and got my reports up to date and listened to the radio messages as the attack progressed. The town came under a terrific barrage when we moved mortars in to support our attack; four shells hitting the house I was in and wounding men out in the streets. The company had been caught in the open fields below the hills and shelled unmercifully, causing them to withdraw with heavy casualties.

In the afternoon, following a murderous artillery barrage, the 41st Infantry took the hill. They had moved down from the right and were in better position than we were to assault the hill; they also had more artillery support. That night the town was outposted and I set up the CP and got reports on the men wounded the day before.

April 16, 1945

In the morning we continued to advance, passing through many forests and overrunning many small towns against minor resistance; most of these towns we left burning. Interdictory enemy artillery fire was encountered all morning, just enough to keep us worried. I sat in the CP half track all day as the company went out twice to clean up some towns which were offering resistance.

In the afternoon our advance was held up by AT fire to our front and artillery fire on the road. I had moved all the company's half tracks into a wooded area where they were out of danger and then sent the platoons up to where the fighting was. Patrols were unable to find the gun positions, but towards evening the firing stopped.

A Company and a company of tanks then moved into Brunst, a small town to our front, and outposted it. An archway over the road had been hit by artillery after our last vehicle went through and the rest of the battalion was unable to join us. We were right in the middle of the German lines, as krauts kept pouring in and we could hear them firing mortars and artillery not far away.

In the morning the remainder of the task force joined us and we continued to advance mounted. Small opposition was encountered but nothing serious as we were moving too fast and the krauts had no time to organize any real resistance.

Late in the afternoon of the 18th we were outside of Ansback. The convoy came under a hail of sniper fire from the hills to our left. Under this hail of fire we raced into a small town just a mile from Ansback. C Company was moving up on our right and we could see kraut activity off on all sides. I set up the CP and waited for things to develop. Another task force entering to our left caught the krauts who had been firing at us between the two columns and we soon had close to a 1,000 prisoners streaming to the rear.

At dusk the company moved out dismounted to attack Ansback in coordination with the task force on our left. The krauts had just taken off and I soon brought the tracks forward and set up the CP in a really swell home.

In the morning we went out on patrols through Ansback to clear out any hidden enemy. We managed to get plenty of souvenirs in this town.

April 19, 1945

Late in the afternoon we mounted up and moved toward the south; this was to be the last plunge. CC R was following the other combat commands and we just spent the day riding through cleared territory; long lines of German prisoners came in and we passed through many burning towns. For two days we followed the other combat commands as we rapidly moved toward the "National Redoubt."

On the 22nd the CP was set up in Bobfingen and all the platoons were sent out on patrols to capture enemy equipment, clear out pockets, or ascertain enemy activity. I spent a pleasant day trying to please the Captain on a choice of CP's. By now the interference received from the Captain and Lt. Malling, the yellowest man I knew, was driving me bats. This business of running company headquarters was getting to be a pain; everyone seemed to be at each other's throats from this or that. If these guys had to get out and fight like the line platoons did they wouldn't feel like privileged children. The only reason I stayed and didn't say much was because I thought I had a chance of getting through this alive now if I just kept praying each night; this was certainly a lot better than leading the platoon night and day and getting shot at twice for every time one of my men got shot at.

April 23, 1945

In the morning we moved forward rapidly, nearing the Danube River. We raced into the town of Lauheim. Here we ran right into the midst of a bunch of krauts and soon shots were being fired on us from all sides and we would answer with the steady burst of our machine guns. The bullets were bouncing off the sides of the half tracks. We moved slowly through the town and were fired on by panzerfausts, none of which hit a track, luckily. The 1st platoon dismounted and after heavy fighting established a bridgehead across a canal that went through the center of town. The rest of the company went across, leaving the tracks on this side. The bridge was soon under artillery fire and destroyed. I moved the CP half track up and into the courtyard of a large beer hall in the vicinity and had a woman fry me a veal cutlet; it was the first cooked meat like this in a long time and it was good.

The engineers moved up and soon had a treadway across the canal and Able company's half tracks and a platoon of tanks got across before the bridge collapsed. Heavy firing was still going on and we outposted the bridgehead as darkness set in. Kulikowski came by and told me where there was a nice wine cellar so my half track driver and I went and brought back a couple of bottles of champagne for the night's meal. I soon had the CP set up and we waited for new orders.

The 1st platoon was ordered to advance down the road to a point three miles from the Danube and then send a patrol dismounted to ascertain if the bridge had been blown or not. It was a foolish mission as they all stood a chance to be ambushed and annihilated before they knew what hit them. I was glad I wasn't back leading the 1st platoon now. Half way to their objective they ran into terrific fire and were forced to withdraw.

By next morning, the bridge was up across the canal and the remainder of the task force was able to join us. Early in the morning the 1st platoon spearheaded the attack to the Danube, but soon ran into heavy resistance at the same spot as the previous night. Soon A Company supported by tanks was moving dismounted against the enemy's positions. I had the CP moved down to a house 300 yards from the fighting. The fighting was terrific and we were suffering heavy casualties. Finally our artillery support got into position and we soon broke through the line of resistance and the 3rd platoon went through the fighting mounted and broke up what resistance was on the other side.

We then continued to advance slowly, but the column was held up because of a heavily mined area and we received a report that the bridge had been blown. While the column was halted we came under a terrific artillery barrage which inflicted heavy casualties on C Company which was in the lead.

Late in the evening we moved back and at dusk on the 24th we crossed the Danube at Lauingen and moved into position in the vicinity of Schmittenback to protect the bridgehead the 12th had won across the river. During the night some replacements reached us. They were mostly medics, ex-aircorps men and other rear echelon men who had had a few weeks' infantry training and then went up here because of the shortage of infantry men in the ETO.

During the night and next morning numerous prisoners were taken and we had some clashes with enemy patrols.

April 25, 1945

In the evening we moved out of our defensive position under scattered enemy firing and moved onto the autobahn near Augsburg and occupied the Vallried Air Strip which the enemy had constructed as part of the autobahn. We caught numerous Luftwaffe men who didn't seem to know that we had broken through. The area was soon outposted and I set up the CP in a large house for the night. Prisoners walked in all night long.

In the morning we got a good look at the airplane factory in the woods nearby. We had captured almost 100 jet jobs; they were sleek-looking affairs; if they had had some fuel they might have caused quite a lot of trouble. All along the autobahn where the completed planes were parked camouflaged in the woods, were the wreckage of planes our strafing planes had caught and destroyed.

On the 28th we continued the advance to the south following CC B. All through the day we passed destroyed enemy columns and long lines of PW's. On the 29th we crossed the Lech River over a railroad bridge; it was a slow bumpy ride, but somehow the old tracks stayed together. We had passed a camp where numerous Poles and Jews had been fed to dogs by the Germans.

On the 30th we entered Starnberg where CC B had just liberated 1,500 Allied prisoners of war. It was a wild party, but our platoons were soon out cleaning out some pockets. They came in with 3,000 prisoners.

May 1, 1945

Early in the morning we crossed the Issar River and sped southward. The 17th was spear-heading for the division. The Austrian Alps loomed in the distance. We were soon on the Reichsautobahn which led to Austria and were making time as we rolled down through Bavaria. Fleeing enemy could be seen on all sides; our advance was so rapid that we captured all bridges intact. It wasn't long before it was snowing and I was soon miserable with the cold. The mountains were only a couple of miles away and we raced on. Over the radio we learned that a detachment of SS engineers had managed to blow up one of the big bridges to our rear, leaving the 17th out all by itself. It was two days before the division was able to make contact with us again. We had set the ground-gaining record for combat: 59 miles in 5 hours and 9 minutes.

We pulled into a little town, Pfraundorf, which set just outside of Rosenheim along the autobahn and the main highway leading into the Alps toward Innsbruck. We soon had the tanks and platoons outposting all the roads and setting up road blocks. Then the field day came. The Germans were caught now, as elements moved up and out of Italy fleeing our attack from there and others fled in front of us. All during the night unsuspecting enemy columns drove up to our road blocks and were prisoners before they knew it.

The next day men in peeps were speeding in all directions bringing in German armored columns single-handed. The PW cage had been set up in our town and it was soon bulging with men. Over 6,000 prisoners were crowded into the barns; 350 officers including 6 generals. I had the job of finding suitable places for the generals so I was told to move my runners out of a couple of rooms and let the German generals have them. I didn't care if the krauts were generals, they could get out in the barns for all I cared, but officers seem to stick together even when they are on opposing sides. It was comical to watch the dirty, unshaven GI's bringing in these polished, immaculately dressed kraut officers. The German 19h Army had collapsed and we knew it wouldn't be long now, since the fighting to the north had stopped weeks ago.

Our new headache was feeding these prisoners. They became restless as we were unable to supply them with food. I had never seen so many enemy soldiers in one spot in my life.

May 2, 1945

Leaving the 1st platoon to guard all these prisoners and captured enemy equipment, we continued our advance toward Innsbruck and into the Alps. All morning we moved through a blinding snowstorm, past the wreckage of numerous enemy vehicles trying to escape our lightning advance.

At noon, just as the leading elements turned a bend in the road at the narrow pass leading into the Alps, we were stopped by a huge crater in the road and swamps to the left and the sheer cliff of the mountain on the right. We had no more than halted than we came under enemy artillery fire which destroyed two vehicles. The leading peep and its occupants were captured by kraut outposts and soon A Company was dismounted and was fighting the krauts who were entrenched in the mountains.

All day we received heavy artillery fire and suffered comparatively heavy casualties. In the afternoon the CP was set up three miles to the rear near Fischback and outposts were set up for the night all over the valley and pass leading into the mountains.

On the 3rd following a bombardment by friendly aircraft, the 17th was able to take the first town in the valley after a fierce fight. We remained in these positions until the 5th when elements of the 36th Division relieved us.

Following our relieve we mounted up and moved north through Munich, Augsburg, Donoworth, and to the little town of Pappenheim where we would start our occupational duties.

Our combat days were over. Germany surrendered on May 8th.

The 1st platoon had started out with 55 men and of these original 55 men, only Luedtke, a half track driver, and myself remained and had seen service all through the campaign.