UPSTARTS

Second Edition

Memories of the 915th Field Artillery Battalion and the 359th Regimental Combat Team of the 90th Division in World War Two

by

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Dedicated to
All the UPSTARTS
Of World War II

Acknowledgements

This book is primarily a personal memoir. Any opinions given in it are my own, and any experiences related are either from my own memory or are reconstructed from what I believe I heard about the experiences of others. However, it could not have been written without the support of others in supplying information, stimulation, and encouragement. Here are a few of those who contributed some or all of the above.

First I should mention my three older children, Bill, Charles, and Roberta, who said they wanted to know what I had been doing all that time they and their mother had stayed in Abilene, Texas, waiting for the war to be over so I could come home. Then there were the members of my Tuesday morning writers' workshop who, knowing nothing at all about military matters, listened patiently while I read everything here, made useful suggestions, and asked questions which resulted in many of the explanatory "essays" imbedded in my narrative.

Donald E. Thomson, Assistant S-3 of the 915th, who shared more of my experiences than any other person, had the wit to save from destruction copies of the Battalion's Historical Data, S-3 Journal, and Unit Journal when the 915th was inactivated after the war. Even more remarkably, he managed to store and save them all during his 30-year career in the Army, and has given me access to them and other miscellaneous documents, including first-hand accounts of the Chambois action written by several officers of the 915th immediately after it was over. These papers have been invaluable in stimulating my memory and frequently in correcting it.

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Ross J. Novelli, forward observer from C Battery, 915th, who gave me a full account of the actions leading up to the death of Lt Col Costain, and their aftermath.

Harvey Safford and Mike Palmer, who came up with some second hand accounts of the same action which supported and supplemented Novelli's recollections.

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Kenneth Reimers, commander of the 343rd FA Bn, who gave me some interesting slants on the war.

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William Falvey, S-2 of the 358th Infantry, who surprised me by coming up with a **complete** list of those names.

And to my wife, Dolores, for her technical expertise in helping me get this manuscript ready for publication.

Robert E. Moore
La Mesa, California, 1995

Postscript, With More Acknowledgements

This second edition contains (1) a number of corrections of material in the first edition and (2) an Appendix with submissions from other members of the 915th FA and the 359th Infantry. Neither would have been possible without considerable correspondence from readers of the first edition. The following correspondents (in alphabetical order) offered everything from long detailed accounts of their own experiences to terse comments on my own, to simply encouraging words:

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The crossed cannon insigne on the title page is a photocopy of one worn by Capt. James Donald Richter, used by courtesy of his son, Duane Richter.

Bob Moore

La Mesa, California, 1997

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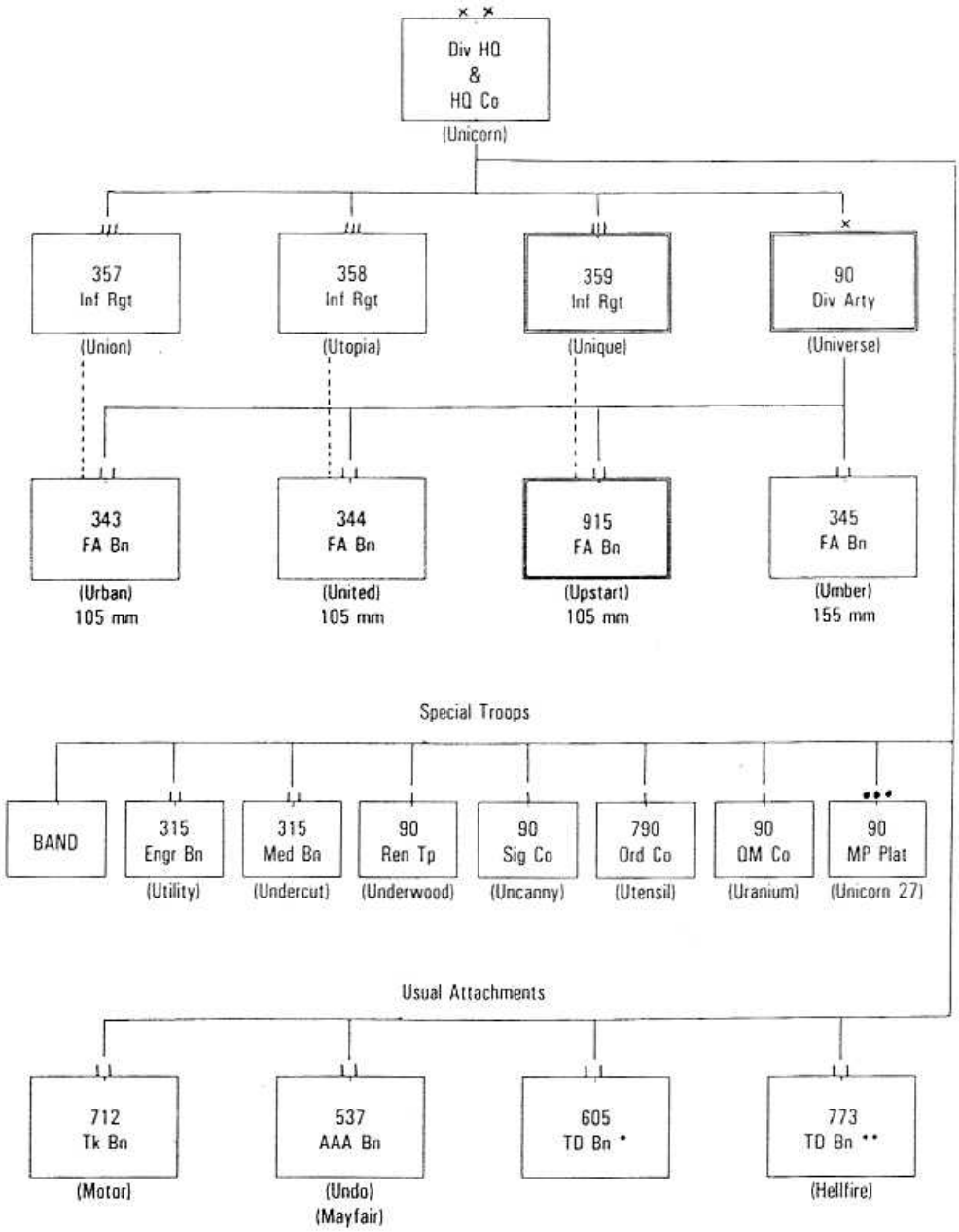
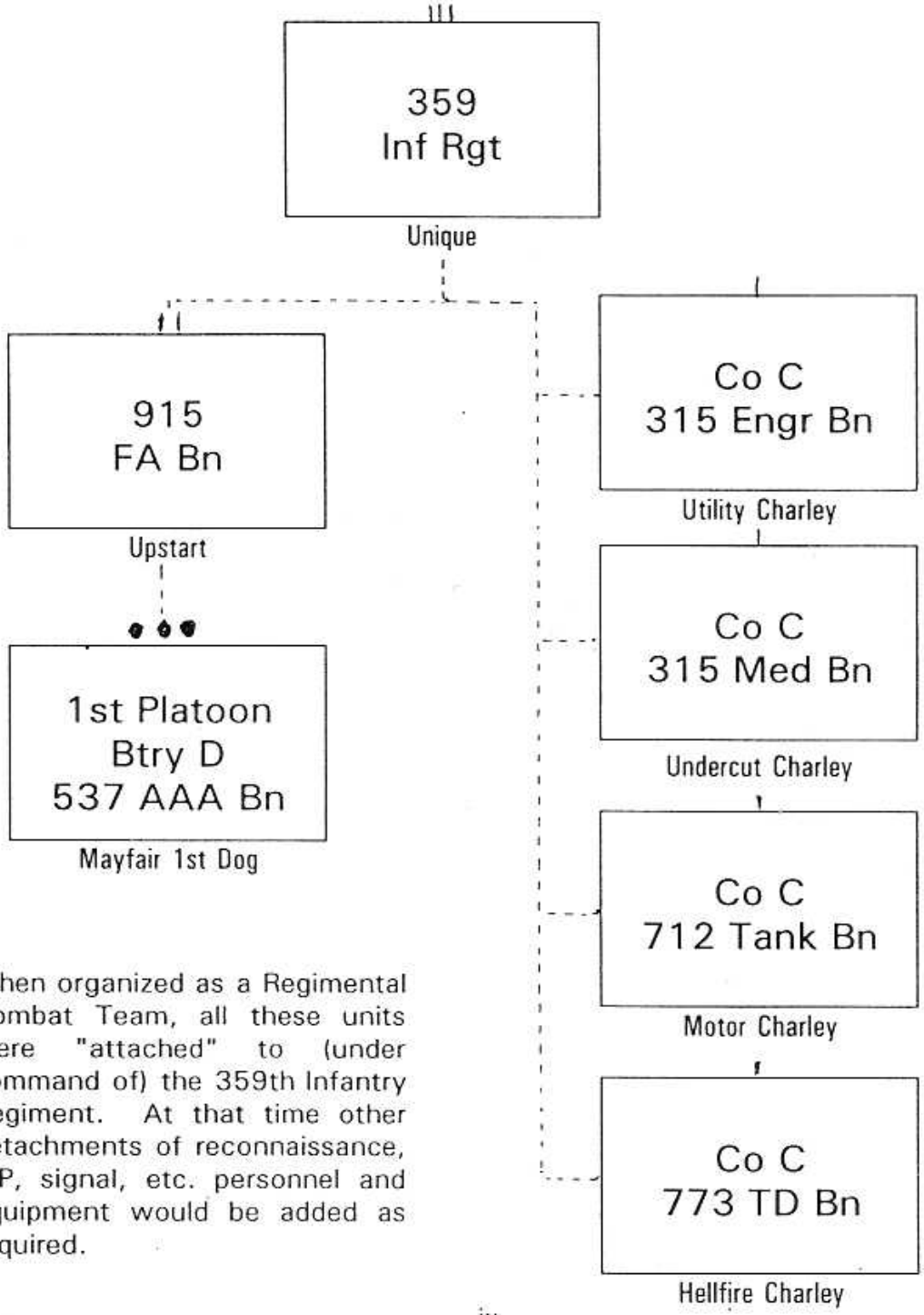
Authorized Strength (less Attached Units) = 14,000 men



* A battalion with towed guns, attached until Nov 1944

** A battalion with self-propelled guns, attached during and after Nov 1944

Units Normally Supporting 359th Infantry Regiment



When organized as a Regimental Combat Team, all these units were "attached" to (under command of) the 359th Infantry Regiment. At that time other detachments of reconnaissance, MP, signal, etc. personnel and equipment would be added as required.

Foreword

Direct Support

Do not try to digest this section all at once, but keep it on hand for reference.

In this document I will refer frequently to battalions and batteries, and it might help to get a rough idea of what they are.

A field artillery battalion (Bn) was made up of something over 500 men and necessary equipment, divided into five batteries, plus a medical detachment. The batteries were Headquarters Battery (Hq Btry), Service Battery (Svc Btry), and three firing batteries, A, B, and C. Each battery contained roughly 100 men and was commanded by a captain. The Hq Btry Commander had the additional job of Communications Officer (ComO). The Svc Btry Commander was also the Battalion S-4[1], or supply officer.

Most of Hq Btry were communications people, handling two-way radios, laying telephone wire, manning switchboards, etc., but it also included a survey section, a fire direction center, liaison sections, a kitchen crew, and some other odds and ends.

Svc Btry contained a sizable motor maintenance section to do preventive maintenance and repairs on the vehicles, an ammunition train to haul shells for the howitzers, and a supply section to deliver food, clothing, gasoline, and other amenities. And, of course, a kitchen.

Batteries A, B, and C each had four howitzer sections, consisting of a howitzer (cannon), a truck to tow it, and the cannoneers and driver to operate same. There was also a "fifth section" with two trucks and a crew of ammunition handlers (traditionally the men too dumb to do anything else). The battery executive officer commanded these five sections.

A firing battery also included communication (radio and telephone) personnel, instrument (survey) people, and forward observer? (FO) parties. And last but not least, a kitchen truck with equipment and personnel to feed everyone.

The Medical Detachment of our battalion didn't have much to do, fortunately. Most of our casualties were forward observer and liaison personnel who were up with the infantry and got treated or evacuated by the infantry medics. Our battalion surgeon, Lt. Davis, a pathologist as a civilian, had an ambulance and a jeep plus several aid men, and took care of colds and fluxes. Much of the time he spent-hanging out around the S-2 Section where there was company. A few times we were shelled or bombed, and then he was a tower of strength.

In the 90th Division Organization Chart (page iii) the 915th Field Artillery Battalion (915th FA Bn) is shown as under the command of the 90th Division Artillery (Div Arty), and its box is right under that of the 359th Infantry Regiment and connected to it by a dotted line. That means that the 915th was in Direct Support of the 359th. The chart on page iv shows what other units were also in direct support of the 359th. To clarify much of what follows, I must explain just what that relationship implies.

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The infantry, nicknamed the "Queen of Battle," is the key and most important part of any army. It is the part that attacks the enemy, defends against him, and, hopefully, eventually defeats and overcomes him. Everyone else is there for the express and sole purpose of helping and supporting the infantry in accomplishing its mission. In an infantry division, the most conspicuous support is given by the artillery, and most infantrymen who have been in combat understand, or at least appreciate, that support. To quote one combat infantryman, John Colby, author of *War From the Ground Up,* ". . . The infantry protects the artillery so the artillery can shoot the bejesus out of the enemy_ "

To establish a structure for assuring that an infantry regiment gets artillery fire" when it needs it, a field artillery battalion is assigned the job of direct support. Consequently, unless the 359th Infantry Regiment was in reserve, or otherwise not in contact with the enemy, the mission of the 915th FA Bn was to see that the regiment got whatever artillery fire it needed. If we couldn't furnish it by the fire of our own three batteries (12 howitzers in all), we would get in touch with any other artillery battalions within range - whether in the Division Artillery or the Corps Artillery - and request additional fire from them. Occasionally there would be some reason why they couldn't comply, but usually they were happy to oblige. However, except at our request or with our permission, no other friendly artillery could fire in the zone of the 359th. This was because we were supposed to know where all our infantry units were and could assure that they didn't get any "friendly fire" down the back of their necks. Keeping track of our own front lines was probably my own most important duty as *S-2*[1] of the 915th, a job I held for about the first half of our time in combat.

How did I keep track? It wasn't always easy, but fortunately, the 915th had representatives up with the infantry units. As a Direct Support battalion, the 915th had three liaison officers (LnO's) (captains), each with a sizeable party of about six men and two jeeps, one carrying a two-way radio, the other a reel of telephone wire. One LnO went to each of the three battalions of the 359th Infantry Regiment, with instructions to form a symbiotic relationship with the battalion commander and keep us informed on what was going on. After the first few days in combat, the infantry battalion commanders were happy to have them along.

In addition, we were authorized three forward observers (FO's) (lieutenants) per battery, so we had enough for one per rifle company. A FO party had only about three or four men, with one jeep, a radio, and a small breast reel for hand-laying about half a mile of a lightweight, flimsy telephone wire.

(FA tradition called for observers to find observation posts [OP's] on high ground, where they could see the enemy and shoot at them. That immediately proved infeasible in combat, for at least three reasons: 1. The Normandy hedgerows, used as fences around the tiny fields, were high banks of earth with dense brush and stands of trees on top. You couldn't see further than about 200 yards from anywhere. 2. The infantry tended to use lack of artillery fire as a reason/ excuse for not advancing, and unless they had observers with them, were unlikely to get it when they needed it. 3. FO's who couldn't see the enemy couldn't see where the friendly troops were

either, and at first they tended to shoot at anything that moved. In consequence, it turned out that the only place for an observer was with the forward infantry elements. You couldn't see anything there either, but you at least could see as much as the infantry could, and you were available when needed. And you were sometimes a sort of hostage, lest the artillery committed some impropriety such as firing on its own troops.)

And you could send word back to the slavering Bn S-2 about where the elements of your company were. Maybe.

There are three things a FA unit must be able to do: move, communicate, and shoot. Communications probably caused more problems than the other two put together. All the radios I mentioned above operated using one of two electrical sources: the jeep battery or a battery pack, used when you are away from the jeep. When you were traveling in the jeep, you could use the radio any time, but when you got out, things got harder. The battery pack and the radio weighed about forty pounds each, and had to be carried by hand for moving on foot, which is mostly how infantry moves. The radio was then out of service until you stopped long enough to assemble the two parts and check in. To make things even harder, the infantry (especially at first) often objected to an artilleryman raising the radio's high whip antenna. It was thought to draw fire, either because the enemy could see it or because they could "home in" on it electronically.

Until it was set up, however, the Bn S-2 could call his lungs out, but those at the other end could neither hear nor answer.

Telephone, though more satisfactory to talk over, is even more tedious. First, telephone wire has to be laid up to wherever the infantry commander decides to stop, and then it must be maintained. Traffic, especially tanks, will chew up wire, so it has to be repaired often. Enemy artillery and mortar fire are devastating to wire too, and in the case of the light wire the FO's carried, even a heavy-footed infantryman could accidentally break it.

In consequence, I spent a lot of time on radio and telephone trying to get some response from our people up front, while our sweating wire crews were out trying to find what was wrong with the wire and fix it." It was particularly frustrating because our telephone line to Div Arty *always* seemed to work, and their S-2 was constantly on my back to find out where the troops were. I later found that this was because the division G-3[1] was constantly on *his* back, having found out that we were more likely to know than the infantry regimental headquarters was.

Every couple of days I would get so tired of being chewed out for not knowing where they were that I would abandon the situation map and the telephone to Technical Sergeant Johnson, the operations sergeant, and go forward by jeep and foot to find out for myself. ' It was a cowardly thing to do, but it got me out of communications for awhile, and Sgt Johnson could always blame everything on me.

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[Note: Here I must mention that the 915th also had an air section, with two Piper Cub airplanes, at least one of which was constantly in the air during daylight, weather permitting. They were invaluable for finding targets and observing fire, but were of limited use in keeping track of our own infantry locations. Our infantry had been taught to conceal themselves from aerial observation.]

END NOTES

Note 1: The four principal staff officers of battalion and regimental size units are designated the S-l, S-2, S-3, and S-4. At division level or higher, they are designated G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4. Their normal areas of responsibility are

S-l: Personnel matters. In our battalion the executive officer (major) theoretically supervised these as a minor part of his duties, but under him was a warrant officer, who was in charge of the actual paper work. He and his crew were separated from us, being with the 90th Division Rear Echelon, far to the rear, and we rarely saw any of them.

S-2: (Captain) Enemy intelligence (my initial job). Ironically, most of my time was taken up, with keeping track, not of the enemy on our front, but of our own infantry facing them. I passed the information on to our S-3, so he would not fire on them. I also procured and distributed maps, coordinated with adjoining units, and was a high-priced gofer.

S-3: (Major) Operations, plans, and training. In combat, the primary duty of the artillery battalion

S-3 was to run the fire direction center, where all requests for fire came in, were screened, and if approved, converted into commands for the firing batteries. This fire direction center needs a more thorough treatment, which I will give in the next segment.

S-4: (Captain) Supply. The S-4, or his men, requisition (order) all kinds of supplies: food, ammunition, gas and oil, spare parts, clothing, et al; go get them when they are ready; and distribute them to the users.

Note 2: Until after the American Civil War, field artillery (cannon on wheels, so they could be moved from place to place) were fired by a fairly simple procedure: the piece (cannon) was located where the enemy could be seen by the cannoneers (and vice versa). The crew chief sighted down the top of the barrel and had the cannoneers move the piece until it was pointed at the target. Then it would be loaded and fired. The recoil from the shot would drive the piece backward for several yards, so the cannoneers would muscle it back into position and repeat the process, provided the smoke from the preceding round had blown away enough for the target to be visible again. All this was a lot of work. And it had to be done hastily, because the enemy, who could see you, might break through any moment and attack your position with fixed bayonets.

Foreword

Then, some time in the 1870's, some French genius invented the French 75 mm gun, which revolutionized artillery. In the first place, it had the first successful recoil mechanism, meaning that after it was fired, the piece automatically came back into position, all ready to be fired again. And in addition, it had a sight which enabled it to fire at a target which was invisible to the cannoneers. This meant that the cannon could be fired from a safe, hidden position, provided an observer was up somewhere where he could see the target, go through a complex mathematical process, and send the resulting command to fire back to the guns, using semaphore flags, homing pigeons, telephone, or whatever came to hand. The first rounds fired were hardly ever right on target, so the observer had to watch and send more commands to adjust the fire to where it belonged. If you could do it within six or eight adjustments, you were pretty good. Pigeons proved to be too slow and irresponsible. Semaphore flags were still being issued in 1942, and once, during a field exercise at Camp Barkeley, we actually tried to use them, but the experiment failed. After that we forgot them.

Note 3: The wire crews and their "Don Ameche wagons," 3/4 ton trucks with wire reels, pike poles, and other equipment, were frantically busy; they were also in frequent danger when repairing damage done to the wire by enemy artillery fire: enemy artillery tended to fire again at the same place from time to time.

Essay One

The Fire Direction Center

NOTE: An asterisk after a name means that it is not the person's real name. Having forgotten his correct name in the last 50 years, I have had to furnish a substitute.

The sides have been rolled up on the light-proof CP tent to let in light and air, and the crew of the Fire Direction Center (FDC) has relaxed and spread into the surrounding outdoors. The scene is calm.

Smith *, the A Battery Computor, is writing a letter home. *S/Sgt* Hallick, the Chief Computor, a tall blond youth, is sharing a joke with *T/4* Devlin, the HCO (Horizontal Control Operator). Devlin is of medium build, with a blue-black beard showing through his morning shave. These two are close friends; the others call them the "Rover Boys" because they go off away from everyone to sleep at night and are late showing up in an emergency. Or sometimes even for breakfast.

Hallick is from "Lon Gyland"; he says he knows people from "Long Island," but they are from a different area and ambiance.

Devlin hails from Fargo, North Dakota, across the river from Lt Col Costain's home town of Moorhead, Minnesota. They exchange newspapers or clippings from home.

T/4 Harris, the VCO (Vertical Control Operator), a small, pale, unobtrusive man, is reading a book. He is a college graduate-a fraternity brother to Lt. Mendecino of B Battery. Harris is smart enough to be an officer, but he failed to impress the board when he was interviewed for Officer Candidate School,

T/5 Gillis and PFC Jones*, the B and C Battery Computors, are arguing heatedly about nothing in particular.

Major Swatosh, the S-3, has gone off to confer with the Battalion Commander. He will probably stop by the kitchen truck for a cup of coffee on the way back.

Captain Thomson, the Assistant S-3, who has drifted over to the S-2 section, is looking at the Situation Map there. Don Thomson has curly blond hair, a pug nose, and heavily muscled lips from having played the trombone in a dance band to work his way through Iowa State. He is brilliant and very good at his job, but has a bad habit of making clever remarks at the wrong time and to the wrong people.

"Bob," he says to me, "are you sure you have the location of the 359th OP right? It looks like a hell of a place for an observation post. "

Before I can explain that an infantry observation post is different from an artillery OP, a phone rings. His phone. The fire direction phone. Everyone freezes. All conversation stops. Smith* puts the cap on his fountain pen. Harris, closes the book over his finger to hold the place and glances toward the folding table in the tent which holds the map that is his VCO chart. Jones* and Gillis, their mouths still open from the argument, start to fumble for their telephones, clip boards, and Graphical Firing Tables (these latter look like large slide rules). Captain Thomson takes quick steps toward his own place of business.

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Sgt Hallick, being closest, picks up the phone. "Upstart Fire Direction," he says into it. Then he announces "Fire Mission!" to everyone within earshot, says "Wait, " into the phone and hands it to Thomson.

Everyone scrambles into position. Devlin and Harris lean over their firing charts, plotting pin in hand. Each of the three Battery Computors, having assembled all his equipment, cranks his telephone on the direct lines to his firing battery, and says, "Stand by," into the mouthpiece.

Meanwhile, Captain Thomson hears his telephone say, "This is Upstart Charley FO 2. Fire Mission! Enemy machine guns in vicinity of Concentration three one five. Request battalion. Will adjust. "

He repeats "enemy machine guns in vicinity of concentration three one five" for the benefit of the board operators, and pauses for about one second, during which time he checks the location of Concentration 315 to make sure it's safely out in front of our own lines, considers the wind direction and the amount of ammunition available. Then he announces loudly, "Shell HE. Charge 5, Fuze Quick, Battalion Baker, Center Right, two volleys. "

Pandemonium ensues.

T/4 Devlin has stuck a pin into the Horizontal Control Firing Chart in the middle of a tiny circle marked Concentration 315. He already had three other pins in the chart, one for each battery position, so he now uses a big fan-shaped piece of clear plexi-glass to measures the distance and direction to the target for each battery and starts singing out: "Baker: Base Deflection right one three two, Range four two hundred. Able: Base Deflection right one zero four, range. . ."

Even before hearing this, *T/5* Gillis has already sent a partial command to B (Baker) Battery: Fire Mission. Battery adjust, Shell HE, Charge 5, Fuze quick -" and now that he has more information, he continues, Base Deflection right one three zero -" Then he cuts off and calls to *T/4* Harris, "SI Baker?"

Harris, the Vertical Control Operator, has already been making the calculations necessary to figure the angle of Site (SI) necessary to make up for the difference in altitude between the target and the battery position, so he is able to sing out, "SI Baker, minus 2."

Gillis now completes his command to the battery: "SI minus 2, Center Right, 345."

While Gillis is performing, the other two computors are getting similar data and giving similar commands to their guns, but incomplete ones, because they will not fire until after B Battery's fire has been adjusted precisely on the target, so that their data can be corrected before they join in the Fire for Effect.

All this has taken about a minute.

The Fire Direction Center

If you are confused, think how you would feel if you actually witnessed this moment of bedlam! Everyone talking - bellowing - at once, yet somehow keeping it all straight. And Sgt Hallick circulating to spot check on each man's work, his ears cocked to detect anything that sounds irregular. Speed is necessary, but accuracy is essential. Lives are at stake.

And while you were reading the last paragraph, the sweating cannoneers at the firing batteries have been doing their thing, and the Executive Officer of B Battery has reported, "On the Way!"

*****

The Fire Direction Center was America's contribution to the art of artillery gunnery. It superseded the elegant French method which allowed firing only one battery (four cannon) at a time, and made it possible to quickly mass the fire of an entire battalion of twelve cannon on a single target. It went beyond that. Given adequate communications, it enabled the massed fire of all the artillery within range - up to a dozen battalions or more - on a single target at the same time. Dazed German prisoners wanted to know what kind of "automatic" cannon we had that let us fire so much so fast.

I am sure that the FDC as I knew it no longer exists. Even while I was still in the army, new techniques were developed to streamline it. And that was before the electronic computer was developed. Nowadays a lap-top computer with a competent operator could easily do the work done then by two high-priced officers and six fairly bright enlisted men.

I say fairly bright advisedly: the first experimental FDC I got a glimpse of back in 1938 was manned entirely by commissioned officers. By 1942, when we began setting one up for the 915th, it was recognized that enlisted men could handle most of the jobs, provided they were exceptional enlisted men. So we assembled a group of the best and the brightest we could find, and trained them. They were a quick study, and they were well trained in a couple of weeks, at which time they all departed for Officer Candidate School (OCS). The army hungered for second lieutenants.

So we got together another group, the next-best and next-brightest. They were a little slower to learn, and most of them left for OCS **before** they were fully trained.

Eventually we got smart. To go to OCS, a man had to have an AGCT test (Army equivalent of IQ) score of 110. So we scouted around for men with AGCT scores of 108 and 109. They took a little longer to train, but after they were trained, they did every bit as well as the geniuses had.

Chapter 1

Across the Channel and Over the Beach

The 90th Infantry Division crossed the English Channel in a variety of transports of all sizes. I was aboard the liberty ship *Frank R. Stockton,* together with the rest of Hq & Hq Battery of the 915th. Most of the holds of the ship were full of loaded vehicles, but one, just under the main deck, was furnished with bunks and left without a hatch cover: men could sleep in it. A single narrow ladder led down from the deck. This hold was big enough for maybe 25 % of the men. The rest had to find spots on deck with some shelter from the frigid breeze or in the holds with the equipment. As an officer, I was lucky: the second mate let me sleep in his stateroom (the size of a walk-in closet) on a stiff leatherette settee only two feet shorter than I was.

My roommate was a strange character who spent the first day, before we even left the dock, trying to pump our destination out of me. It was Top Secret, and I knew how important it was that no one not specifically authorized find out in advance. On the other hand, I didn't want to offend him and possibly lose my billet as a result. So I lied, saying I had no idea, but thought it was somewhere either in Norway or on the Black Sea.

He made one comment which surprised me. "The thing I like about these men of yours is that they're tough. They aren't soft, like our sailors." I looked around, and sure enough he was talking about our men - the same ones we had trained at Camp Barkeley and on the desert. It had never occurred to me that they could be classified as tough, but now that he mentioned it, I saw that they were! As a matter of fact, someone decided that the TO on our shoulder patch stood for Tough ' Ombres instead of Texas and Oklahoma.

We tough 'ombres had been issued Ten-in-One rations, which were one step up from C- or K rations, but required some minimal preparation. Field ranges were set up on deck to do the necessary cooking and provide boiling water for washing mess gear. This sanitary arrangement was not entirely effective. The heads (latrines) built into the ship were adequate for the crew, but not for the number of passengers aboard, so long urinal troughs had been installed along the rails. Unfortunately, the drain-spouts intended to take the flow down to the ocean were cut off at deck level, so the contents of the windward trough was frequently sprinkled over the kitchen and dining facilities. I couldn't see that it affected appetites much, even in the constant rolling swell of the English Channel.

A lot of preparations had been made before we embarked. All the vehicle engines were waterproofed and equipped with snorkels so that they would run for short distances even immersed in water-a possibility definitely worth considering. Then they were driven about 20 miles to the port for loading, and during the drive some of the waterproofing loosened and burned off, as we discovered later.

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The night before we left camp for the ship, I had prepared maps for issue. Maps were my responsibility. We, especially Battalion Headquarters and the Ln O's, would need them at once upon landing. However, since the general area where we were to land was Top Secret, only a few of us had been briefed on it. If any of those maps fell into the hands of enemy informers - and anyone, including my friend the second mate of the ship, might be one - the whole landing operation could be jeopardized. So I separated the maps into sets, one for each person who would need them, and sealed each set into a fiber container normally used to carry a round of 105mm ammunition. The sealed containers were carried onto the ship by a detachment of enlisted men carefully selected as sober, responsible, and intelligent enough to understand the grisly threats as to what would happen to anyone who lost one. Once we were at sea, we issued the maps and briefed everyone as best we could on what was going to happen. Or what the plan said was going to happen.

Elaborate preparations were made for gas (external) attack. We all had gas masks, a new, lighter model than the ones we had worn, cursing, all through maneuvers. And we had waterproofed them by sticking tape over the end of the canister to keep out water or even moist air. However, on shipboard it turned out to be hard to wear gas masks and life-vests at the same time, so most of us carried the life-vests and stashed the gas masks somewhere.

We also wore impregnated fatigue clothes over our woolen uniforms to protect us from blistering gases. The fatigues were stiff and smelly and the chemicals in them balled up under your fingernails when you scratched. Shoes were treated with impregnite, a thick gummy grease that made the shoes about as flexible as a pair of wooden sabots. I put the gunk on my shoelaces and was able to hold one out as rigid as a baseball bat when I was through.

You might think that wearing all these gas-proof garments in June would have been sweltering, but you just don't know about the English Channel. I doubt if it ever gets warm enough for comfort there.

The main problem with the fatigues was the pants pockets. There were only two: saddle patch pockets with flaps, located just over the hip joint, so that it was impossible to reach into one without unbuttoning the pants. I had a K-ration box in each pocket, so I could not lie down on either side. I tried lying on my back on the little settee, and then on my stomach. Finally I decided that if the ship went down I could drown just as well without my impregnated trousers, and took them off to sleep.

Sleep was what I did most of the time on the ship, probably 14 to 16 hours a day. We had done a lot of sleeping while crossing the Atlantic, too, so I thought that it was the effect of the ship's motion or the salt air, but I have traveled by ship since without that effect, so I know now that it was caused by fear or apprehension, combined with a feeling of helplessness. On land, we could do something useful. We could move, communicate, and shoot. Or dig holes to hide in. Here and now we could only wait and take turns fearing the worst and hoping for the best.

Across the Channel and Over the Beach

Our fleet was enormous, and each ship had its own barrage balloon bouncing overhead. The last three nights we were attacked by planes - bombing mostly, because they couldn't get low enough to strafe effectively on account of the balloons. The sailors looked at us and said, "We sure feel sorry for you fellows' having to get out on that beach and fight." We turned a shade whiter and answered, "Hurry up and get us ashore where it's safe. There isn't any place on this tub where you can dig a foxhole." And they said, "Well, if that's the way you feel about it, we hope you get off soon, so we can get the hell out of here!"

On the afternoon of D-day, I was on deck looking at the vast clusters of barrage balloons, listening to the naval gunfire in the distance, and trying to figure out what was going on along the faraway smoky shore when some idiot yelled, **"GAS!"**

I knew what to do. I held my breath and reached for the flap on my gas mask carrier. But the carrier wasn't there. It was in the second mate's stateroom, where I had left it. Still holding my breath, I headed back for it, noting as I went that there was a lot of panicky scrambling around on deck near the top of the ladder to the hold. Everyone on deck had left his gas mask in the hold, and everyone in the hold had left his on deck. The ladder was too narrow for two-way traffic. There was quite a little bottle-neck.

Meanwhile I reached the stateroom just before collapsing from lack of air, found my mask, and, dislodging several waterproofed packs of cigarettes stowed in the gas mask carrier for lack of room in my musette bag, put it on with some difficulty over my bugged-out eyes. [The cigarette packs were waterproofed by tying them in condoms. The system did not work well, for the sharp corners punched holes in the rubber.]

And then I found, to my horror, that I had forgotten how to breathe! Strain and contort my diaphragm as I would, I could not get any air into my lungs. Reeling from asphyxiation, I finally remembered that waterproof patch across the end of the canister. Of course I couldn't breathe through it. I clawed at it, trying to get a fingernail under a corner, but finally yanked the mask off in disgust, and took a deep breath of fresh ocean air.

The effect of the oxygen was immediate. It enabled me to recall that you can't use poison gas over water, because it sinks to the surface and is absorbed. I put away the mask and went out on deck to help quell the panic, which was dying down by now anyhow. I remember our battalion commander, Lt Col Costain, waving his own mask in the air and shouting to the men to stop making jackasses of themselves.

Anyhow, we kept better track of our masks - at least for awhile. Lt Ray Wright claimed that the ship's chief radio officer, whose stateroom he shared, slept in his all night. About as comfortable as sleeping with your head in a hot water bottle.

Upstarts

Because a liberty ship is too deep in the water to get close to a beach, personnel and vehicles are lightered ashore in landing craft of several varieties, all of which have flat, shallow bottoms so that, theoretically, they can run right up onto the sand. So we had to wait our turn for a landing craft. We waited all of D-Day, which wasn't bad, since we weren't scheduled to land until D+ 1. But D+ 1 passed – slowly - and so did D+2. And finally, on the morning of D+3, a Landing Craft, Tank (LCT) came alongside and the ship's crew started to off-load our equipment into it.

I didn't get in the first LCT. Col. Costain and Captain Jacobs, the Headquarters Battery commander, left in that one. Major Hughes was somewhere on shore already he'd landed with our regiment's first infantry waves on the afternoon of D Day. But we had no idea where he was, and we knew that he had expected us on D+1. We had tried to contact him by radio from the ship - and failed. My instructions when we hit shore were to find the 359th Infantry command post and get the situation there, then to find Col Costain and/or what elements of our own battalion I could and report what dope I had been able to get. You see, each of our batteries was on a different ship, and we didn't know whether the firing batteries were ahead of us, behind us, or where.

The second LCT finally came up alongside and started to load. My jeep was one of the first to be loaded into it, toward the stern and away from the drawbridge that made up the front end. Joe B. Davis, Sgt Johnson, and I went down the swinging rope ladder somewhat gingerly, and backed it [the jeep] into place. The vehicles were packed in almost solid, so that you had to step from vehicle to vehicle to get around.

The back seat of the jeep was packed with luggage almost to shoulder height, and Sgt Johnson sat perched ‘way up on top of it all. I considered taking off my heavy musette bag and hanging it somewhere on the vehicle instead of wearing it between my shoulder blades. Then I thought again. Maybe something would happen, and we'd have to abandon the jeep quickly. I might need the things in the bag. I compromised by sitting with it rested on the back of the seat, leaned uncomfortably against my helmet.

Hours went by. They were still loading. I began to wonder if they would ever get the LCT loaded. It didn't really look as if they would.

The sides of the craft were high and narrow so that all you could see was a patch of sky, and on one side, the rail of the liberty ship, and every now and then another jeep dangling in mid-air being loaded. From time to time you could hear the clatter of anti-aircraft fire, and once in a while a plane came across my little vista. I wasn't really scared, but I was nervous with anticipation and anxious to get ashore, where I was part of a fighting machine, instead of here, where I was just so much vulnerable dead weight. Also, it was late afternoon, and I had been wearing my full pack most of the day, so as to be ready without holding anything up. I cursed myself for an eager beaver, because I really knew better. I had forgotten the ancient army adage: Never run when you could walk, never walk when you could stand still, never stand still when you could sit down, and never sit down when you could lie down.

Across the Channel and Over the Beach

I couldn't tell you how long it took to get to shore - it seemed like forever. But at long last, the front end opened by letting down the ramp, and here was the beach, some three hundred yards away. I had been told that it might not be possible to come in close enough to land us dry-shod - that was the reason for waterproofing the vehicles but it looked like half the English Channel still in front of us. The first vehicle rolled carefully down the steep ramp and splashed out of sight. Shortly we saw it again, chugging manfully up to the beach. Then the next and the next, and after while it was our turn. The ramp looked awfully steep, the water tremendously deep. Joe B. Davis put the jeep in low range, low gear, and eased her in. The water covered the hood and lapped around my short ribs. I looked back at Sgt Johnson with some envy. He was still mostly above water level. The engine sputtered, chugged twice, sputtered again, and died. The waterproofing had failed.

"God damn it!" I screamed. "I thought you had this son-of-a-bitch waterproofed!"

"I thought so too, sir."

I jumped out-for some reason the water was even icier outside - and called to Sgt Johnson to get out and help push. Hopeless. Our feet sank ten inches into the sandy bottom, and so did the jeep's tires. The LCT yawed, moving the ramp so that we were on longer blocking it, and more vehicles came off and passed us. Can you imagine pushing a car stuck in the mud through four feet of water? We tried for five minutes, and I saw it was no use, so I started to tell Joe B. to wait with the jeep until it could be rescued and then come find me. I was about to start out on foot with Sgt Johnson, but just then a caterpillar tractor floundered out toward us and told us to hitch onto it. The tractor pulled us and another unfortunate out and across the beach and up a roadway onto a bluff where there was a place we could pull off the road and work on the jeep. And there - wonder of wonders - I found Jake Jacobs and Major Hughes. I fell on their necks and kissed them. Davis opened the hood of the jeep and started scraping off waterproofing compound by the handful and fooling with the carburetor. It was dusk by now and I was wet and worn, but I was with someone I knew and someone that knew the score.

When my jeep would run again, we started out, following Major Hughes. Before dark I just got a few faint impression - signs everywhere, "Roads cleared of mines to hedges," M.P.s at almost every crossroad, the first view of the now famous Normandy hedgerows, an occasional village, usually badly shelled. In one doorway here were two figures - a gaunt Norman woman and a boy of about ten who puffed avidly on a cigarette. Both looked at us listlessly as we went by.

I went a lot of places that night - to the field where Major Hughes had decided to assemble the battery as it came in, to the 359th Infantry CP, to the fields just out of the village of Neuville au Plain (just north of Ste. Mere Eglise) where B and A Batteries were already in position firing, and to the 4th Division Artillery CP. Part of the time I was with Hughes and Jacobs, later with Col Costain.

Upstarts

Almost all the troops were green, and I was glad I knew the password. "Triggerhappy" is the word for the sentries. The one at the 359th got the password from Jacobs and me, then kept us at bay while he sent for someone who knew us to identify us. ("I thought he would give me a shave with that bayonet," Jake commented.) Nobody was taking any chances. They had read books and seen movies about spies, snipers, and infiltrating patrols.

Finally we got back to our assembly field and my bedroll was soaked. In spite of that fact and in spite of all my surplus of sleep on the ship, I slept very soundly for what little was left of the night. It was over a week before my bedroll completely dried out, but that never kept me awake when I got a chance to get into it.

Using my mess kit fork, I fished one of the artichokes out of the boiling water in the #10 can. "Won't you try one?" I asked. "I think you'd like it."

My jeep driver, T/5 Joe B. Davis, recoiled as if I had offered him the business end of a rattlesnake. "No, sir." A pause. "Thanks anyway." It was clear that in his West Texas home artichokes were not a staple of diet like fried okra or black-eyed peas, and he was not about to experiment on some strange weed that a foolhardy captain had picked in a deserted garden in Normandy. He had humored me enough by **cooking** the things.

Joe B. Davis was a small, wiry man with a weather beaten Texas face that might have belonged to a man of twenty or forty-five. I expect he was in his upper twenties. He didn't talk much.

He was the last of a series of drivers I had experienced, and I got him when we were on desert maneuvers in California. He was a substitute for my regular driver, who was on sick call for the day. Joe B. Davis drove me for about a mile along a trace of trail that wound between creosote bushes, when I mentioned mildly that I thought we were going a little too fast for the conditions underfoot. At this point my regular driver would have either ignored the suggestion or slammed on the brakes and slowed to a crawl. What Joe B. Davis did was reduce speed from twenty-five to twenty and ask, "This OK, sir?"

At this point I began to realize that Joe B. Davis understood the same language I did, that we were on the same wavelength. This insight was confirmed later in the day when I told him to send a message on the radio. He sent it with the exact wording I gave him. My old driver had always tried to improve and embroider. Once I gave him the message, "Safe to fire," to send to fire direction center. He expanded it to "It is now safe to fire," and they scrubbed the mission because the "now" sounded like "not."

The first thing I did when we got back to the command post was to demand that Joe B. Davis be reassigned to be my jeep driver. The Headquarters Battery Commander, Captain Jacobs (Jake), didn't want to, because it meant he would have to find a slot for the idiot who had driven for me before, but I insisted and he compromised and gave me what I wanted.

From then on, Joe B. Davis (always called by his full name to distinguish him from Amos Davis, a switchboard operator) was my Man Friday, jeep driver, cook, and procurer of eggs, until the middle of the war, when I was kicked upstairs to S-3 and was no longer entitled to a jeep.

While I waited for the artichoke to cool, I looked around. The garden where we sat on the ground by our tiny campfire was unkempt and overgrown. The people who owned it had wisely departed some time ago, probably about the time the Germans decided to use the hill as a defensive position. At the moment, the weedy ground was littered with twigs and leaves from the tops of trees which had been clipped off in a neat Line by machine gun fire. Like trimming a hedge.

Upstarts

To the north, down the steep slope of Hill 122, I could see the hedgerow-enclosed fields and groves we had fought over to get our present toehold on the hilltop. Fought with the enemy sitting on this hill and able to see every move we made. I had supposed that when-if-we made it to the top, we could see down the other side, but it hadn't worked that way. The slope on the south side was more gradual, and it was covered by the *Foret de Mont Castre*, an almost impenetrable growth of trees and underbrush which cut off observation beyond a few yards.

I returned my gaze to the artichoke, which was now cool enough to eat. Joe B. Davis's skepticism had begun to shake me. It **looked** like an artichoke, except that I had never seen one quite that small. I remembered that artichokes are in the thistle family; maybe this was just a large thistle. Are thistles edible? If not, do they just taste bad, or are they poisonous? Do they catch in your throat and strangle you?

Well, there was only one way to find out. I pulled off the first leaf, and as I raised it to my mouth, I saw Joe B. Davis lean forward anxiously. He was probably wondering how he would explain my unfortunate demise when he went back to the battalion. ["Well, sir, I tried to tell him, but you know how he is-was ... "]

It tasted like artichoke. Would have been better with mayonnaise, of course, but I didn't have any, or even melted butter. But it was good anyhow. After I got down to the heart, gouged out the prickly stuff in the middle, and ate the rest of the base, I offered the second one to Joe B. Davis, thinking that I had now proved that it was harmless. But the ridiculous sight of my peeling off a leaf at a time and eventually throwing most of it away anyhow had turned him off further than ever, so I ate the second one too.

Then I strolled back over to the captain who commanded the Company C, 315th Engr Bn, and reminded him that I was his artillery forward observer. Both of us needed reminding, because I had never acted as FO before, nor was he used to his role as an infantryman. The 359th Infantry, the regiment we both supported, was so depleted that they couldn't defend their whole front line against possible counter-attack. They had called on the engineers to plug the gap, and the 915th Field Artillery Battalion had to give them artillery support, including an FO. As Battalion S-2, it was my job to coordinate and assign observers, and I was fresh out of observer parties to assign: they were all out with infantry companies.

So I went myself. It was kind of a vacation, really. I was tired of sitting at the telephone in front of the situation map in the battalion command post [CP] and explaining to the Div Arty S-2 that I didn't know all the details they wanted about what was going on up at the front lines because I was having trouble getting through on the telephone to the forward observers and liaison officers up there. And if the Div Arty S-2 would get off the line long enough, I could keep on trying. So I was glad enough to leave Tech Sgt Johnson, my operations sergeant, to field the flak and go off as an FO. Up with the engineers, I might be shelled by artillery and shot at by small arms, but at least I'd be with people who appreciated me.

And they did. They dug me the deepest, roomiest slit trench that I had ever seen. Practically a bedroom. It had a timber and earth roof a foot thick. It seemed a little excessive at the time, but it proved useful. I am a sound sleeper, but even so, nothing short of that thick, soundproof roof would have enabled me to sleep through what the engineers later assured me was the heaviest enemy artillery barrage of the war. Apparently that was partially true, because next morning I found fresh fragments from 150 mm artillery shells on that roof, and was doubly glad it had been there.

At dusk - around 2300 hours [11 p. m.] - we got a storm of fire from the tree line about a hundred yards in front of us: rifle and burp-gun fire and the occasional cough of a mortar. The engineers were all up and firing back with rifles, carbines, and submachine guns, so I cranked my field telephone and directed some artillery fire at the woods. The engineers called it a German counter-attack, but I always thought a counter-attack involved soldiers charging forward with fixed bayonets, and on this occasion I never saw so much as a German helmet. I think it was only a demonstration intended to conceal the fact that they were withdrawing. [Parthian shot?]

Anyhow, the engineers were impressed with the artillery fire, and after while the "counter-attack" died down and we got a few hour's sleep before breakfast. The engineers, like everyone else, had powdered eggs for breakfast, a poor substitute for the real thing. And on this particular morning, T/5 Joe B. Davis had not had a chance to work his magic touch and procure fresh eggs in the shell.

So far as I know, Joe B. Davis never learned but one word of French, and he pronounced it "oof," but he made himself understood, especially if he had a pack of cigarettes in his hand. Every man got an automatic issue of a carton of cigarettes a week. Joe B. Davis did not smoke at all, and I never used more than half of my ration, so we always had good trading material, tobacco being both expensive and hard to find in France in those days. Joe B. Davis's ability as a procurer of eggs was one of several characteristics that made him invaluable.

Another of this good soldier's virtues was that he had a touching if unjustified confidence in my judgment and ability - aside from my weird taste in vegetables. I know that if I had awakened him in the middle of a dark night and said, "Let's go, Davis, we have to drive to Berlin," he would have pulled on his boots and started up the jeep without question, except perhaps to ask if I had enough maps to get us there or if he should take an extra can of gasoline.

He might be afraid to eat artichokes, he was intrepid when it counted. He was cool under fire, and he was not afraid of strange roads in the dark. That was good, because we did lots of wandering around at night, and in the combat zone, strict blackout was required. Even glowing cigarettes had to be shielded. And vehicles had to be driven with no lights other than the little "cat eye" lights which look like the quotation marks on a typewriter and are useful to show an outsider that the vehicle is there, but cast no light on the surrounding terrain.

How can one drive under such circumstances?

Carefully, and very, very slowly. Possibly up to 5 mph on a good wide road with bright moonlight, but mostly much less. The windshield of the jeep was folded down over the hood and covered with a canvas slip-cover to keep reflections from attracting the attention of enemy aircraft, so Joe B. Davis would lean forward over the steering wheel and strain his eyes for some sort of clue as to what was ahead. I would crouch beside him, trying to do half the looking for him. If it was too dark, I would get out and walk ahead, carrying something white for him to guide on. I always had to do this when we turned off the road into a field or grove, where there might be stumps, sink-holes, or soldiers sleeping on the ground.

I never saw Joe B. Davis show any symptoms of fear except once. That was about three weeks before the artichoke episode. One morning I was having communications problems with the FOs and LnOs and eventually got tired of telling the Div Arty S-2 that I did not know where our infantry was, so I got in the jeep and we drove up toward where I thought some of them might be. We drove slowly, but did not see anyone. Having made the mistake of driving right up to the front lines once during maneuvers, I knew not to do that again when real bullets might be fired, so I had Joe B. Davis drive off the road and into a little grove of trees to park while I walked on forward.

I went along the road, pausing from time to time to look over the hedgerows at either side for signs of infantry in the adjacent fields. Nobody. Only the occasional bloated corpse of a cow killed by artillery.

I began to feel the hairs on the back of my neck rise up to help me look. I had been lonely before in my lifetime, but never quite that lonely. I wanted to see some human figure, hear some human voice. At that point even a German voice might have been welcome.

Then, looking over a hedgerow, I saw another hedgerow off to my left, at the far end of a sizable field, and a helmet bobbing along above it. Then I saw more helmets along the same hedgerow. They looked like American helmets, but at that distance they could have been German; the silhouettes are similar.

My map said there was another road over there, parallel to the one I was on. By now I was sure those were GI helmets, and I considered crossing the field to join them. Then I reconsidered. They might not recognize **my** helmet. And besides, I knew by now that many of those innocent-looking fields were covered by German machine guns or seeded with German mines. I had better get over to that road some other way.

I walked back to the jeep, half-expecting to find Joe B. Davis snatching a nap while he could. But he was up and standing near the jeep, holding his carbine in both hands, moving his head from side to side like a bluejay. His actions exactly mirrored my own feelings. I knew how glad he was to see me - perhaps as glad as I was to see him!

Joe B. Davis

I don't recall losing my temper with Joe B. Davis but once. That was late on the afternoon of D plus 3. He and I had been sitting for some time in our waterproofed jeep on the loading deck of a landing craft, tank (LCT). Tech Sergeant Johnson perched on top of all our baggage, which filled the entire back of the vehicle. All three of us watched with interest as the front end of the ship swung down to form a ramp to the beach. I somehow had expected to see a stretch of sand at the end of that ramp, so it came as a shock when I realized that the nearest dry land was at least two hundred yards further on, and that we had to drive into what looked like about four feet of gray turbulent water. (Had I thought the matter out, I should have realized that the ship was heavy and couldn't skim over the surface like a water-skater bug, right up to the edge. But I hadn't thought it out.)

Each vehicle ahead of us went down the ramp and chugged off toward the shore.

Wow! I thought. The waterproofing really works.

One of the last things done before embarking to cross the channel was waterproofing the vehicles. A gasoline engine has to have air-specifically oxygen-to mix with the fuel in the carburetor, and electricity to flow to the spark plugs. Without both these things, it will not run. So waterproofing involved smearing some sticky stuff around the distributer, spark plugs, battery terminals, and other key points along the electrical system. And a snorkel was installed on each vehicle to enable it to take in air and give off exhaust somewhere above the level of a driver's head.

The drivers were admonished not to drive the vehicles any farther than necessary, because running the engines while waterproofed tended to burn out (a) the waterproofing and (b) the engine. Then after the drivers had waterproofed their vehicles, they drove them twenty miles to the docks at Cardiff to be loaded onto the ships that were to take us to France.

And now here we were, and finally it was our turn. This was **it!** Joe B. Davis started the engine and we crept forward in compound low gear. The opening at the front of the LCT framed the scene ahead: the gray dismal sky, the water to match, and the distant beach, full of bustling men and vehicles, plus stacks of supplies. Occasional enemy artillery shells burst here and there.

The jeep hesitated, put its head down, and splashed into the surf. The engine chugged twice before it wheezed and died. The frigid water came up to our armpits, speedily soaking through three layers of clothes.

I turned my head toward Joe B. Davis. **"God damn it!"** I screamed. **"I thought you had this son-of-a-bitch waterproofed!"** I was trying to think of some more creative language to express my emotion when I caught the stricken look on my driver's face.

“I thought so too, sir”

Then I realized that he was in this just as much as I was, and that nothing I could say could make him feel any worse than he already did. Nor would it help the situation. So all three of us dismounted and tried to push the jeep toward land. Futilely. We were in water breast high - higher, after our feet sank eight inches into the soft sand.

The LCT yawed enough to let the vehicles behind us get past. Before long a Caterpillar tractor came along the beach and flung us a line so it could haul us and several other derelicts onto the sand and move us across the beach and onto a little ridge where Joe B. Davis finished de-waterproofing the vehicle.

Being the driver for an officer is a miserable job at best. You drive him to places neither of you has ever been, trying to follow his directions as he sits beside you with a map on his knees, trying to turn it to keep it oriented every time the road curves, and frequently missing turn-offs until you are well past them, then acting as if it were your fault when you have to go back. And urging you to hurry.

When you finally get there, he jumps out, calling over his shoulder, "I'll be right back!"

You can't go far away, partly because he might return any moment and partly because WW II vehicles had no ignition keys, only an on-off switch, so they had to be watched for fear of theft. You think about taking a nap, but he might return any moment. After about an hour, you remember that funny noise the engine had been making and think you ought to look under the hood, but he might return any minute.

Finally, after two hours, you do raise the hood and poke around, and just when you have unscrewed two of the spark plugs to clean the points, he rushes up, leaps into the front seat, and cries, "Quick, back to the CP!"

Despite all this, Joe B. Davis remained faithful, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things. He was a good soldier, and I don't know what I would have done without him.

Chapter 2

Hedgerows

The first time I ever heard of the hedgerows of Normandy was when I was a sophomore in high school, studying Caesar's *Commentaries* in Latin class. Here, in translation, is what Julius had to say.

> The Nervii had practically no cavalry; to this day, in fact, they have very little use for that arm, relying entirely on infantry. They had, nevertheless, long since evolved tactics to check marauding parties of foreign horsemen. **Their method was to plash young trees and bend them over so as to form a thick horizontal mass of branches. This was intertwined with brambles and thorns, and presented an obstacle as good as a wall, being impossible to see through, let alone to pass.**

I recall my Latin teacher commenting that she had heard there were still vestiges of those barriers in what is now Normandy. She was right! And in the intervening 2,000 years, earthen embankments had built up around them.

Another famous writer, Honore de Balzac, wrote in the early 19th century:

> The [Norman] peasants, from time immemorial, have raised a bank of earth about each field, forming a flat-topped ridge, six feet in height, with beeches, oaks, and chestnut trees growing upon the summit. The ridge or mound, planted in this wise, is called a hedge; and as the long branches of the trees which grow upon it almost always project across the road, they make a great arbor overhead. The roads themselves, shut in by clay banks in this melancholy way, are not unlike the moats of fortresses ..

Balzac's description is still very good: the hedgerows have changed very little since his time. Rural Normandy is made up of millions of irregular little fields about a hundred yards square on the average, all fenced in by hedgerows. These fields are irregular in size and shape; most are vaguely quadrilateral, except for a few L-shaped ones, but the sides are rarely equal and the corners may or may not be 90% angles. Many of them have small pools or tanks in a corner for the cattle to drink from, and most of them have gaps in the vegetation two or three feet wide at one or two corners, where a person, but not a cow, could scramble over the embankment and into the next field.

The odd shapes made it easy to locate oneself on the map, because our military maps [the best I have seen anywhere in the world] showed every field exactly as it was on the ground.

Upstarts

One of the important things to be done each time a firing battery moves is to locate it precisely, so it will be possible to measure the distance and direction to any proposed target. Under most circumstances, this has to be done by a surveying party with optical instruments and steel tape, etc., and we had a brilliant survey officer in Lt. Raymond Wright. But on these maps all he had to do was look at the gun position and stick a pin into the map. "The number one howitzer is right there," he would say.

Most of the secondary roads were narrow trails sunk so deep in the ground that you couldn't see the tops of vehicles going by from the next field.

Not only were the hedgerows ideal physical barriers for the Germans to defend, but there was a severe mental effect from fighting through that kind of terrain. It was no place for a man with claustrophobia. It was like walking through a haunted house with secret passages and hidden peepholes so that you can get only an occasional glimpse through a half-open door at the next room, but you can always feel eyes looking at you from some unknown spot. And it was haunted by burp-guns instead of goblins, by mortars instead of monsters, by snipers instead of ghosts, by the wail of the nebelwerfer [German rocket launcher] instead of the scream of the banshee.

German machine guns don't sound like American ones. American machine guns sound like mechanical typewriters, but no typist has developed the speed of a German machine gun, which makes an almost continuous sound. I thought they sounded like ripping cloth, but the term "burp gun" gives the idea. And German small arms fire was almost all automatic. It grazed the tops of the hedgerows, or seemed to, and made you duck down. When you ducked down, the mortars started to search the backs of the hedgerows. It happened again and again, discouraging, terrifying, and often fatal.

And the nebelwerfer! Never will I forget the first one I heard. It said, "WOO!woo!WOO!woo!WOO!wool" all very fast so it sounded like a distant siren. Then it was followed by six almost simultaneous explosions, scattered by several hundred yards. The sound itself was terrifying; the fact that even the man who fired it couldn't predict very accurately where it would fall was plenty disconcerting too.

But the weapon our infantry talked about most was the German 88mm gun. These guns were mounted on the "Tiger" heavy tanks as well as on standard artillery carriages. A terrible weapon, particularly against tanks and aircraft. They were especially devastating because the shells flew through the air so fast that you did not hear them coming before they arrived. However (1) they had a very flat trajectory (path of flight), so that they weren't very effective in hilly country, where they had trouble clearing the crests of hills to hit targets on the other side, and (2) the infantry tended to lump all German artillery fire together as "88s" even if it came from 75 or 150mm howitzers or even heavy mortars. That gave them more credit than they deserved.

Now, having set the scene and the mood, let me go on with the story.

On the first day I went to a field near the two firing batteries and as Headquarters Battery came in piecemeal we set up a CP piecemeal. I remember the whole day as the day I cleaned my pistol. It had been sealed up in an allegedly waterproof bag and stuffed back into my holster. Something had happened, however, and about a gallon of English Channel had gotten into the

waterproof bag and overpowered the pistol. I have never seen so much rust in all my life. I had to detail strip the gun, which means taking it apart into very tiny pieces indeed; scrub and oil each piece; and then try to remember how to get it back together again. Every time I just about had one piece maneuvered into position, the telephone (invention of the devil!) would ring and someone would want to talk to me. Periodically I would drop some small but essential jigger into the grass and have to comb for it. Finally I gave up and got a spare sergeant to finish the job for me. I don't really recall accomplishing anything at all that day except getting that accursed pistol cleaned. Had I known then that the war would end before I fired it again, I probably would have let it rust. But there were times when I would have been lonesome without it.

Ray Wright, who had the same job to do, was sitting in a command car doing it, when Jake commented that there had been a lot of trouble with snipers. Ray noted for the first time how extremely high a silhouette a command car has, so he finished up the job kneeling on the floorboards.

We fought from daylight to dark in those early days, and that meant from about 4 a.m. until about 11:30 p.m. (Double British Summer Time). Hours of darkness were usually taken up getting ready for the next day's fighting. Later on we found we did better by taking it easier, but in those days it was right in the tradition of maneuvers, when we had never gotten any sleep, and we took it for granted. Our nerves were worn pretty thin by the end of the first week, however.

We made our second move during daylight, and while we were moving in, we got another big scare: snipers. One man was wounded while standing right next to the switchboard, and another bullet clipped a twig off a tree just a couple of feet from Col. Costain's head.

Col Costain was a brave man, and he had played down the sniper angle on the grounds that when you started shooting back at them you usually ended up in a firefight with some nearby friendly unit that thought you were a sniper yourself. He was right, of course. But this time he called me over. "Bob," he said, "there is a German sniper in the next field over that way or the one just beyond. He almost shot me, and he might shoot someone else any minute. Take a couple of men and get him. He's probably in one of the trees; the bullet seemed to come from above."

I felt the knot in my belly tighten another notch. I hadn't the foggiest idea how to go about finding a sniper, let alone "get" him, but I told myself that this mission was nothing compared to what infantry did all day. Finally I took two men with carbines and put them at the corners of the next field and told them to "cover" me. I thought that meant to watch for a flash if the sniper fired at me and to shoot at it: I hope that was what they thought too. Then I walked with a nervous crouch all around the field, pistol in hand, peering up into each tree and kicking into every ditch. I did not find a sniper, so we repeated the process for two or three more fields with no effect except to raise my blood pressure.

Finally I decided that the sniper must have seen me looking and gotten away before I found him. However we still got occasional bullets whizzing by. We finally figured out that the "sniper" was just a few stray machine gun rounds that were aimed too high and came in over the trees from the front lines, which were only a kilometer or two away.

Here let me digress to tell you a little bit about the senior officers in the 915th, because although artillery commanders are less vital than infantry commanders to a unit's operation, they do make a difference.

Lt Col James Costain was the most junior of the artillery battalion commanders, having been promoted to Lt Col at Fort Dix, less than six months before the Normandy landing. He made up for his junior status by his intensity. Among his subordinates, Costain was more respected than popular. He was a West Pointer and proud of it. He knew field artillery. He was also a slave driver and a perfectionist who rarely was satisfied.

He had an odd, unexplained background: he was in the Pacific with the 43rd Division, New England National Guard, and was on a transport ship, the *Coolidge,* when it was torpedoed and sunk. Shortly after that, he was shipped back to the US as a major, and sent to us as battalion commander at Camp Barkeley, just before we went to the desert.

In 1950 I was assigned to the 43rd Division, also as an outsider, a Regular Army man surrounded by National Guardsmen. I got along with them fairly well, but when I mentioned Costain, those who remembered him were pretty hostile. I deduce that, as a West Pointer surrounded by National Guardsmen, he was such a misfit that someone in authority pulled enough strings to get rid of him. Apparently after that he felt he had to prove himself. In any event, his abrasive tongue had honed us to a sharp edge by the time we hit Normandy. Every officer knew what was expected of him and was afraid to be caught not doing it. And of all the things Costain was death on, the primary one was communications. In training exercises on the desert and in England our radios were never dependable: Costain was convinced that unless we had telephone wire laid, we couldn't communicate. Ironically, our radios worked just fine in Europe, but Costain wasn't there to witness it.

There is a tradition that the executive officer should be a son-of-a-bitch, so the commander can be a nice guy. In our case it was reversed. Major Bob Hughes was as nice a guy as you would ever meet. A wiry little Oklahoma red-neck, he loved all his subordinates and thought they all were as dedicated as he. If he had faults, they were that he was too easy on people, and that he was an incurable optimist. He also was proud of his knowledge of artillery, and he tended to prove it by doing jobs that were the duty of subordinates, so they would be done right - unlike Costain, who expected everyone to do his own job, and it had better, by God! be done right. Bob Hughes was universally popular, though not as deeply respected as Costain.

Our other major was the S-3, Robert (Swat) Swatosh, who was neither liked nor respected. This was somewhat unfair to him: he was a big, affable, jolly youngster who had held several jobs in another battalion and had served a hitch in the Division G-3 section. When he was cut from their roster, he was sent to us as a very senior captain with instructions that he be given a major's job. Costain did not want him, nor did several rival ambitious senior captains, including me, who felt crowded out. Other officers under similar circumstances would eventually have been accepted, but Swat was always an outsider. His primary job as S-3 in combat was to operate the Fire Direction Center (FDC), where requests for fire got translated into commands for the cannoneers at the firing batteries. It is a heavy responsibility, and I'm not sure Swat would have been up to it if he had not had a very bright young man, Captain Donald Thomson, as his assistant S-3. Don was not only capable, but he was super-alert as the result of many chastisements from Colonel Costain.

These, then, were our top players up to the time, a couple of days into combat, when Major Hughes was standing at a road intersection talking to an infantry officer and one of our LnOs, Captain La Verne Sumner, just as a German shell came in. Hughes was seriously wounded and had to be evacuated at once. Sumner was battered by concussion, but seemed to be all right; however his back bothered him, and after a few days he too was sent back, never to return.

There was no doubt as to who should replace Hughes as exec: Captain Doug Myers had held the job ad interim and done well. He was S-4 (Supply Officer) and commander of Service Battery, but Lt. I. W. Smith, our Motor Officer, was fully qualified for those jobs. Doug made a good exec: he was both popular and respected. He did his job so easily that he once complained to me that he felt useless. I assured him that if anything ever happened to the battalion commander, he would speedily start earning his pay.

Colonel Costain must have been a Jonah. The *Coolidge* had sunk under him; I have heard since that the *Athlone Castle*, which carried us across the Atlantic, was sunk, but fortunately after we got off. He must have felt it too: while we were in England he told me that he did not expect to survive the war, and asked me to write a letter to his wife after he was killed. I tried to laugh him out of it, and finally made a reciprocal agreement that either survivor would write to the appropriate widow.

Still, violent death does not happen to people you know, and when we got word back at the CP that Costain and one enlisted man had been pinned down by machine gun fire, our first thought was on how we might rescue them. Maybe if we fired smoke shells to blind the enemy machine gunners, they could crawl out. I remember Don Thomson and Doug Myers crouching over the FDC map, trying to figure how to do it without hitting the very people we were trying to rescue. By then it was too late, but of course we did not know.

Upstarts

The story is a tangled one, which has bothered me for fifty years. Only recently did I hear anything like a complete account from an eyewitness, and even now there are unanswered questions in my mind. However, this seems to be generally what happened:

Sometime on the fifteenth of June, 1944, probably late morning or early afternoon, 1st Lt Ross Novelli of C Battery went out to be a forward observer with one of the rifle companies of the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry. He stopped at the 3rd Bn CP to get directions and a quick briefing on the situation up ahead. The infantry battalion commander, Lt Col Lawrence, told him that the two leading rifle companies were well out ahead and out of contact with each other and with other elements of the battalion. Since there were a lot of unoccupied (and unexplored) little fields bounded by hedgerows between them and the CP, Lawrence recommended that, instead of rushing up forward, Novelli wait until things up there got consolidated and the infantry CP moved ahead. That way he would have a guide to the company location and some well-armed companions in case they ran into by-passed German troops.

Novelli heard no firing to indicate that the forward companies were actually fighting, so he decided to take Col Lawrence's advice. While he waited, listening to the radio transmissions from the infantry companies, both Col Costain and 2nd Lt Ralph Schmidt (FO from A Battery, 915th) arrived in jeeps.

Costain listened to Novelli's report, then started on foot along a narrow road leading in the direction of the front lines. He said little or nothing, but his actions seemed to indicate that he intended to go forward without waiting for the infantry.

Corporal Max Shaffer, Costain's radio operator, followed him, and after a slight hesitation, because they had received no orders to either come along or stay behind, Schmidt and then Novelli decided to follow too. Soon they were joined by a Lt Ben Respass, a friend of Novelli's who commanded the I&R Platoon of the 359th Regt, and Sgt Ray Jackson, also from the I&R Platoon. Respass, a former professional football player nicknamed "Tufty," took a light machine gun off its tripod and carried it along.

The road ended abruptly at a T intersection, and Costain continued ahead on a foot path which led through an opening in a hedgerow and into a field about fifty yards square and covered with chest-high grass. The others followed, spreading out so they would not make a single target.

As soon as they were all into the field, a German machine gun (or two?) opened fire on them with its characteristic rapid-fire sound, unlike the "typewriter" noise of an American machine gun, and they hit the ground, thanking God for the high grass. The hedgerows concealed the machine gun even while it was firing; they could not locate it by either sight or sound.

When it ceased firing, Costain gave a signal and they all got up and started forward, firing as they went. Respass held and fired the .30 caliber machine gun, which was theoretically air-cooled but soon got blistering hot. The others fired carbines or pistols, neither very effective weapons against a dug-in enemy. If they intended the firing to make the enemy keep their heads down while they 'advanced, they were unsuccessful, for the machine gun re-opened before they advanced far, and they ducked to the ground again.

This time after the machine gun stopped firing there were scattered rifle shots fired into the grass apparently by snipers trying to locate individual men. Sgt Jackson later told his friend Mike Palmer that he "could see the bullets hitting almost between his fingers as he lay on the ground." Perhaps the machine gun was positioned so that it could not fire down into the surface of the field where our men lay, and the German gunners dared not move it forward for fear of exposing its position.

There was a lull, and again Costain signaled for an advance, this time yelling, "Let's get the yellow bastards!" They got up, tall enough to see, tall enough to reach with machine gun fire. When they dropped to the ground again, Costain and Respass had been hit. "Tuffy," bent over double, hurried back toward the opening, with blood pumping from a head wound. "They got me, Novelli!"

Soon Lt Schmidt crawled over to Novelli, whispered that Costain was badly wounded, and asked for instructions, Novelli now being the senior unwounded officer. Novelli told him that they had to split up, and sent him back through the opening to the field - the easiest way out - to try and get help.

No one knew it yet, but Costain was already dead. Cpl Shaffer was not wounded, but he was understandably reluctant to get up or even move around much for fear of disturbing the grass and drawing more fire. So he lay still, listening to his heart beating. Hours later, when dark came, he was still there.

Novelli finally crept over to a foxhole at the edge of the field and slipped into it. There he stayed, possibly wondering what Col Costain had in mind when he tried to charge a machine gun head-on with a handful of men, most of them untrained in infantry tactics. Why hadn't he withdrawn and called for infantry support? Or artillery fire? Why hadn't he made some effort to outflank the machine gun? It seemed like a mini-scale reenactment of the Battle of the Big Horn, the Charge of the Light Brigade, or some other military disaster.

The firing had slowed by now, and after awhile Novelli put his helmet on the end of his carbine and raised it above the grass-tops to see if it would draw fire. It didn't. After a wait, he tried again. No response. After a third trial, he decided to chance jumping over the hedgerow into the next field - and succeeded.

Understandably shaken, he made his way back to the Infantry 3rd Bn CP, which was preparing to start forward. He asked for someone to rescue Costain and any others by taking out the machine gun, but Col Lawrence declined. They had no time to mop up bypassed German strong points.

Frustrated, Novelli returned to the CP of the 915th FA Bn to report in and see what they could do to save their battalion commander. They discussed firing smoke shells to blind the machine gunners until the survivors could crawl out of the field. Novelli wanted to go back and adjust fire if someone would come with him. Lt Ray Wright, who was acting as liaison officer to the 3rd Bn Infantry, volunteered and they drove back to the scene. The nearest place that would afford any kind of observation was a farmhouse a few hundred yards away. The house turned out to have the roof missing, so Novelli climbed up to the attic while Wright manned the telephone from the ground. There turned out to be too many thick trees in between for any kind of observation. Even the smoke from the shells could not be seen. After half a dozen "lost" rounds, they got word from the FDC to cease firing. There was too much danger of hitting a survivor.

And there it stood. No one knew whether either Costain or Cpl Shaffer was still alive. Sgt Jackson seems to have gotten out unscathed, but I don't know how or when.

Novelli's body was not wounded, but his psyche had suffered severe trauma. He did not eat for several days, he was present at an officers' meeting in the 915th CP when two rounds of German artillery came in and wounded an enlisted man whom Novelli had known and liked. Then he went on another particularly frustrating mission as forward observer, crawling through the mud for hours under machine gun fire, and had half a dozen more traumatic experiences. He needed rest, but there seemed to be neither time nor a place to rest.

Lt Novelli now looked like a case of combat fatigue. He was evacuated for ultimate medical treatment, which he got in England, coincidentally at the 182nd General Hospital, whose personnel had been on the *Athlone Castle* crossing the Atlantic along with the 915th and part of the 359th. There he refused a chance to be returned to the United States, and was eventually sent to a port company in Rouen, France, later in Ghent and Antwerp, Belgium. With them he performed with distinction, became company commander, and ended the war as a captain.

When a field artillery shell lands after being fired, it explodes with tremendous force, sending a spray of steel shell fragments in all directions. The concussion can kill within a distance of perhaps six feet; the shell fragments may be lethal as far as a hundred feet to either side-if they hit you. If you are lying prone when the shell bursts, a comparatively low swell in the ground between you and the burst can shield you. That's why foot soldiers "hit the dirt."

Why does the shell explode when it hits? It's all done by a little device in the nose of the shell called a fuze (spelled with a z). When the shell is stopped, or even slowed appreciably in its flight, a little plunger in the fuze flies forward and starts a rapid chain reaction that causes the explosion. To guard against the possibility of a careless ammunition handler dropping a shell before it even gets inside the cannon, the fuze is designed to stay inactive until it has made a goodly number of spiral spins - something that automatically happens to it when it is fired. It should be safe then, until it has at least left the muzzle of the cannon, and hopefully for a ways beyond that.

Since artillery is normally fired over something that is between it and the enemy target, it is important that it not be fired so that it will strike anything before it gets out of friendly territory, since artillery shells are too dumb to know friend from foe. So every time a howitzer goes into position and is readied for firing, the chief of section (sergeant in charge of that cannon) must measure the angle to the top of the nearest obstacle in front of the howitzer, report this "minimum elevation," and see that the weapon is not fired at any lower angle. If the obstacle is a tree, he may send someone out to chop it down.

Enter the Hero

Philip Yazzie was a man of about twenty, 5'4" in height, with a stocky build and a guarded, sullen expression when he joined us at Camp Barkeley. He was handicapped by being both short and inarticulate. He only spoke Navajo, and I suspect that he wasn't very loquacious in it. Although he probably understood a little simple English, his first few months in the army must have been bewildering at best, terrifying at worst. And very, very lonely.

We have all heard about the use of Navajo radio operators in the Pacific theater during WW II using their own language to confuse the enemy, but that presupposed another Navajo to receive the message. Yazzie was, so far as I know, the only Navajo in the 90th Division, so he had no one to talk to. If education in ESL was available at the time, nobody knew about it or, I'm afraid, thought about it. He must have learned some English, because I once saw him actually speak to the man next to him in formation.

I am told that Yazzie could do more push-ups than anyone else in his battery, and that he had an uncanny sense of direction and landmarks that made it impossible to get him lost, so that he kept others from straying. Eventually he became a competent Number 5 cannoneer in the first section, Battery B**,** and was promoted to Private First Class (PFC). That was his status when he arrived in Normandy.

Upstarts

I have no way of knowing what thoughts ran through PFC Yazzie's head as he approached the active part of the war. His Navajo forebears were warlike, we know, but theirs was a different kind of war, and World War II was a war for a cause of no direct interest to the Navajo Nation. I think we can assume, however, that having spent some two years in learning to fire cannon at an imaginary enemy, he might have looked forward to using his skill for real. And that he valued his buddies in B Battery and wanted to stay with them.

Battery B landed mostly on D+1. They were led to a little field fenced in by hedgerows, arriving after dark, disoriented, scared, and dog tired. There the cannoneers labored in the dark to clean the cosmoline off the howitzers and get them into position, ready to fire. It was a long, tedious process, but they were ready by daylight, when their surroundings became something more than shadows and looming shapes, and they could see clearly the hedgerow in front of them with the trees growing out the top.

About that time, the battalion fire direction center (FDC) called on B Battery to fire a registration (an esoteric but necessary rite of artillery which requires only one howitzer to fire), and the Number One Howitzer crew was given the commands to fire it. The gunner looked through his sight and cranked the gun to the left to get it laid in the proper direction, the #1 cannoneer cranked it up to the proper angle of elevation, PFC Philip Yazzie handed a round of ammunition to the #2 cannoneer, who loaded it into the breech of the howitzer. The #1 closed the breech and grabbed the lanyard. The rest of the crew stood back, away from the recoil of the howitzer barrel. They were ready to fire their very first round in combat.

"Number one ready to fire," sang out the chief of section. "Fire!" called the executive officer.

Number One cannoneer pulled the lanyard. The cannon fired with a thunderous report, followed instantly by a louder boom as the shell struck the top of a tree in the hedgerow ahead and exploded, spraying the field with shell fragments.

No one was killed, but several members of the second section were seriously wounded. Philip Yazzie was evacuated with a completely shattered elbow.

I never saw him again. But I did get word about him.

I don't recall where I heard it, but I found out that Yazzie had ended up in Bruns General Hospital, in Santa Fe, my home town. Probably the nearest army hospital to the Navajo reservation.

Next time I wrote my father, I mentioned this fact and suggested that he might look in on the patient and let me know how he was progressing. The prognosis turned out to be bad: the elbow was gone and the right arm would always hang limp.

However, there was a surprising up side. It had never occurred to me that Dad and Yazzie would become friends. As Dad told me later, he first found him in bed, looking unhappy. When he approached and asked if he were Philip Yazzie, the expression did not improve: it turned glum and suspicious. Too many bad things had happened already: what was this stranger about to do to him?

Philip Yazzie

Dad stepped to the side of the bed and introduced himself. "My name is E.P. Moore. I'm Captain Moore's father."

According to Dad, Yazzie's visage lit up like a neon sign of a happy face. He opened up, asked for the latest news from the 915th, talked about his wound, and in general became a human being.

Now I am sure that Philip Yazzie had never considered me as an old friend, a role model, or anything else special. But my name was something out of the past, from the outfit that had been home to him for two years, and although it had never been particularly good to him, eventually demanding the sacrifice of an arm, it was now part of him.

And here was a link with that part. He clung to it. Dad continued to visit him up to the time his was discharged from the hospital and the army, and after that Yazzie called on him when he came to Santa Fe. Dad also gave him small loans from time to time, "loans" I am sure neither of them expected to be repaid.

I almost met Philip Yazzie once after the war. I was visiting in Santa Fe when Dad found a note under his front door.

Dear Moore

I come today you not home. Need $5. Get it to moro.

Philip Yazzie

I waited until "to moro," but he didn't come for the $5.

Chapter 3

The Peninsula

The hours wore on. The situation didn't improve. We didn't know what was happening or what was going to happen. Col. Costain wasn't there to make decisions. Finally I made one. "Doug," I said to our new executive officer, "Somebody has to find the regimental commander and see what the score is. Generally Col Costain does that himself, but he isn't available, so I guess it will have to be me. Help out Sgt Johnson if he needs it while I'm gone."

I found Colonel Fales, commander of the 359th Infantry Regiment, at the CP of his 3rd Battalion and got the information we wanted. The 90th Division had landed on the east coast of the Cotentin Peninsula, which stuck up like a sore thumb from northern France. Now our mission was to drive west, cross to the west shore, and thereby isolate the port of Cherbourg, which the Allied forces needed for its dock facilities. The 359th had made some progress that day, and although the leading companies of the 3rd Battalion had lost contact for a while, things were now pretty well consolidated

At the 3rd Bn CP I also saw Lt Ray Wright, who had been acting as liaison officer because Capt Sumner, wounded at the same time as Major Hughes, wasn't available. Wright was done in. Never have I seen a man so tired and still moving. He had been doing hard work that he was not accustomed to for three days without sleep, and they had been days full of strain and nervous shocks, not the least of which was his helping Novelli in the vain attempt to fire smoke and rescue Col Costain. Furthermore, he still did not know whether Costain was still alive. Something would have to be done about him.

I went back, reported my information, and convinced Myers that Wright needed to be relieved, especially since, if we moved again, we would need him for his regular job of Survey Officer. "Who'll we send?" he asked.

That had been bothering me, too. Captains Klas and Fauble, commanding Batteries A and C respectively, had both been wounded - not seriously, but they were still receiving medical care. Captain Bob Wilson, commanding Battery B, was already up forward as an observer. All our other experienced officers were doing something vitally important.

It occurred to me that I could do a better job as S-2 if I knew more about the problems of the LnOs and FOs, and here was a chance to find out. And to prove that it wasn't as hard as they claimed to keep in communication with us.

"Me," I said. Doug demurred, but I finally went, because my job was one that one of our slightly wounded officers could do if necessary.

It was about dark by the time I got to the 3rd Battalion and relieved Wright. Contact had been restored with the lost companies, but nothing had been heard from Col. Costain.

Upstarts

I spent a miserable night at the 3d Battalion CP, huddled in a ditch that was deep but damp. I found that I knew almost none of the officers there. As a matter of fact, neither did the battalion commander. Lt Col Lawrence was an unimpressive man of about fifty, who was so newly-assigned that he still called his staff officers by their job titles: Exec, S-3, S-4, etc. He addressed me as "Artillery."

I was taken under the protective wing of the S-2, Lt. Drake, who was a fascinating character. From his name you would have never guessed that he was a German Jew, and he looked more like an Italian. But when he spoke, he had a German accent thick enough to spread on toast. In addition, he was a screwball, as I was to discover later, when he had become a legend.

Next morning Lt. Drake and I went to what they called the battalion OP (observation post). In the artillery, we thought of an OP as a place on high ground where you could see what was going on up ahead, and I wondered how they had found such a spot.

They hadn't. In infantry parlance an "OP" was a sort of forward command post, where the CO (commanding officer) and a handful of people controlled the fight, leaving the rest of the command staff at the main CP to take care of administrative matters and keep higher headquarters off the commander's back.

Drake and I were the only officers at the OP. The battalion commander was supposed to be there, of course, but this one didn't arrive until mid-afternoon. In addition to the two of us and a few men from my own crew, there was a runner for each rifle company, some telephone men, and a radio operator carrying a walkie-talkie on his back. The infantry walkie-talkie radio had its own internal batteries and could actually be operated while in motion, but it had a short range. This one could communicate with the Bn CP and, I believe, the Heavy Weapons Company (Co. M), but most of the communications with the rifle companies were by written message, carried by runners.

My own radio, the standard artillery one, could be used when mounted on the jeep, attached to the vehicle's battery for power. Or it could be carried by two men, one with the radio and one with the battery pack, each weighing about 40 pounds; however, you could not talk on it until you stopped and assembled the two parts. Clearly it made sense to leave it on the jeep as long as possible, but on this day we were going over the hedgerows, and the jeeps couldn't follow, so they waited where we had started in the morning. My handful of men had to carry the radio and string wire on foot.

The runners kept going back and forth from the company commanders, bringing Drake reports on the situation ahead and taking his instructions back to them. We had two telephone lines, mine and the infantry's. Drake and I would tell our respective CP's what was going on over the telephone. When the companies got so far ahead that the runners had trouble making the round trip, we would move forward ourselves, stringing our wire as we went. Sounds simple, doesn't it?

I believe it was about 9:30 that morning when Corporal Shaffer appeared. He was the man who had been pinned down with Col Costain, and now he kind of fell out of the hedge beside me. His clothes were soaked with rain and he was shivering in long uncontrollable shudders. It was cold that morning. I tried to get him to take my field jacket, but he refused it and kept on shaking.

I asked about Col. Costain. Shaffer told me what I had dreaded to hear: Costain had been killed almost immediately after being pinned down. He, Shaffer, had lain still all day and crawled out after dark. While starting across a hedgerow, he heard four Germans talking right on the other side, so he squirmed into the underbrush on top of the hedgerow and lay listening to them all night. In the morning they went away, and he crawled on until he dropped almost in my lap. He was not wounded, but I guess he hadn't dared let his teeth chatter all night, and he was making up for lost time this morning.

I had him driven back to our CP, and after getting dry clothes and eight hours sleep, he was back for duty. A good man.

It was difficult to get used to the idea of Col Costain's death. Aliveness was such a strong characteristic of his. But there were other things to do besides worrying about that.

The infantry battalion commander joined us for about an hour, then disappeared again. Lt. Drake seemed perfectly at home sending orders to the companies as if he were the CO himself, and I didn't hear of any of the captains commanding companies complain about taking orders from a lowly lieutenant. When I commented to him about the colonel's absence, he shrugged and said, "He von't be vit us for long anyhow."

We moved forward slowly but more or less steadily that day, and I managed to keep up until, late in the evening, while guiding my telephone wire men forward, I got temporarily lost from the OP group and didn't find them again until dark.

I ran out of wire a couple of hundred yards from the OP and saw that I would have to send or go back and get my two jeeps and some more wire. My men had all been working like dogs, stringing wire and carrying heavy radios, and besides I wasn't quite sure one of them could take care of everything I wanted, so I started back myself. It was dark in the sunken trail I had to take-dark as pitch. I heard some footsteps behind me. Probably some doughboy* (I hoped).

I turned and quavered, "Who's there?"

"Hell, sir," came the voice of Private Forand, a man who was a disciplinary problem and a pain in the butt in garrison, but proved to be a hero in combat, "I ain't goin' to let you run around in the dark alone. I'm coming along." And he did. I thought he was being over-protective, but I was glad of the company.

When I finally located one of my jeeps and its sleeping driver, I ran into another difficulty. The driver, upon awakening, enthusiastically declined to drive around in the dark. At first I thought that he meant he couldn't see well enough, but that wasn't it. He was, frankly, yellow. He said he could hear those burp-guns and he had no intention of driving any closer to the front lines than he already was.

Upstarts

I had often wondered what happened when a man refused to do his duty, but it had never happened before, and this seemed like a hell of a place to have to find out. I considered pulling my pistol on him, but he was still half-asleep, and it was too dark for him to see the pistol and be properly impressed. Also too dark for me to shoot him if he called my bluff. And if I made him perform that way, what of it? I could never trust him anyhow.

So I compromised and talked him into driving me back to the 915th CP, **away** from the burp-guns. There I awakened Captain Jacobs and requested that he relieve the man, pointing out that a liaison section is no place for a driver with insufficient guts to drive around after dark near the front lines.

Jake concurred, and suggested that I take Joe B. Davis as a substitute. I don't know just what Joe B. thought of me, but I do know that he never questioned my orders, screwy as some of them sounded, so I was happy to have him.

I picked up a couple of reels of wire and finally got back to my station about an hour and a half before time to jump off in the morning. I still didn't have my wire completely laid, because I couldn't find the end in the dark, but I figured that the action would be slow and difficult again in the morning and I would have plenty of time then, and I was dead tired, so I lay down and shivered until daylight.

In the morning a lot of things happened. We were late getting started, because the infantry battalion commander was relieved first thing and it took them awhile to re-organize and get things rolling under the new one, a vigorous young major. But on the other hand, I had trouble getting my wire straightened out too, and by the time I was ready to go, the infantry had already moved out. The enemy, it seemed, had withdrawn during the night, and so we were just walking straight ahead against no resistance at all. Finally I had to abandon my wire and drive around by road with my jeeps to catch up to them.

I caught them when they stopped on their objective, and was just in time to hear about a new plan and a change of direction.

Fortunately, one of the artillery observers, Lt. Curtis, had had better luck with his wire than I did, so I was able to tap in on his line and scoop everyone on the new regimental plan by phoning it to our CP.

That was the first and last brilliant thing I did all day, because immediately after I pulled the prize boner of my career as a liaison officer, the inexcusable sin of getting out of communication. We were going along as fast as we could walk, and I decided that it would not be feasible to lay wire, so I would have to rely on radio. Since the easiest way to carry a radio is on a vehicle, I told Joe B. Davis to follow me with the jeep and radio. I also tucked my map, an indispensable tool of the trade, in the jeep.

Oh, foolish me. My mistake was soon apparent, but it was too late to change my plans. We started out on foot cutting straight across country, climbing hedgerows between fields. There were no roads going our way. A helicopter might have been able to

follow us, but certainly not a jeep. So there I was-no map, no radio, no telephone, and all my men back with the jeeps which I might not see for some time. The infantry marched in two or three single file columns with a few patrols protecting the flanks. There was little talking, and almost nothing happened. Once or twice I heard rifle shots off to the right, but they were just single rounds. Once we got a radio message from the next battalion to watch out for snipers on our right. "Let me take my platoon over there," begged one lieutenant. "I'll take care of those snipers. I'm mad at them, and I ain't about to get happy at 'em. One of the bastards got my buddy."

It was about mid-afternoon when the burp-guns opened up again. The command group (the new battalion commander, his S-3, Captain George Godding, Lt Drake, and I) had just arrived alongside a Norman farmhouse, and we went into the farmyard to hide behind the buildings. We contacted the leading company on an infantry handy-talkie radio and learned that they were pinned down trying to cross a road a few hundred yards ahead of us, that they had received only machine gun fire, and that they had not been able to locate the machine guns. The battalion commander radioed the same information back to his CP.

We waited. Some of the men started scouting around, looking for eggs or potatoes. I leaned back against an earthen mound in the sun and dozed. The machine guns went on firing.

Lt. Curtis, B Battery forward observer, came up and reported that he had performed the spectacular feat of laying wire and almost keeping up with the infantry too, but that now he had run out of wire several hundred yards back, and the line was not working anyhow, so he could not phone back for more wire. He said he would go back and have the line repaired and get some more wire. I again cursed myself for inefficiency, gave him a pat on the back, and sent him on his way. He had done his best, and if I had done as well, we might have been able to accomplish something between us. As it was, neither of us was much good without some sort of communications to our own battalion so that we could ask for fire.

After a while the infantry battalion commander decided that we had better go up and see what was going on, so we went forward, crawling on our hands and knees the last hundred yards, until we reached the road they had been unable to cross. The German machine guns were still firing intermittently, and I couldn't even tell from what direction.

Just then there was a commotion to the right front, across the road, and the lieutenant who had been mad at the snipers came running across the road hustling a frightened German soldier in front of him. The lieutenant held a pistol in his left hand. He had a clean bullet hole through his right wrist. The German's left arm was limp and his elbow dripped blood.

Several soldiers, whom I judged to be members of the lieutenant's platoon, offered freely and profanely to stick a bayonet through the prisoner and put him out of his misery. Lt Drake stopped them. "Leafe him alone," he ordered. "I vant to ask him some qvestions. "

An aid man was called to give medical attention first to the lieutenant, then to the prisoner. While he was being bandaged and prepared for evacuation, the lieutenant was giving instructions to his platoon sergeant for things he wanted done in the platoon and commending certain of his men. He was a good officer.

I looked curiously at the prisoner, who was the first live German soldier I had seen. He looked pathetically young, with blond down on his face and extremely long, straight blond hair falling in his eyes. He was hurt, and frightened sick. He was Czech, he said, not a German; he had been forced into the army. He was seventeen years old, was one of a crew of three on a machine gun. There were some five or six machine guns in the vicinity, but he did not know exactly where the others were. He was not German, and the Germans did not trust him or tell him anything. Yes, it was his machine gun which had wounded the lieutenant, but he had not fired it himself. He had come in to surrender when the lieutenant called to them, and had been wounded by one of his own comrades for trying to surrender. He was sobbing by the time he was through, and they gave him a shot of morphine when they bandaged him. I think his elbow was broken.

The battalion commander ordered the leading company commander to get his company across the road and form a line about two hedgerows further on. The company commander led the way across himself, then stood in the ditch on the other side, sheltered by a hedgerow, and directed the rest of the company across. He would beckon and two or three would rush across at a dead run and jump into the ditch on the other side. There would be a burst of enemy machine gun fire. When it was over, they would get up, crawl through a break in the hedge, and continue up along another hedgerow perpendicular to the road. The company commander would motion another group across. They kept well dispersed and I saw no casualties.

It was about this time that the artillery started shelling us. It was only one gun, of rather small caliber, probably 75mm (about 3 inch), and it was firing somewhere on our right. You could hear it coming quite easily. I sat there and listened to it for a while before I realized that they seemed to be landing in the field on the other side of the road, where the company was going. I went and told the battalion commander and asked him if he wanted me to go find out. He fooled me by saying "Yes," so I darted across the road and through a break in the hedge that the doughboys* were using. Just then I heard another round coming. I don't know how much warning it gave, probably about a second.

It is amazing how much you can do in a second. Right beside me, in the corner of the field, was a sort of water hole into which the ditches along the hedgerows drained. I think the cattle use these tanks for drinking. Anyhow I was into it, but fast. After the burst, I stuck my head up. Sure enough, it had landed in the same field with the troops. Someone was observing and adjusting it. I jumped back through the hedge and told the company commander. "Hell," he said, "it's too late to change the route now. Here comes the last squad."

The Peninsula

Whee-ee-eel Here it came again. We both hit the ditch. Now I know that it is not true that you ever hear the one that hits you, because that one didn't land more than ten feet from us. Fortunately, there was a hedgerow between us and it, but there was a break in the hedge inches away from my head, and the blast of side spray cut the dirt just in front of me. I jumped up and ran back across the road to where the battalion commander was.

It was late afternoon by now, and the battalion commander asked me the question I had been dreading. "Can you fire your artillery for us?" Of course I couldn't unless I could get communication with my battalion somehow. I thought it over and decided that the best thing to do would be to find Curtis' wire and see if it was working yet. So I walked back to try and find it.

As I walked, I congratulated myself on the fact that enemy firing, including the close artillery fire, had left me calm. I had been mildly scared, but not really terrified or even nervous. Cool and collected.

Just then a tiny dog ran out from a farmhouse and barked at me. I jumped about eighteen inches.

Sure enough, I couldn't find the wire or Lt Curtis or any of his crew. I apparently was the only artilleryman, with a whole battalion of infantry to take care of. My mind had to function - I had to think of something. Finally it clicked. The infantry had radios. They could talk to their own battalion CP. Their battalion CP should have telephone communication with the 915th. It wouldn't be ideal, but it might work. I found one of the infantry radios. Could they get the battalion CP? No, their set was on the blink. So was the second set I tried. The third one worked OK, and their CP could talk to ours by telephone. It would work! Now all I had to do was borrow a map from someone.

I went and reported my findings to the battalion commander. "OK," he said, "but it's getting late and I'm almost on the objective, so I think we'll just button up [stop and go into a defensive position] for the night where we are, so never mind." He added that he had sent for the battalion's vehicles with a resupply of ammunition, chow, and the CP.

We moved back to the farmhouse where we had originally stopped. The farm girls were out milking the cows, elbowing the soldiers out of the way. The soldiers were buying fresh milk, hard cider, and Calvados (an extremely high proof apple brandy) by the drink and requisitioning hay to sleep on. The peasantry, although they did not seem wildly enthusiastic about our presence, at least were friendly and cooperative, seeing that their home was intact and business was excellent. I didn't drink anything, although the milk was certainly tempting, because we had been warned about undulant fever and tuberculosis in European cattle.

Lt Drake told me that he and the battalion commander had arranged to get a steak dinner at a nearby farmhouse right after dark and invited me to attend. I accepted with considerable gratitude.

Pretty soon here came my two jeeps, which had been trying to find me all afternoon, and right on their heels in another jeep was Bob Wilson, who had been sent up to relieve me as liaison officer. I could have kissed them.

I briefed Bob on the situation as best I could, and he advised me to start home before it got too dark, since the battalion had moved and I might have trouble finding it. His advice was good, but after about ten days of K-rations, I had no intention of missing that steak dinner, so I stayed.

Drake spoke a little French and one of the boys in the family had a year of high school English, so we managed to carryon a conversation of sorts with the family, who bustled in and out or stood watching us eat, a trifle pop-eyed. We found that they had had a group of German officers as guests the night before, and the quick change left them somewhat dazed, especially since the front lines were only about a quarter of a mile away. The English-speaking boy looked at us with shining eyes and exploded, "Yesterday German officier. Today - American officier." He paused for effect. "Tomorrow French officier!"

Let us draw a veil over my trip back to the 915th. Suffice it to say that Bob Wilson was right, because I got lost innumerable times getting back, that I finally arrived at Orglandes, the town where the battalion was located, but couldn't find the battalion. I did find the 90th Reconnaissance Troop, however, and they were at least neighbors, so my crew and I moved into their area, unrolled our bedrolls, and spent the rest of the night with them.

Next morning we found the 915th without difficulty, and I reported to Eric Peach, who had assumed command during my absence. Then I got some knockout drops from the Doc and spent the rest of the day sleeping it off. While I was asleep the 79th Division passed through the 90th and relieved us.

For the next couple of days there was very little going on, and I had some time to spend on composing the promised letter to Mrs. Costain. It took many agonizing hours, and I finally gave up and mailed it although I was not at all satisfied with it. I had known the woman only briefly, but I think it might have been easier if I had never met her at all.

I don't remember what I said, but I believe I emphasized his sobriety and sexual continence. What I said was quite true. All the time we were in England, where female companionship and beer were available and most of his subordinates spent off-duty time on one or the other, Costain never left camp except on official duty. However, he was an advocate of waterproofing containers for everything, including spare socks, and he used a lot of condoms for this purpose. I have heard since that some extras may have been left in his footlocker, which was sent to his widow after his death.

The Peninsula

I understand she remarried before the end of the war.

About the time I mailed the letter, we got the order to turn south, to the base of the Peninsula, where we were to start our bloodiest campaign of the war - the Foret de Mont Castre.

Note: A number of people have told me that the term **doughboy** for an infantry soldier was only used during World War I, and that in World War II they were known as **dogfaces.** This may be true, but the 90th Division never heard about the change, so we went on committing this anachronism right up to the end of the war.

Essay Two

The Command Post Tent

"Hey, Devlin, straighten your pole ... No**, straighten** it! Don't you know what straight means?"

"How the hell can I straighten it with Gillis pulling on the rope? Let up on it, Gillis! ... No, not that much!"

"OK, Harris, you have to move your pole toward me a little. Maybe six inches. That's … good. Now, Smith, tighten ... "

S/Sgt Hallick is superintending the erection of one of our two CP tents. In WW II each battalion or higher unit in combat had at least one. They were a tribute to the fixation - practically a paranoia - for "light discipline," the attempt to insure that no light showed in any area where there were troops.

The CP tent of those days had an almost flat roof about six and a half feet high, so that anyone of average height could stand erect inside it. It was made of a heavy, dark OD, opaque canvas, on a framework of a ridgepole, about a dozen vertical wooden poles and innumerable stakes and guy-ropes. Setting one up was a substantial task for five or six men, but once erected on reasonably level ground, it could be made completely light-proof. To insure this, somebody, usually Sgt Hallick or Sgt Johnson, had to go outside at dusk when there was a light inside and walk around looking for leaks, being careful not to stumble over or bump into any of the ropes while doing so. He would take care of streaks of light along the bottom edge by kicking or scraping dirt into the cracks. If he found leaks along the walls and seams, he would bellow instructions to those inside to re-lace, re-tie, or otherwise adjust the tent itself.

The purpose of all this noisy and apparently trivial light-proofing was to keep enemy night patrols, aerial or ground, from locating the tent and perhaps dropping a bomb or tossing a grenade into it. It was almost too successful, as we shall hear later.

There was always a problem of lighting the interior, which was dark day and night. There were a few small windows with blinds, which could be rolled up in the daytime, but they didn't let in enough sunshine for the amount of careful plotting done on the FDC firing charts. In the summer time, the tent walls could be unlaced and rolled up to let in the outdoors, but after the weather turned cold, we quit doing that.

I once visited the CP of another battalion who had painted the ceiling of their tent with white paint, and that improved visibility considerably, but we never got around to trying it, partially because we were never sure of being in one place long enough for the paint to dry.

We did try several sources of light. The two most successful were the Coleman lantern and the sealed-beam truck headlight.

A Coleman lantern, when hung from the ridgepole, gave off an intense white light in all directions except directly under it. It hissed noisily, produced considerable heat, and required frequent attention, pumping to maintain air pressure, adjusting the flame, refilling, and treating the mantle with tender, loving care. It was a fire hazard, too, although we never had one explode.

A sealed beam headlight was less temperamental, but it had its drawbacks, too. When we first started using it, the light came out in irregular streaks and patches, which were distracting, especially when the headlight swayed. Then we found that a sheet of tracing paper tied over it diffused the light beautifully. The major problem was a source of electricity. There weren't any light sockets to plug into, and if there had been, the electric lines in the combat zone wouldn't have been working anyhow. The sealed beam, which was intended for a truck, had to run off a truck battery. And running it twentyfour hours a day soon discharged the battery. We didn't have a generator to recharge batteries, so we had to have a truck running its motor most of the time to keep the batteries charged. That was expensive and hard on the truck engine. It was also noisy. The sound could be heard for a long way, and made us as easy to locate as if we had been showing lights.

After mid-November, when it got uncomfortably cold in tents, we were usually able to find buildings with roofs for our CP: mostly farmhouses or barns, once a castle with parquet floors. And once, I remember, a pig sty. (We ran the pigs out.) But the summer and autumn we spent in the CP tents. Mostly we erected our two tents together, with the non-entrance ends butted against each other and the end walls rolled up, forming one long room with an entrance at each end. The FDC all squeezed into one tent, to discourage visitors from trying to squirm in among them and getting in the way. The S-2, Tech Sgt Johnson, PFC Levine, and the Situation Map occupied the other, with plenty of room for loafers and people getting in out of the rain.

As I have said elsewhere, one of my duties was as a general gofer. I ran errands and coordinated with other units: the 359th Infantry, Div Arty, and other artillery units, either within the division or temporarily assigned to reinforce our fire. All these contacts involved visits to other people's CP's, and an amazing number of them were at night. As a result, I got a lot of practice in approaching unfamiliar CP tents in total darkness.

First, you have to get to the CP, an adventure in itself. It was always wise to look at the map first, to see where they claimed their CP was. Then you had to memorize the route, because under blackout regulations, there would be no way to consult a map on the road.

Driving blackout at night was always a strain. The only lights on the jeep were the cat-eyes, which provided no illumination but hopefully allowed others to see us coming. But I will skip over that here, merely assuming that Joe B. Davis succeeds in driving you somewhere near the strange CP, despite the fact that the actual ground has a way of looking different from the map, especially at night, and the CP you are looking for is doing its best to be invisible.

The Command Post Tent

It will have a sign at the side of the road at the entrance, and hopefully it will be in some sort of reflective paint, so you can see it - if you are using an illegal light, or if the moon is bright. Otherwise, you had better get out and search on foot until you trip over it. Often there is a sentry at the entrance, but you can't depend on his challenging you before you turn off the road. He may like to keep a low profile.

If the CP is at a road intersection, you then must keep trying until you find which one of the roads the sign is on, and which side of the road.

So, all right: you've found the entrance, given the password, and satisfied the sentry that you're OK. You lead the jeep inside, holding something white for the driver to follow, get it parked out of the way, and get out your plexi-glass map case. Now you have to locate the blacked-out CP tent, which will be somewhere in the acre or two of ground that the CP and its support elements occupy. There are several methods: the standard one is to ask. You may find someone still awake and roaming around; if not, you will undoubtedly step on a soldier sleeping on the ground and bring him to a dazed and resentful consciousness sufficient to hear your question.

At any rate, the answer you will probably get is, "It's right over that way, sir," as the person points an invisible finger. Or maybe, "How the hell should I know?"

Another system is to grab hold of that telephone line that caught you by the toe and follow it to the end, which will probably be at either the CP tent or the switchboard. If it's the switchboard, the operator there can hand you another wire, which **does** go to the CP tent. (Of course there is always the possibility that you are following the first line in the wrong direction, will end up several miles away and have to follow it back.)

But eventually you find it. It is that black blob with square corners against a black background. There's no doubt that this is your destination, for you can hear the muffled sound of voices inside and the hiss of a Coleman lantern. Now there is only one problem remaining: where is the entrance?

It seems simple enough: there being only two ends, the entrance has to be at one or the other. But in the blackness it is hard to tell a side from an end, or which way the entrance faces when you do find the right end. So you grope your way all around, bumping into each guy rope as you go by, making the entire tent lurch.

You do get a lot of helpful advice from inside: e.g. "Watch were you're going, you clumsy bastard!" Or, "The entrance is up that way, stupid!"

Eventually, you either find the entrance or someone 'emerges from the tent and leads you inside.

The time I spent learning to find and enter a CP tent was an education which has been useful all my life. I still consider myself a handy person to have during a power failure: I can grope my way around with much less light than most people and can often find my way to the candles-even to the matches, although I am apt to spill them all over the floor when they do come to hand.

Chapter 4

Hill 122

The 915th's new battalion commander, Major Eric Peach, was a big, pudgy man with reddish hair and face. He came to us from a sister battalion, the 344th, so I had known him slightly. He was quite different from Col Costain: e.g. I never heard anyone in the 915th refer to Costain as "Jim," but before long most of the officers called Peach "Eric" in informal conversation, sometimes even to his face. Not that we didn't respect and obey him: we certainly did that. But we didn't feel the hot breath of the battalion CO on the backs of our necks and go about our duties thinking that were about to catch hell for overlooking something. Anyhow, it was easier for Peach to relax, because Costain had forced each of us to learn his job well, and now we were able to handle things even without pressure.

Costain had always been off and away somewhere, visiting the firing batteries, checking on forward observers (that's how he got killed, remember) and going to other command posts to see what was going on. He visited his own CP just often enough to keep in touch with things, but we always wondered where he would be if there were an emergency.

Peach, on the other hand, spent most of his time at our CP, doing most of his checking by talking on the phone or getting reports from his staff. He would occasionally make a trip to the Div Arty or 359th Infantry CP, but I think he begrudged the time he was gone. And he was always there when you needed him.

The three things a field artillery battalion has to do well are to move, communicate, and shoot. Shooting is its primary job, of course, but you can't shoot until you have moved to within range of the possible targets. Consequently the art of Reconnaissance, Selection, and Occupation of Positions (RSOP) is an important part of a battalion commander's job.

It generally started when the Div Arty S-3 called, said to move either as soon as possible or as soon as possible after dark, and assigned us a "goose egg." A goose egg was a rough circle or oval marked on a map enclosing an area into which we were to move the battalion. This was a precaution to prevent two battalions from trying to occupy the same place at the same time against all the laws of physics. Usually the area would amount to about a square kilometer [250 acres]. Plenty of room, depending on the nature of the land. One tried to locate everything, especially the firing batteries, so that there was a hill between them and the enemy because if the enemy could see the flash of firing cannon, they could shoot at the battery.

Before you occupy a position, you have to reconnoiter, that is, go to the location and decide what to put where. The battalion CO does this, and he takes a lot of people to help him when he goes. The reconnaissance party would normally comprise (1) the CO in his vehicle (Most Bn CO's rode in a command car, a big clumsy passenger vehicle with a powerful radio, but Peach preferred the more maneuverable jeep), followed by (2) the S-2 in a jeep, then (3) the Headquarters Battery Commander/Communications Officer in a jeep,

followed by wire truck, so that the local telephone lines between the new CP and the firing batteries could be laid by the time the position was occupied. Behind him came (4) the CO's of A, B, and C Batteries, with a jeep apiece and a back seat full of people who might stay at the new position to help guide the batteries in when they arrived. And at the end (5) the Survey Officer in a jeep with his crew in a small truck, so they could survey in the gun positions and have the locations ready to plot when the Fire Direction Center arrived. All in all, a column about a quarter mile long.

It was also one, which took awhile to assemble, even after everyone had been notified. So every time the message from Div Arty came, I would leap up, excited, and ask, "Sir, shall I call everybody and get the recon parties up here?"

Costain would have answered, "Of course! Why are you wasting time asking stupid questions? And tell 'em to hurry!"

Eric Peach would stretch and look at his watch. "10:45. By the time they all got here, it would be almost chow time. Tell them to be here at one o'clock." Eric didn't believe in doing anything on an empty stomach.

When the recon party did get on the road, we would drive up somewhere near our goose egg and the CO's jeep would stop. I would dismount and come up to his side, where he would be staring at the map in his lap. "Bob," he would say, "where are we?"

I would consult my own map, peer at his, and reply, "I think we're about here," putting my finger on the spot. By then Capt Jacobs would arrive and give a second opinion. Then each of the firing battery commanders, Captains John Klas (A), Bob Wilson (B), and Lew Fauble (C) would arrive on the scene and indicate where he thought we were. Just as we were about to take a vote, Lt Ray Wright, the Survey Officer, would arrive from the end of the column and settle the argument, because everyone knew that he would be exactly correct. He always was.

When we turned off the road and came into our goose egg, Eric Peach would look around, be dissatisfied, and end up putting one or more batteries somewhere outside our assigned area, probably into someone else's. I never understood why, but he always got away with it, too.

I think the reason Major (later Lt Col) Peach was a **popular** commander was that he was human, and he didn't expect super-human efforts from himself or any of his subordinates. And he was a **successful** commander because he was 'bright and because he followed Costain.

It was under Eric Peach that we started out on our new mission.

The Douvre River flows most of the way across the base of the Peninsula. The 82nd Airborne Division had a bridgehead across it, and the 359th Infantry, which we supported, was to go down and relieve them, then attack south and break out of the Peninsula. The 82nd was spread altogether too thin. Paratroopers may be the world's finest fighters, but even they have limitations.

Hill 122

We drove down on reconnaissance, through the ruins of Pont l' Abbe, a little town the 358th Infantry had taken a few days before. We had fired all the artillery available into it for a steady 45 minutes, and dive bombers had completed the job. I have seen a lot worse since, but at that time it was the most thoroughly demolished town I had ever seen. The people had the dazed, apathetic look that we were to see so often. Then we crossed the river on a long ponton bridge and saw the parachutes and a few bodies of unlucky paratroopers who had landed in the river or on its marshy banks.

It had seemed to me that it was asking a lot of a regiment (about one-third of a division) to make an attack where an entire division had just been holding still, and I mentioned that to an officer of the 82nd Airborne whom I met while on reconnaissance.

He had been crossing a field with long, quick strides, and I thought I saw a silver star, the insignia of a brigadier general, on his collar. I blinked, telling myself that it must have been the silver bar of a first lieutenant - this lad looked barely old enough to shave.

It was a star. He was Brigadier General James Gavin, Assistant Division Commander of the 82nd Airborne. He returned my salute and asked what I was doing there. And in response to my comment about a regiment relieving a division, he said mildly, "The thing is, your regiment has so many more troops than my division. "

[Ten years later, Lieutenant General Gavin (three stars) inspected my battalion at Will Kasern in Munich. He was a great man, and would have eventually become Chief of Staff if he had not openly opposed the Viet Nam War.]

South of the river we found positions near the village of Grettville and brought the battalion down after dark to occupy them. Our CP was huddled along a hedgerow in a mulberry orchard at the edge of town.

Next day Major Peach and I looked up the 359th Infantry CP to find out what the plans were. They were to attack almost at once-next day, to be exact. We looked at the map. Directly in the path of our advance lay a large hill. The crest of it was marked on the map with the altitude-122 meters, or about 400 feet. The reverse slope was covered with woods labeled *Foret de Mont Castre*. I had no idea then how tired we were going to get of looking at that map, or how indelibly all the details would be impressed on us all.

We did not jump off as scheduled - nor did we for about ten days. There was bad weather on the Channel, and supplies and ammunition could not be landed fast enough to support our campaign **and** the one to take Cherbourg too. Cherbourg was vital. Until we got it and had the port in running order, everything would have to be landed on a beach, with only makeshift port facilities and subject to the fickle Channel weather.

I'm glad we didn't know how long it would be before Cherbourg was in working order. We would probably have been too scared to go on fighting. At any rate, we waited until Cherbourg fell. Then we heard that the Germans had wrecked all the harbor facilities before they surrendered, and it take some time [months, as it turned out] before it could be repaired and made fully operational, so we would have to go on without it.

Meanwhile we sat still and studied the terrain.

Well, not quite still. Our CP was moved three times before we decided that we would probably be shelled wherever we moved anyhow. All three firing batteries moved at least once, too. Jerry obviously had some artillery, and he certainly had one of the finest OP's anyone could ask for. All you had to do was look above or between the trees in the hedgerows, and you could see it - Hill 122. Between us and the hill were some five miles of hedgerows, orchards, and tangled woodlands (the Normans, unlike the other French, did not keep the underbrush cleared out of their woods). But that hill still loomed up above everything else in the landscape. We fired at it, off and on, but it was too far away and the Germans kept too quiet for us to see any definite targets.

During this period, some Air Corps Engineers moved in right beside us and started bulldozing out a landing strip between us and B Battery, effectively chewing up all our telephone wire to them. The new construction was within easy artillery range of the enemy, but that didn't seem to bother the Air Corps people in the least. On the morning of July 4, these characters decided to celebrate by shooting off all their machine guns into the air and scaring us out of several years' growth. We got even, though. At noon every artillery cannon in VIII Corps fired in a serenade as a salute to Independence Day.

It must have been while we were waiting that we got our first bath since embarking from Wales. A quartermaster field shower unit had been set up somewhere out of artillery range, and we got to send everyone in staggered shifts. The whole layout was in big tents. About twenty men at a time would go into the first dressing room and strip. Next they filed into the shower room and stood under the warm spray for about 30 seconds to get wet all over. Then the showers turned off automatically long enough so you could soap, then on again for another half minute to rinse. And finally you would move into another dressing room to towel off and put on clean clothes.

You have no idea how good it felt. I still had salt water from the English Channel to wash off, and all of us smelled rank after a month with no ablutions. We did have fresh water during that month, and most of us had shaved occasionally. Maybe a few enterprising men had managed a sponge bath, but most of us were filthy.

We did finally find a spot from which we could get a good view of the area between us and Hill 122 - or as much of it as the trees on the hedgerows permitted. It was better than nothing, so we set up a battalion OP there, manned by the survey crew when they were not out surveying. It was about a football field forward of a major crossroads with a ten foot concrete cross towering above it.

One afternoon I was at that OP, adjusting fire on what I thought was a German position. Two men from the survey section were with me as I heard a couple of rounds whistle overhead. I commented to them, "They have two 'overs' now. When you hear a 'short,' they'll have a bracket, and we had better start to duck. "

"Sir, didn't you hear that one land in front of us just before those last two?"

"Oh, I said, "then you'd better start ducking now."

They did so, but I stuck around for a last look at my own fire mission, which was just finishing. That was a mistake, for the next Jerry round was neither an 'over' nor a 'short.' It was range correct on me, but somewhat to my left. I wasted no time getting through the hedge, to the sunken road behind me, and into the fox-hole conveniently dug there. Artillery fire doesn't bother me much unless I get that uncomfortably intimate feeling that the joker firing it has me personally in mind. This time I had that feeling. When I saw the cross at the crossroad and realized that I had been only incidental, I felt better. Funny, isn't it?

On another day Lt Ray Wright stayed at the battalion OP until dark, about 10:30 or 11. When he came in, he had an interesting story. At dusk he had seen a lighted object like an airplane in the sky. "It made a big circle, and then took off north, faster than any airplane I ever saw. "

"How much calvados have you had to drink, Ray?" "Laugh all you want to, but I saw it!"

After the war, I realized that what he had seen was a V-I, the world's first guided missile, being fired at London. Buzz-bombs, as the English called them and their bigger, faster, successors, the V-2's. The British censored all reports of them, for fear the Germans would find out how devastating they were and step up the program.

While we waited, the rest of the 90th Division came up beside us so all three regiments were available when the attack started on July 3. Even so, we didn't make much progress. We were still in hedgerow country, and had not yet found out how to handle the German defenses there. To make it tougher, the Germans held Hill 122 and could see every move we made that was not masked by the hedgerows. But worst of all, the tactics used at division (or higher) level were unbelievably stupid. The infantry "jumped off" every morning at 6 a.m., about dawn. The Germans noted this, and made sure they were out of bed and ready to start shooting by then, But in case they might forget, we would fire an artillery preparation for fifteen to thirty minutes just before H-hour, by way of an alarm clock.

An artillery preparation consists of heavy fire right on the enemy front lines, designed to keep their heads down until the attack is under way. But as soon as your own troops start forward, it has to be lifted, because artillery shells are too dumb to tell friend from foe, and will kill attackers as well as defenders. Sometimes you continue firing it at a little greater range, to hold down the enemy reserve forces. Preparation fire is very valuable at times, but not against well dug-in enemy who can pop out of their holes as soon as it is lifted.

And not when it blows the possibility of surprise.

Upstarts

One day I called my opposite number at the 343rd FA Bn and asked him for the situation in his sector. "Well," he said, "the 357th Infantry jumped off in place this morning, and they've been jumping up and down ever since." ["In place" means without moving in any direction.]

And so it seemed to go with the 359th also. Probably that's why they lost Colonel Fales.

When a military unit does well, the commander gets the credit, whether he deserves it or not. When it does poorly, he takes the blame. If it does too poorly, he is relieved and replaced by someone his commander thinks can do better. The 90th Division had been doing poorly: our commander, Brigadier General McKelvie was relieved only a week after D-Day, the commander of the 357th Infantry Regiment was relieved the same day, and the 358th Infantry lost two CO's to wounds during the month of June. In mid-July, our assistant division commander was also relieved. As you can see, job tenure was not secure in the higher command.

Our organization called for three Liaison Officers, one for each infantry battalion of the 359th. It did not provide for liaison with the regimental headquarters, which was also essential. Since much of the time only two of the infantry battalions would be on the front line, I suppose it was expected that we could use the spare liaison officer for that purpose, but it never worked out that way. There was also some thought that the artillery battalion commander would spend a lot of time at the infantry regimental CP, in what is called "command liaison." But that did not suit the temperament of either Costain or Peach, so the gap had to be plugged with temporary expedients. I was one of the most frequently used plugs, alternating with Lt Troxell, one of the Hq Battery officers.

That is how I happened to be present when Colonel Clark Fales was relieved by Colonel Robert Bacon.

Col Fales was one of my personal heroes. A big, calm officer of about forty, a West Point graduate, he always seemed to know what he was doing. And he certainly commanded the loyalty of his men.

I think Col Fales must have gotten word over the telephone, but he didn't say anything about it that I heard, until the arrival of Col Bacon, who had been the Division Chief of Staff. Then, after a short colloquy, they announced to the stunned staff in the CP tent that the change had been made. I broke the silence that followed by asking, "Sir, may I say something?"

Fales nodded, and I quavered, "We're going to miss you."

"Thank you," he said. Col Bacon shot me a strange glance, but afterward he asked me to go with him to visit the CPs of his battalions, where he hoped to get the situation and establish himself as the new boss. He always seemed to like me after that.

Bacon was quite different from Fales: he was small, easily frustrated, and given to unpredictable brainstorms. He could be all sweet reason one day and irrationally frantic the next.

In my capacity as S-2, I was the coordinator of observation and liaison. In these early days, when we were still settling in, I assigned duties to the LnO's and FO's, sending them forward to join the infantry as they were needed. It didn't matter which of our firing batteries a FO was from, he went to whatever infantry company lacked one when it was being committed to combat. Before he left, I would brief him and show him what I knew of the situation on the map, and tell him to check in with the LnO at the appropriate infantry battalion on the way up.

It soon became evident that there was an advantage to having a LnO stay with the same battalion all the time: he got acquainted and knew how they operated and what to expect of them, just as they learned what to expect of him - and us.

Lt Bill Beck, of B Btry, was one of our most aggressive observers. He was stocky and muscular, and usually wore the smile of a successful salesman. But one day he came to me, worried. "At Fort Sill," he said, "they taught us to get on high ground, where we could see the enemy. But I can't find any place where I can see much of anything. What shall I do?"

I thought over the problem and looked around at the little fields surrounded by hedgerows. He was right. I couldn't see much of anything either, and I didn't have a good answer to his question. "Well," I finally answered, half-kidding, "you might **try** climbing a tree.

Next day Major Peach cornered me. "Did you tell Beck to climb a tree?"

"Well, kind of, I guess he might have thought that was what I meant."

"Don't do it again. He can't see anything up there either, and he's liable to get his butt shot off. "

I heard later - much later - that Beck **had** climbed a tree, that he had become a visible target, and that after being knocked out of the tree by a near miss, he had immediately climbed the same tree again!

In the evening of the first day of our attack, Bill Beck was with one of the companies of the 1st Bn, 359th Inf - A Company, I believe - when I got a call from him saying that the Bn Commander of the 1st Battalion had been wounded, and so had Capt Harvey Safford, our Liaison Officer. I told Beck to take over as LnO until a replacement could be decided on. Eric Peach approved what I had done and said he'd think about whom to send up. This was the second LnO we had lost within a month, and we were getting short on captains.

Within two days, we had forgotten about replacing Beck. The 1st Bn had a new commander too, a Captain "Fireball" Pond, whose nickname fitted him perfectly. A short, slight man with a sharp up-turned nose and strawberry blond hair, he wore a perpetual

grin and knew not fear. He got the same sharp physical pleasure out of combat that an athlete gets out of playing football. Was a machine gun nest holding up the advance? "Come on, Bill, let's go up and get them out of the way."

His theory was that if his men were afraid to tackle a job, the best way to get them over it was to go out himself and show them how easy it was. Needless to say, his men idolized him, and he immediately became a legend. Beck's temperament matched his exactly. Both of them had an enormous store of nervous energy, and a boundless supply of luck.

He and Beck made an operating team that couldn't be stopped. Beck was a natural born salesman, and he immediately and effectively sold the entire 1st Battalion on the value of artillery in general, the superiority of the 915th in particular, and the infallibility of Wilmer T. Beck. their personal representative, especially.

As I mentioned earlier, we jumped off at dawn every day and fought until dark. One of the first things Pond did was to ask permission to stop in the mid-afternoon (they weren't making any progress anyhow) and resume the attack at dark - just the time we always stopped and "buttoned up" for the day. And he did not want an artillery preparation.

The Germans, who knew Americans never fought at night, had gone to bed when the 1st Bn advanced quietly, and by the time they woke up and realized what was going on, the 1st Bn was lodged on top of Hill 122.

The Germans counter-attacked, but Pond climbed a tree (I don't think Beck suggested it) and personally called for artillery fire from us, directing it until he had drawn a nearly full circle of fire around his position. He was using his own radio, a short-range job carried on the back, with a two-foot whip antenna, to call directions to the CP of the 359th Regiment. I happened to be at the regimental CP at the time, and I forwarded his messages by phone to our Fire Direction Center. After one of our volleys, Pond commented, "That one bent my antenna!"

Later, I pointed out to Lt Beck that conducting artillery fire was not the job of an infantry Bn CO. "Where in hell were **you**?"

"I lost my radio and wire crew in the dark, and I'd gone back after them. That's why Pond had to use infantry radio."

Considering that on my own attempt as a LnO I had lost all communication in broad daylight, 1 couldn't be too hard on Bill Beck. This was his first experience, and he didn't let it happen again. Besides, Pond wanted him as Liaison Officer, and right then Pond could have anything he wanted.

Beck had a request too. He wanted forward observers from his former battery, B Btry. to work with him and the 1st Infantry Bn. It made sense to have a team accustomed to each other, so from then on, 1 assigned B Btry FOs to the 1st Bn, A Btry FOs to the 2nd, and C to the 3rd. It would have been more symmetrical to have A with the 1st, B with the 2nd, but it worked the way we did it.

As I said, Pond and Beck made a great team. They both actually enjoyed fighting, and together they used to clear out enemy machine gun nests, using pistols and hand grenades.

The 3rd Bn team was a sharp contrast. The young major who had taken command of it when I was with them died mysteriously while on a night visit to check his company positions. (When I heard of this, I remembered thinking that PFC Forand had been over-protective when he insisted on going with me when I went made my midnight trip back to find the jeeps!) The missing major was replaced by a Captain J. F. Smith about the same time Pond took over the 1st Bn.

The two were both highly successful commanders and speedily won promotions to major and then lieutenant colonel. But they were quite different men: Pond's nickname was "Fireball," Smith's was "Foxhole." Although no one questioned Smith's personal courage, he didn't go in for the individual heroics that Pond did. He tended to position himself far enough to the rear to keep track of the situation with all his companies, and to control them. I didn't much like Smith personally - finding him arrogant and peremptory - and at first neither did Captain J. D. (Rick) Richter, who had to work with him as liaison officer. Later the two of them learned a mutual respect for each other, although they were never as warm friends as Pond and Beck.

Rick was mis-cast as a LnO anyhow. In his mid-thirties, he was older than most of us, and he walked with a round-shouldered slouch, emphasized by a pregnant look from keeping a supply of tools and souvenirs tucked into the bloused front of his field jacket. He was a mechanical near-genius, and the best motor officer we ever had until he got kicked upstairs. Unlike Beck, he did not enjoy war: he yearned for it to be over, so he could go back to his family in Texas. Where Beck swaggered, Richter shambled, with his eyes on the ground, looking for something he could salvage and make into something else. But when winter came, his two jeeps were the only ones in the European Theater with heaters.

Another of his hobbies was talking with PsW. [Prisoner of war was officially abbreviated PW. Most people used the plural form PWs, but the G-2 of the 90th Division, Lt Col Boswell, was a purist. He felt that they were **not** prisoner of wars, but prisoners of war. So within the 90th, they were designated "PsW."] Richter spoke German fairly well, and being of German parentage, he felt it was his duty to point out to his misguided cousins the foolishness of trying to fight against us vastly superior Americans with our vastly superior weapons. The standard German army pistol fired a .38 caliber bullet; ours was .45 caliber, considerably larger. He would illustrate the difference by pointing his pistol at a PW and watch his eyes widen at the huge hole in the end of the muzzle. I expect the poor terrified German's eyes widened mostly because he wasn't sure what Rick intended to do with the pistol.

Whatever the early relationship between Richter and Smith, Rick kept abreast of what was going on, and he was a great favorite with Smith's staff and with most of the infantrymen, officers and enlisted, who knew him. I think one reason was that he feared absolutely nothing. When enemy artillery fire came in, he did not deign to take cover, but continued wandering around, alternately searching for bric-a-brac and making disparaging comments on the efficacy of German artillery. The fact that he was hard of hearing probably had something to do with this, but it was not the whole story.

The 2nd Battalion of the 359th was the only one that retained its original commander, Lt Col Gorton, who had commanded it ever since Camp Barkeley. He was a calm, stubborn man, friendly in a sardonic way, considerate of his men, but a rebel against authority. His running mate was 1st Lt (later Capt) Maurice Smith. Maurie was an excellent man except for his violent temper which kept him in constant hot water, and his perennial conviction that he was being persecuted. He was personally courageous, but could not take it for granted like Richter or dramatize it like Beck. He got along surprisingly well with Gorton, whom he admired, although they occasionally struck sparks, as a combination of steely temper and flinty stubbornness might be expected to do.

Essay Three

Of Telephones, Wire, and Upstarts

Two a. m. The night is black dark, and the sentry at the entrance to the CP hears before he sees the little truck chugging up the narrow road at three miles per hour without the aid of headlights. Soon he can see the cat-eye lights on the front of the vehicle: they are faint and blue and shaped like the quotation marks on a typewriter. Now it is close enough to see (or feel) some of the shape: a square, blocky shadow, with large reel of field telephone wire silhouetted high in the back.

Just before the truck is close enough to touch, the sentry sings out, "Halt! Who's there?"

The truck stops and a voice comes from the passenger side of the front seat, "Friends. "

Something in the voice is not quite right. The sentry flicks off the safety on his carbine. "What's the password?" he demands.

"Vyerless," comes the response, followed by a slap and a gurgle. Then another voice, loud and frantic, this time from the back of the truck. *"**Wire**less! **Wire**less!* Don't you shoot, you son-of-a-bitch!"

It was one of the 915th's wire trucks, and the Wire Corporal, whose name I believe was Erich Gergs, was a loyal American soldier, although he was born in Germany and had two brothers in the German Army. Passwords were deliberately selected as ones hard to pronounce if you had a German accent. [This was an ancient custom, going back to Old Testament times. See *Judges* 12:6]

So that was why Corporal Gergs almost got his head shot off by the sentry. But what were he and his truck and wire crew doing out in the middle of the night, when they would rather have been in bed? That takes some explaining.

In the olden days of WW II, there were no information super-highways, no communications satellites, not even any cellular phones. If you were to talk to someone by telephone, there had to be an electrical wire going from your instrument to his. The wire might pass through various switchboards, T-splices, or other shunting devices, but it basically had to be unbroken. A wire that was broken, grounded, or shorted out was worthless until repaired.

That is why we needed wire crews. Those unrecognized heroes, armed with pike-poles and pliers instead of rifles and bayonets, did four things: (1) Lay the wire between all the people who needed to talk to each other, (2) Fix it so it would not get broken or shorted, (3) Repair it if it **did** break or short out, and (4) Pick it up again for future use when we moved somewhere else.

Wire crews had to be among the first to get to a new position, because we couldn't get any thing done until we could talk to each other. On the other hand, wire crews had to be the last to leave an old position, because they weren't allowed to pick up any old wire while a conversation was still going on over it. Consequently, you had to have several crews available.

Upstarts

Strange things sometimes happened. One of our battalion wire teams was out one day with their truck, picking up a line that they thought was no longer in use, when they almost literally ran into the back end of a larger truck from Division Artillery that was laying the same line.

"Hey!" shouted the sergeant from Div Arty. "What d'you think you're doing?" "We're picking up the Upstart Liaison Two line. How come you're laying it?" "Like hell you are! This is the line from Universe to Upstart. Now you turn around and put it back where you found it!"

Maybe I should explain those esoteric names "Upstart" and "Universe." Each army unit large enough to have its own switchboard had a code name, somewhat like the exchange names the Bell System used to have before they went to all numbers. The 90th Infantry Division's code name was **UNICORN,** the 90th Div Arty was **UNIVERSE.** The 915th had the code name **UPSTART.** If you had wanted to call me, you would twist the crank on your field telephone, wait for a switchboard operator to answer, and say, "Get me Upstart 2." Eventually, depending on the number of switchboards the operator had to go through first and assuming that all the wire was intact, you would get a fuzzy answer: "Upstart 2, Sgt Johnson speaking. Captain Moore is out somewhere. "

When wire crews first laid a line, they did it as fast as they could and still make it work. Since the quickest way was from a truck, using the big reel holding a drum with one mile of wire on it, they would generally lay it along a road, sometimes running along behind the truck, pulling the wire off the reel and throwing it into the ditch, sometimes actually standing on the bed of the truck, pulling and throwing the wire from there. Either way, they tried to pull off at least 25 % more than appeared to be needed. Wire with a lot of slack was less likely to get broken and easier to splice if it did break. The worst insult to a wire crew was, "Their line's neck high and so tight you could play 'Nearer, my God to Thee' on it."

But once the wire is on the ground, the wire crew is not finished. As soon as they can find time, they go back out to tag and tie it. The tags, tied on the wire every fifty yards or so, identify the owner of the wire and where the line goes. This is to prevent mishaps like the one described before, where one crew is picking up while another is laying down the same line.

Tying is a tedious process. That may never get completed, unless you are in the same position for many days. It means lifting the wire off the ground with a long pike-pole and tying it up onto trees, fence-posts, telegraph poles, or whatever. That is because while the wire is on the ground anywhere near a place where vehicles pass, some passing wheel can break a wire, or still worse, wind it up around an axle and carry it away.

Of Telephones, Wire, and Upstarts

One day of the first week we were in combat, Lt Col Costain, the commanding officer, got into his command car and started to leave the CP. The off rear tire of the command car picked up the wire from the fire direction center to A Battery and took off, taking the wire with it, jerking the field telephone out of the hands of PFC Smith*, who was talking over it at the time. The telephone bounced over the meadow in the wake of the command car as the screaming Smith* galloped in hot pursuit, his helmet falling forward over his eyes.

Track-laying vehicles, tanks and such, were even worse, since they covered more ground surface, and their radio antennas were so tall that they could snag wire up to twelve feet overhead. I remember the first knocked-out German tank I ever saw. It was a Panther, slightly smaller than its more famous cousin, the Tiger, but it looked like a battleship to me. I was exclaiming in awe, when I noticed its right track. A good halfmile of red-orange German field telephone wire was wrapped around it. I knew then that we could win the war: there were military problems that the Super Race had not eliminated either.

There was a worse hazard to telephone wire than traffic, though. Enemy artillery fire, which sends out sprays of sharp steel fragments, will mangle both wire and human beings. When artillerymen can't think of anything else to shoot at, they shoot at road intersections. And that's where the most wire is. And that's probably where they will be shooting again - about the time the wire crew is out trying to splice the line back together.

Any time, day or night, that a switchboard operator became aware that a telephone line was not operating" he would ring the emergency line [like 911] to the Wire Chief, and he would send a crew out to troubleshoot it. The system they used to locate the break was to bracket it: They would go out about half-way and hook a telephone onto the line with test clips, ring it, and see which end of the line answered. Then they would know that the break was somewhere between where they were and the other end. The worst thing that could happen was not to get an answer from either end. Then you knew that there were at least two breaks in the wire, and if it was a fairly short line, it might save time just to lay the whole thing again instead of fixing it.

We weren't supposed to use lights at night - might give away our position to "Bed-check Charlie," as we called the night-flying German aircraft. But it’s difficult even in daylight to sort out your wire line from a dozen or so other lines along the same road, and finding the two cut ends of the same line and splicing them together would be nearly impossible by using only feel, so wire crews were allowed to use carefully shielded flashlights to do their work in the dark. And each man carried on his belt a lineman's kit, a leather holster holding a folding knife and a pair of electrician's pliers. This and two kinds of tape allowed him to make waterproof splices in the wire.

Upstarts

The ultimate communications crisis struck the 90th Infantry Division on about 10 July, 1944, early in our campaign to take Hill 122 and the *Foret de Mont Castre*. There was a major crossroads roughly in the middle of the Division zone, about a mile and a half behind the front lines. Owing to its central location, a high percentage of the division's telephone lines went through it. At the southeast corner was a concrete cross perhaps twelve feet high. It was a handy place to hang wire, to get it up off the ground, out of the way of traffic.

I would guess there were fifty lines hanging on that cross when some German artillerist zeroed in on the crossroads, and one chance round hit the cross, knocking chunks out of it and spewing slashed telephone wire in all directions.

In no time there was a traffic jam. Wire trucks and crews braved the still incoming artillery fire, all anxious to get their own lines spliced together. Even with so many different wires kicking around, incredibly most of them got assembled correctly, but it was days before one could be completely sure who would answer on any particular line.

Right then would have been the time for the enemy to counter-attack! We could still talk to a limited extent by radio, but the lack of telephone definitely hampered our units' ability to communicate with and support each other. Fortunately for us, the Germans missed their chance.

Come to think of it, maybe their telephones weren't working either.

Isadore Levine, the journal clerk of the 915th Field Artillery Battalion (915th FA Bn) spent most of his time sitting on the ground near the situation map in the S-2 Section of the battalion command post (CP).

The core of the CP was the Fire Direction Center (FDC), which processed all fire missions (shooting the howitzers), converting requests for fire and corrections after firing had begun into commands to the firing batteries. Supervised by the S-3, a major, the FDC comprised two officers and six to eight enlisted men, plus equipment, whose functions and operation are described in Essay One. Generally they operated in a cramped CP tent or a small room in a requisitioned house that left barely enough space to move around.

Adjacent to it was the S-2 Section, allotted at least as much area, but with only three people: the S-2 (me), the operations sergeant, Technical Sergeant Johnson, and our perennial guest, Pvt Levine. The disparity in space per person was deliberate. The FDC in action was a tense group, operating under pressures of both time and accuracy, and they did not need any outsiders wandering in among them, bumping into the firing chart tables and distracting the (human) computors. The S-2 Section was more relaxed and hospitable, open to anyone who wanted to come in and look over the situation map, get briefed on what was going on, or merely hang out. Our chronically underemployed battalion surgeon, Lt. Davis, MD, spent considerable time in the S-2 Section.

Pvt Levine was a sort of afterthought. At the time we hit the beach, no one had thought of our needing a journal clerk. I knew that there was such a thing: on visits to the 359th Infantry CP I had seen Lt Col Darlington, the old-maidish regimental executive, point to the clerk and cry out, "Get that in the journal!" whenever anything of the remotest interest happened, but I had only found it mildly amusing. I had trouble believing in the importance of things like the exact times the regimental commander or even some insignificant visitor like me arrived and left. Let alone the precise moment the telephone line to the Third Battalion stopped operating.

But that was before our battalion commander, Colonel Costain, was killed. His unexpected death left our CP in a state of high crisis for a couple of days: the S-3, Major Swatosh, was the senior officer, but he was green and indecisive; the exec, Captain Myers, had only been on the job two days himself. Everything kind of ran on automatic pilot with no one in clear charge and no record of who had done what and when, as we discovered later when trying to piece together a report on Costain's death. Then Major Peach arrived, took over with a firm hand, and immediately realized that we needed a journal clerk.

About the same time, Pvt. Isadore Levine appeared. He was eighteen or nineteen, tall, thin, and bookish, with dark eyes and a pale face. He carried his M-l rifle awkwardly, and he was scared and confused even more than the rest of us. He had been drafted after graduation from high school, put through basic infantry training, and shipped to the combat zone as a replacement. He was one of several we received to replace men who had been wounded.

Upstarts

Pvt. Levine was not qualified for any particular job in the artillery, nor, I suspect, the infantry for which he was trained. He was, however, both literate and articulate, and like Conrad's Lord Jim, he had "ability in the abstract." He was handed a clipboard and paper, given a short briefing on how to note what was going on and the exact time each event took place, given a synchronized watch, and put to work. He was not part of the S-2 Section, and I was not technically responsible for him (I believe he belonged to the Sergeant Major and ultimately the Battalion Executive), but it turned out that my section was the best location for him to observe the action and write it down.

Never was there a more fortunate assignment. Levine was a quick study: he grasped the fundamentals of the job at once, and although he stayed inconspicuous most of the time, he had the necessary nosiness to ferret out what information he needed to jot down, and enough *chutzpa* to demand details from anyone who had them. He would drive Capt Thomson wild when, at the end of a move into a new location, he was trying to get the survey data plotted on the firing chart so we could start shooting, Levine would sidle up beside him and demand to know the map coordinates of each battery.

Nor did he hesitate to grab the battalion commander by the arm as he headed for his jeep and ask. "Where are you going, Major? When do you expect to be back?" Colonel Costain probably would not have put up with such impertinence, but Major Peach was more easy going. Besides, having a journal clerk had been his idea.

At the time, I thought it odd that an artillery unit should get infantrymen as replacements, but now that I look back on it, I realize that the G-1,' (personnel) people had requisitioned only infantry replacements because they figured that most of the killed and wounded would be in the infantry.

How right they were! All during the first two months of combat, reports rolled in daily - even hourly - of infantry companies losing men (killed, wounded, or missing) by the dozens.

Too high a percentage of those lost were raw replacements like Levine. Since the front-line infantry rifle companies were fighting throughout the daylight hours, they got their bewildered replacements after dark, where, amid strange sounds, smells, and looming dark shapes and shadows, they were assigned to squads and briefed in whispers, prior to jumping off in an attack at dawn. Many a man was killed before he had seen his squad leader's face. One could hardly blame the squad leaders, either: the infantry rifle squad of WW II had twelve men, an impossible number for anyone leader to keep track of in the confusion of combat, let alone in the dark.

Before long the insanity of this policy was evident, and the method was revised.

Infantry replacements were withheld until a unit was in reserve (not on the front lines). Then the newcomers were sent in by daylight and given some time to get acquainted and adjusted before the unit was committed again. Of course that meant that front-line rifle units might have to fight under-strength for a few days until they were in reserve and could get their new men. But strangely enough, rifle squads turned out to be more effective with only three or four men who knew what they were doing and could be controlled by the squad leader than when they had all twelve men, especially when half of them were green.

Isadore Levine

Meanwhile, Pvt. Isadore Levine sat on the ground in the S-2 section, his infantry M-l rifle lying beside him, listening to all these gory reports, growing even paler, and writing down what was applicable.

Then fate struck!

There was an unexpected violent storm in the English Channel. We hardly noticed it inland, but it did so much damage to supply ships and facilities for landing supplies on the beach that very little could be unloaded for weeks, and we began to feel the pinch. We did not miss any meals, but we were severely limited in the amount of ammunition we were allowed to fire in a day.

Among other things, the flow of replacements was halted. The infantry continued to take casualties, however, and soon they were so depleted that something had to be done. Orders came down from Division Headquarters that all men who had infantry basic training but were now in non-infantry units would be reported for reassignment to infantry rifle companies.

Pvt Levine was violently ill. His pallid face turned from white to pale green, and his hands shook so that he could hardly hold his clipboard and pencil. He barely managed to stagger to the battalion aid station, dragging his infantry M-l rifle behind him.

Dr. Davis reported that he had the classical symptoms of shock, symptoms impossible to fake, and that he would have called it battle fatigue if Levine's job had not been one of the safest on the beachhead.

Major Peach was disturbed. Clearly Levine would be useless to any rifle unit in his present condition: he would soon have to be evacuated as a mental case if he were not killed or wounded first. And we would lose a good journal clerk. After some thought, Peach got in his jeep and went to the division CP to talk to the G-l. I don't know what was said there, but he came back with a reprieve. Isadore Levine was exempted from the order.

Pvt Levine's recovery was swift. He turned in his M-l rifle and got a carbine (the weapon of artillery enlisted men) instead. He was never called upon to fire it, but he kept it beside him as he made entries in the journa1. And he was forever grateful to Major (later Lieutenant Colonel) Peach.

As he grew more accustomed to his job, and as things became more routine, he found time to relieve his loneliness by writing letters. And he was lonely, for he had few friends in his new home. He was a newcomer, and his job didn't give him much contact with his peer group. So he became what we now would call a networker: he wrote, not only to his immediate family, but to classmates in the high school he attended in New York - **dozens** of them, according to Lt Rodman, the battery censor, who had the job of reading all letters written by members of Hq Btry and cutting out any passages which might have been of value to the enemy.

Naturally, Levine got quite a bit of mail in response, much more than those of us who grudgingly found time to write our wives once a week. And so he kept track of what his old friends were doing - who had a new job, who had been drafted, who was engaged to whom, and the like.

After awhile, he began to get some very affectionate letters from a girl whom he had thought of as a friend, but certainly not as a girlfriend. As her missives became more and more intimate, he decided to cool things off by not writing to her as frequently as before. That didn't seem to help: she kept writing to him even oftener and more ardently, sometimes referring to steamy passages in his letters that he had no recollection of having written.

Finally the truth came out. There was another Private Isadore Levine, stationed somewhere in North Africa, and one of the girl's letters had been misdirected to him. Isadore II seems to have been an unscrupulous character, who not only opened our Isadore's mail (possibly by accident) but also used the return address to start a libidinous correspondence of his own. How the young lady correspondent felt when she got the facts can only be guessed.

Meanwhile, the time approached when Colonel Peach might have been repaid for saving Levine from his fate with the infantry.

Brigadier General Bixby, the Division Artillery Commander, was a man who wanted quick, if not simultaneous, response to his orders. Col Peach, his subordinate, was a man who did not like to be hurried, especially if it involved missing meals or sleep.

It seemed to us that Bixby would phone down an order for us to move into a new position (a complex operation taking several hours at best) and then jump into his jeep and go to the new position to see if we were there and firing yet. And it must have seemed to Bixby that Peach did nothing but drag his feet. The truth, as truth usually does, lay somewhere in between.

After his brush with battle fatigue, Levine was in good health until early winter, when he developed some small ailment, probably flu, and was evacuated to the field hospital for a few days. The man who replaced him as journal clerk lacked both the experience and temperament of a Levine, and since the war had warmed up about then, no one took the time to supervise him. The journal had come to be taken for granted.

And just then an occasion arose when, due to a number of misunderstandings, Gen Bixby and his executive, Col Theimer, thought that the foot-dragging had gone altogether too far. Col Peach was relieved of command and sent back for reassignment, together with a list of his shortcomings intended to end his career forever. That list was full of unfair and self-serving errors in fact, and our whole battalion staff was agreed that we had to write a response to refute it and save Eric Peach's professional reputation. We remembered it differently than did Gen Bixby, and all we had to do was prove him wrong by citing the actual facts as recorded in the journal.

But where was the journal? Our substitute journal clerk produced it, but it was an inaccurate, incomplete scrawl, containing nothing we could use. We wrote our response, but it lacked the punch and authority that excerpts from an adequate journal would have given.

Eric Peach had seen the need for a journal. He had found, assigned, and saved the right man to keep it. As an ultimate irony, he got no benefit from it when it was needed! FINAL NOTE: It came out all right: Lt Col Peach was reassigned to command an heavy artillery battalion - mobile earthquakes, he called them - which was not expected to move on a moment's notice. He got along fine under a new commander and in a job that fit his temperament better. So actually, our inability to protect him didn't matter. He was relieved, not for of the misdeeds alleged, but because he and Gen Bixby were on different wave lengths.

Levine returned to duty, was promoted to Private First Class (PFC) and stayed with us as journal clerk until the end of the war, when the journal was valuable for preparing after-action reports.

I have recently obtained copies of the Unit Journal and tried to use it in reviewing this book. I do not recommend it for light reading - a duller document was never written. It is replete with location given in map coordinates, useless without the appropriate maps, and recording the precise time of receipt of written orders and documents long lost. However, it is like placer mining: after panning tons of gravel, a few grains of gold dust can still be found.