

APPENDIX

to

UPSTARTS

Second Edition



Edited by

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This appendix contains recollections from the following (in alphabetical order):

Wilmer T. (Bill) Beck

Raymond Bell

Edwin Calvin

Poley Evans

Loren Fred

Wayne Gilliland

Clarence Hollandsworth

Williams S. (Jake) Jacobs, Jr

Clyde Kennedy

George Kilmer

George Knudsvig

Louis Larrey

Harvey Meltzer

Ross J. Novelli

Mike Palmer

James Donald Richter

Victor P. Rizzo

Harvey Safford

Maurice Smith

Earle Sumner

Donald E. Thomson

E. P. Van Buskirk

Raymond J. Wright

Introduction

I have just found out that there is a big difference between writing and editing the writing of others. When I made the rash offer to fellow Upstarts and a few Uniques to submit their own memories so that I could add to my book *UPSTARTS* an appendix of other people's views of our portion of World War II, I hedged by adding "If I live long enough." Now here I am, still alive and in possession of a passel of letters from readers, so I must put up or shut up.

Now recollections do not come neatly packaged in chronological order or much of any other order, so I am compelled to decide how to organize all or most of it into segments with a similar theme or subject. Here's what I came up with:

I What Happened on 15 June, 1944? the dramatic death of Lt Col James A. Costain.

II Surviving a Mortar Barrage. Capt Harvey Safford's account of his near-fatal wound.

III Adventures of the Personnel Section. Stories of what really went on at Unicorn Rear.

IV The Falaise Gap. Accounts of what happened at Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois

V The Sergeants Major. Vignettes of the five men who held the top enlisted job in the 915th.

VI The Battle of Service Battery. [I wish I had more about these unsung heroes]

VII Snapshots. Brief memories from Ross Novelli, Earle Sumner, Harvey Meltzer, and Raymond Bell.

VIII The Account of Louis Larrey,

IX The Sumner Saga. Adventures of Earle (no relation to LaVerne) Sumner, of Baker Battery.

From time to time I have interjected editorial comments into the texts of other writers. My comments are in this type face (called Courier), so they will be recognized as not by the main writer, whose words will be in this typeface (called CG Times).

If you submitted something to me and it did not get into the book, I'm sorry. There is always unintentional slippage.

Read on. And enjoy.

A1, (A2 blank)

PART I

What Happened on 15 June, 1944?

During the Normandy campaign of the war, the most dramatic event for the 915th FA Bn was undoubtedly the death of its commander, Lt Col James A. Costain (Upstart 6). Of course there were greater personal triumphs and tragedies for individuals, but this affected the whole battalion. The impact was even greater because it happened while we were still trying to get used to combat and to the idea of immediate violence and death.

The event impacted the whole Division Artillery. I have been told that Brigadier General Devine had intended to shake up his Div Arty staff as soon as everyone had his land legs after the landing. Lt Col Daly, his S-3, was to become Executive (a job for a full colonel), Costain was to replace him as S-3, and Major Bob Hughes would take command of the 915th. A good idea, putting all concerned into jobs for which they were well qualified.

The plan began to crumble almost at once, when Hughes was seriously wounded. Next, the second week of the invasion had hardly started when Costain died. And that is why Major Earl Sutton of the 345th became Div Arty S-3, a job which he performed brilliantly. Daly did become Div Arty Exec, but he too was killed before the summer was over - the very day when he was promoted to Colonel!

Now back to the main event. Anyone who has sat on a jury knows that different witnesses are likely to describe wildly conflicting details of the same event, especially after considerable time has elapsed. In this case, we are very fortunate to have stories which match reasonably well after more than half a century.

The following accounts are presented in inverse order of direct evidence:

A. Account of Capt Harvey Safford, based on conversations with eye-witnesses Lt Ben Respass and Lt Ralph Schmidt.

B. Account of Mike Palmer, based on conversations with eyewitness S/Sgt Ray Jackson soon after the actual episode, and on the appearance of Lt Respass after he was wounded.

C. Statement dated 15 August 1944, by Lt Raymond J. Wright, eyewitness to both the beginning and the aftermath of the episode.

D. Detailed account by actual eyewitness Ross J. Novelli, including what happened to him afterward.

E. Comment - not an account - by Mr Sgt Wayne Gilliland, who wishes he had been an eyewitness.

I have been unable to find either Ralph Schmidt or Max

Appendix

Shaffer. If anyone can tell me whether either of them is still living, and if so, where, please let me know. I'd like their stories too.

Also included is a Postscript from George Knudsvig concerning Costain's widow.

15 June 1944

Section A - Excerpt from Letter of Harvey Safford, Galesburg IL, dated September 5, 1996

In regard to the events surrounding Costain's death: An enemy machine gun and crew were missed by the advancing Infantry. They, the enemy, then fired through a gateway, interdicting the road. Costain couldn't get the Infantry interested in taking out the machine gun. He then recruited five people to help him do the job. They were Novelli, Schmidt, 359th I&R Platoon Leader [Lt Ben Respass], Costain's Radio Operator [Cpl Max Shaffer], and one of the drivers. They were armed with a 30 cal. Light Machine Gun, 2 carbines and pistols. Costain led the charge shouting, "Let's get the yellow (expletive)." A burst of automatic weapon fire stopped them. They dropped to the ground, 2 wounded, Costain fatally. They stayed, flat to the ground, unprotected from the sun, until darkness gave them cover to crawl away. The narrator described it as a damned fool stunt for which Costain did not deserve a Silver Star.

I saw the I&R Platoon Leader in the hospital in England. This was about 4 weeks after the event. He had a head wound which was healed but an arm and leg were affected in the same way that a light stroke does.

Schmidt came to the hospital in Galesburg in late 1944. He was on leave and on his way to Nebraska. I don't recall seeing him in France; so it was in Galesburg that he related the story to me. I can't separate what I heard from Schmidt from what I heard from the Inf. Lt.

It is interesting to compare this account with the one related to you by Novelli. I would wager that my account contains errors; the problem is deciding which is error and which is reliable.

Section B - Excerpt from letter by Mike Palmer, Mesa, AZ, dated 6 November 1996. [A member of the I&R Platoon, 359th Infantry.]

As for the correction you sent on Col Costain: On or about June 15, I remember an incident in the hedgerows. I can see the picture clearly even today: Lt Ben Respass, our I&R platoon leader, came through our position and he was bleeding on the side of his head. Respass was a football player for some pro football team before the war. The story as I heard it evolved like this: Some Colonel or Major came along and said, "Let's go get some Heinies," and along went Lt Respass; my best buddy, Sgt Ray Jackson of my squad of the I&R Platoon; and I don't know who else. Sgt Jackson told me later that they got pinned down in the middle of a field and he could see the bullets hitting almost between his fingers as he lay on the ground. He sweated it out. My impression was that this Colonel was very foolhardy.

If my memory serves me right, this officer was from Fargo, or somewhere in North Dakota. Of this I am not positive. [That's close. Costain was from Moorhead, MN, right across the river from Fargo.]

Appendix

P.S. My friend Ray Jackson died in front of Periers July 26, 1944, while on liaison with 8th Division on our right. Lt Ben Respass died about 2 years ago in Houston, TX. I regret not attending the 90th reunion that year, as I have never seen any of my I&R boys at the get-togethers over the years, and I would really liked to have seen him. (He was there at that reunion.)

Section C [Sworn] Statement of 1st Lt Raymond J. Wright, dated 15 August 1944.

I was acting as liaison officer with the 3rd Battalion, 359th Infantry, on 15 June 1944. I and K Companies of that Battalion had been cut off. Lt Novelli came up to relieve the observer with I company. At that time Lt Novelli went forward with his Battalion Commander, Lt Colonel James A. Costain, to try to gain contact with the companies then cut off. While advancing they were pinned down by machine gun fire. Lt Novelli and several more managed to escape. Col Costain and an enlisted man, Corporal Max J. Shaffer, were unable to get out. Lt Novelli returned to the Infantry battalion CP.

Lt Novelli asked for some infantry to go back and try to rescue the Colonel, but was unable to persuade them to do so.

Lt Novelli and I then decided to adjust artillery fire, using smoke, on that point, hoping that the smoke might enable them to escape. The only place from which we could observe the smoke was a house, then in enemy hands. We went forward to that point. Lt Novelli went into the house and I stayed outside to operate the telephone. We stayed there until about five rounds of smoke had been placed in the area. We decided we could do no more. Lt Novelli showed no signs of fear and was willing to do anything he could toward helping them escape.

Section D Excerpts from letter by Ross J. Novelli, Galveston, TX, dated September 9, 1996, as amended. [Novelli called the complete letter "my book"]

Did Costain and Wagner receive the Silver Star? You do not mention it nor do you mention that I signed or dictated a letter recommending Costain The 915th Sgt Major is the one who approached me and handled the letter for Costain's S.S. I think he was a tall, intelligent, nice looking, blond, quiet person. Was his name Gilliland? [Yes. A good description, too, though I would have added that he looked young for his rank.] Did I hear, in my 915th correspondence, that he received a battlefield commission? [No / but he doubtless could have if he had wanted it.]

* * * * *

15 June 1944

THE UNNECESSARY DEATH OF LT. COL JAMES A. COSTAIN - THE TRUE STORY FROM A SURVIVOR: On or about 6/15/44, as a Forward F.A. observer, I was assigned to the 3rd Bn, 359th Infantry Regt, either to the Bn CP or one of its Companies - I, K, or L. I reported to Lt Col Lawrence, Bn CO. He and his men had been there some time - long enough to be dug into a deep trench. I usually had 2 communication EM's with me, however, at times, one man or an extra second man might have been laying wire, checking or repairing wire. It was broad daylight hours and certainly not early morning.

The designated attacking companies had long ago jumped off and were a great distance away. We had no action there, and no firing sound anywhere. The Inf radio was on and there was constant chatter from 1 or 2 companies that had been cut off. There was absolutely no Art officer there with the infantry. I wish to God there had been. Any Art. LnO, if ever there, had departed. [See statement of Lt Wright, above. Wright was acting as liaison with the 3rd Bn, 359th at the time. Perhaps he had left their CP for some reason at the time Novelli arrived.]

Col Lawrence briefed me. His units were well ahead out front, and we had to await contact between the cut off units and consolidate safely before we could move; and then, naturally, I was to go with them because they knew where their units would be. I don't know if the forward Inf had FO's.

I was there only a short while, still standing outside the trench, observing and listening to the constant radio chatter from the companies up front, when Lt Col Costain, 915th FA Bn CO, arrived. I recall no one with him; however later events proved that a Cpl Shaffer was with him. I briefed Costain as above. I do not know if he talked to Col Lawrence or listened to the radio to update. His mind was usually made up; it was Costain's habit to visit his FO's under calm conditions.

After a few minutes, Costain moved to the nearby road, very quiet, and possibly could have said to me or Shaffer (or both) "We're going forward" or "I'm going forward." It had to be that he was going forward to make contact with the Inf in an uncertain battlefield. He was moving very slowly on the road, and I remained with the Inf at their radio.

Suddenly, the Inf exclaimed happily that contact had been made, and I think Col Lawrence told me to tell my CO. Costain wasn't far on that road, and I raced out and yelled, "Col Costain, the companies are now in contact and the front will be stabilized," or words to that effect. He completely ignored me, so I yelled it again and again. He finally acknowledged with perhaps an okay or a nod.

So what do I do, stay with the Inf (my assignment) or [and?] give Costain the satisfaction of thinking me yellow while he ventures into the unknown, which now was absolutely unnecessary? I really did not know what was on his mind. Did anyone usually? He gave, at no time, a briefing or map location or a destination. He was very quiet and it was almost as if he were obsessed. Honestly, I must say, we had no disagreement, and he did not order me to go on patrol.

Appendix

I decided to go and ran on to the road to join them. I feel sure my unknown one or two EM's (always available) followed me as they always did in the attack. We proceeded forward from the CP slowly and cautiously, spread out to the front and sides.

Approximately 75 yards forward, off the right side of the road, was Tuffy Respass, an Inf Lt. He asked, "Where are you going, Novelli?" and I must have told him "forward," since I didn't know. He replied that he was coming also. He was always "gung ho" and had earned his nickname, Tuffy.

I've always recalled there were 5 or 6 people (most probably 6) in the patrol - absolutely no more. [Six have been accounted for in the narratives of Safford and Palmer above: Costain, Novelli, Schmidt, Respass, Jackson, and Shaffer; Novelli is probably mistaken about any men from his FO party coming along. Note that the party is out of balance with four officers and two enlisted men; four artillerymen and two infantry - a strange composition for a combat patrol.]

Some 200 yards beyond the CP, off the right side of the road, Tuffy spotted a 30 cal. MG on a tripod mount. He grabbed with ammo and tossed the mount aside. This was the first evidence that our Inf had been through here. That MG was planted as a gift from God. Now our firepower was 4 or 5 Art men with carbines (popguns) and 1 Inf man with a 30 cal MG. All was quiet, no talking, and no sound of combat from the front. I really don't believe that Costain knew we were there. He never looked back or said anything, and as our leader continued on an almost straight ahead pattern from the CP, moving slowly. He was as if obsessed; perhaps an exorcism might have helped!

Some 400 yards from the CP we reached a crossroads T. I yelled that it may be zeroed in. No action from anyone. Still going straight ahead, we left the T in the road onto a path with level adjoining fields leading to the fatal hedgerow some 200 yards ahead. We approached the opening to the hedgerow (if there was a gate - it was open); the opening was perhaps 12-15 ft wide. This hedgerow, as a guess, was 50 yds (1/2 a city grid block) side to side, 6 ft. high, thick earthen walls, a wide top of thick vegetation and mostly square to rectangular in shape. There was 4ft. high grass that saved lives.

We entered the opening and followed the leader, Costain, spread out, not bunched up. We continued into the hedgerow until all 5 or 6 of us were in when the machine gun opened up (and to this day never located). We hit the ground - thank God for high grass!

They ceased firing. Were there two MG's? I doubt it as two MG's could have been very bad for us. The enemy was looking down our throats, well hidden, and waited to get us all in for the ambush. What was our objective? We had no conversation, so no easy explanation.

15 June 1944

Down in the grass a signal from the Col was given and we all jumped up rapidly, while slowly moving forward. Tuffy Respass stood his ground on the right, slightly behind Costain, firing the 30 cal MG from his hand (hot). I have a visible picture of Costain to the left, Tuffy on the right, and me in between, 25-30 feet away. I do not remember the others' places. We could only fire at the top of the thick mounds and only toward the sound of their firing. We could not see anything. They were completely hidden.

Their MG opened up again. We hit the deck again. After the MG fire, there were sniper shots here and there into the grass looking for us. Today, on reflection, it appears they dared not move their weapons forward on the wide mound tops to shoot lower into the high grass and thereby expose their location.

The MG's stopped and up we came again. This time Costain yelled, "Let's get the yellow bastards (or SOB's)!" and moved somewhat forward while all of us were continuously rapidly firing and still slowly moving forward, Tuffy Respass with his 30 cal MG.

The enemy opened up again and again we dropped for cover. In firing we were all standing upright and very exposed. Shortly Tuffy came crouched down on feet and hands through the grass, moving fast toward the entrance, and said, "They got me, Novelli," or similar words. I said good luck and saw the blood pulsating from his forehead. Some time later I heard he was paralyzed and pray this information was wrong. [Safford described Respass in the hospital: "He was getting around but limped, and one arm wasn't working."]

Within seconds after Tuffy passed, an excited 2nd Lt Ralph Schmidt crawled to me and said Col Costain was hit, and he looked to me for guidance. This is my only recall of Ralph's being there. I do not recall ever seeing him again. We were whispering and I told him at least one of us had to get out and get help. We had to split up so they couldn't easily get us together. I sent him back crawling through the entrance, the shortest and easiest way out.

I lay there, also excited, no movement, while he was leaving - trying to be calm and analyze the situation. Yes, they were continually firing at times over the grass with only rifle fire. I was not aware of anyone else there as I heard nothing except the sniper fire. Four were now accounted for - where were the other 1 or 2? Did they escape in the high grass unseen by me? I lay there for some time observing as best I could, watching the entrance and for any sign of anyone moving and laying grass down, including Costain.

I then very, very slowly crawled to the left wall of the hedgerow. I found a fox hole (our Inf had passed through) and got in it. There was continued random sniper fire but not close. I was still in the hedgerow trap. Thoughts - did Schmidt get back to get help or did he catch any of the sniper fire? Could the enemy watch me slowly laying down grass as I crawled to this point and were they awaiting the exposure of my full body as I had to jump over a 6 ft. earthen wall to get out - and what was on the other side?

Appendix

After perhaps 10 minutes which seemed an eternity, I placed my helmet on the tip of my carbine barrel, stayed very low, and pushed my helmet top slowly above the top of the grass, then quickly pulled it down. No fire! Were they playing coy with me? So I waited another 5 minutes or so, while listening and watching, then I repeated the exercise with the helmet. No fire and no more sniper activity. It was quiet. Another 5 minutes, again an eternity, and I raised the helmet again. No fire. Perhaps another 5 minutes, another and a good fast look. No fire.

Time for decision. I hooked my helmet strap on for stability, I positioned my long legs under me in the hole to provide a good spring, sized up the 6 ft. mound obstacle I was to jump over, seated my carbine with my arms (finger on the trigger) for quick firing, and then I leaped and climbed over the wall. No fire! Did they spare me? Could be. Nothing on the other side of the mound after my leap.

My carbine only jammed once - out of ammo? I do not recall. Was Cpl Shaffer up and firing each time? I presume so; I positively only saw the two mentioned officers.

I walked across the fields toward the Inf CP (staying off the roads). They were preparing to leave. They could not help me with Costain or any others, even though not far away. "That was an enemy strong point and our Inf had bypassed it."

I headed for the 915th CP. At Bn, as I recall, Don Thomson or Myers told me that I was reported dead by Schmidt, whom I had sent back and who was said to be badly shaken up. He also reported of the wounded Costain. Evidently he heard the continued random sniper fire after leaving me and presumed I had been hit. At Bn I asked for help to go back into enemy territory to get the Col, as I wasn't sure there was anyone else. I think it was Thomson and Myers (were you there?). Ray Wright volunteered.

I showed Wright the hedgerow containing Costain, as a guide in order to adjust fire. We moved 200-300 yds to the left and entered a house with the roof blown off. I told Ray to stay down with the phone (or radio) and I climbed up and lay flat in the attic exposed to the front. We fired 1 round. Lost. Called for smoke and fired 4 or 5 more, all lost. Dense foliage and very difficult observation. Bn HQ was afraid we might hit the Col and ordered cease firing. We agreed.

Today's analysis: Were there 5 or 6 in the patrol? A couple of days after the Costain fiasco I heard that an EM named Shaffer showed up (confirmed in your book [Chapter 3 - The Peninsula]). That would make 5, counting the 4 of us on the ground accounted for. Shaffer must have frozen, as I was there another 20 minutes or so and observed nothing. I can certainly understand, as we were not trained for this. Was one missing, or were there only five to start with? You back at the rear Hq may answer that question. Was another body found with Costain? Did one of my communications men report back to Bn Hq? Either before or after the ambush?

15 June 1944

We sorely needed 1 or 2 grenades, and evidently brave Tuffy did not have any. We were very close for such use, yet I never saw any leaves fly from the MG firing over the top of the hedgerow. Of course we needed the equipped Inf for this assignment which the Col assumed for ill-equipped FA officers and men, contrary to FA teaching. Our training said nothing about Artillery officers doing Inf patrols. We were only to be equipped with 45 cal auto pistols and qualified on such. Prior to Costain, Col Pierce told us our artillery was our weapon. Why didn't our leader pull us out of there when he quickly found an impossible exposed situation with a MG behind a 6 ft. mound? The high grass would have covered us Lt Novelli was the last to leave the field of battle and the first to insist on returning, and did promptly return.

[The following portion of Novelli's letter deals with the after effect of the episode - plus other events - on him.]

After the traumatic Costain fiasco, I continued assignments for a day or two, then an officers' rendezvous (with some EM's) was held under trees at the rear, perhaps to introduce the new CO. Capt Don Richter (Texas A&M '31) said to me (Class of '40) that if I ever pulled a damned fool stunt like that again, he would personally shoot me! He was the only one to show concern, I think. I explained, as earlier in this letter, and told him that it was the Col's idea. Shortly thereafter, we had 1 or 2 bursts from an 88 mm gun. I can still hear the "pup-boom." Hi velocity! Layers of people in the fox holes.

The little Italian EM from NY caught shrapnel in an eye. We held him down and then evacuated. This man had been my telephone op at Abergavenny, Wales - newly married and depressed. I talked to him. Good recall?

Perhaps the next day I went on assignment to the Inf. Raining. We moved out - Inf CO, me and two men with other Inf. We crawled alongside a three-four foot high earthen fence. On our left, perhaps 50-100 yds away was constant MG fire over us it was just like two peace-time crawls under live MG fire. We crawled and crawled in rain and mud for miles. We could not raise up, as we needed total darkness. It finally came very late. [Yes. We were operating on Double Daylight Saving time, and in those northern latitudes at midsummer it didn't get dark until about 2300, or 11 p.m.]

Eventually with my two men we got out of there, mostly crawling, and returned to Bn CP and Major Eric Peach, CO. I dropped into the CP hole, lighted tent. Peach looked at me and said something like "God, man, what's happened to you?" I was whipped, mud head to toe, and of course, no food. I explained as above. He said that he was prepared to chew me out for no communication (long ago the Inf broke our thin line in many places). He told me he wanted me to rest the next day and to send Capt Fauble (CO of C Btry) to see him. I told Fauble, and he asked why. I told him and he was angry. He returned from Peach and said he was going forward in the a. m. Lt Wagner volunteered. I was instructed to fire harassment fire all night at 2 hr intervals, which I did. I was Asst Exec for one night.

Appendix

Early a.m., March Order, the Bn moved. Little sleep, exhausted, did I eat? And, upset with "foolish, fabulous" Fauble's attitude. (Bill Derrig gave him that nickname.) Vehicle traffic jam in the village and I alighted to help. On the corner was a young, dapper-dan Major, probably fresh from the U.S. I passed him and he chewed me out for not saluting. I needed that.

At our new area, I later went to Doc Davis. He gave drugs for a day or so, made things worse and released my pent-up emotions. I was in bad shape. I asked I.W. Smith to give me a break to rest up. There was no place to go, and I went to a Bn superior or superiors. I was confused and wanted out. He or they, were very understanding. I would ... be sent back for reclassification At Litchfield Barracks Repl Center, England, I was given a physical and sent to the 182nd Gen Hospital, Darby, Eng. They were on our ship from the U.S. At the hospital, the diagnosis was "Combat Fatigue." A nurse I had met on our ship came to see me; I had little, if any, to say. She did not return and I cared less. Scheduled for 14 mega shots (1 daily) of insulin. Stopped after 12 - became too violent. Insulin for shocks is no longer acceptable. Later I wrote letters for the wounded.

After a couple of months, I appeared before the medical Board; the Major said I must be an important man because "Ike's Hq was looking for me," My orders were probably lost. The Board said I was being sent to the U.S. I refused. The Major said "The ward is full of men wanting to go home and you refuse! - you must still be sick!" I was designated "Limited Service only" until further evaluated. Sent to Preston Hall, Uppingham, Eng. for 2 week's rehab and then to the 155th Port Co, Rouen, France, with my records We moved to Ghent, Belgium, and then to Antwerp, Belgium. Evaluated "Superior" to war's end; also made friends with the men and still exchange Christmas cards. I became CO, then my 70 points sent me home as a Captain. I stayed in touch with the 915th and heard the sad reports of Richter and the relief of Eric Peach. Yes, I later wrote to Anita Richter [Capt Don Richter's sister] at Moulten, Texas.

[On 16 February, 1946, Ross Novelli was awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action during that fatal episode. But by that time he was back in Texas awaiting discharge, and the news didn't catch up with him for another quarter century.]

Section E Excerpt from letter by Wayne R. Gilliland, San Antonio, TX, dated September 10, 1995. [Sergeant Major, 915th FA Bn]

You portrayed Lt Col Costain as the able, dedicated, selfless commander I remember. Early on I gathered that he wanted his sergeant major to serve important tactical functions. I never quite grasped just what most of those duties were, but he saw fit to get me admitted to the staging area 'war room' quite early and included me in the very small group that observed the English amphibious exercises on the southern coast.

15 June 1944

Upon landing in France he wanted me to accompany him whenever feasible. That morning [June 15] he called me to go with him, but I relented [declined?] in view of the great backlog of administrative work. Much of the paperwork was shunted to Mr. Calvin and Sergeant Kennedy in the rear, but some had to be accomplished at the CP, and we had simply postponed all such work before sailing from England. When Major Myers brought word of Col Costain's death, I was devastated. My first thought was of his family, the second was that I had failed him in favor of some miserable paperwork. I wish it could be said that the guilty feeling subsided as time passed.

Wrap-up by Editor

So there you have the testimony from the witnesses. What does it tell us about the reasons for Lt Col Costain's odd behavior? He was an artillery officer, but even artillery officers are given some education on infantry tactics, and he surely must have known the principles of fire and maneuver which do not include charging a well concealed and dug-in machine gun by frontal attack with a handful of men, all moving slowly forward at once, asking to be targets. Did he honestly believe that all German soldiers were "yellow bastards" who would surrender without a fight? Was he simply so exhausted from nervous strain and lack of sleep that his judgment was impaired? Or was he, as suggested by Novelli's evaluation, "possessed"? One of my literary friends would have said that Costain was a classical example of the tragic hero - a noble character with a single tragic flaw, the *hubris* or excessive pride that caused his inevitable downfall.

I am inclined to a mixture of the latter two opinions, in view of his insistence that I write his wife after his death.[Chapter 2, Hedgerows]. Premonition of death, or the death wish? Whatever it was, it is a shame that the gallant Lt Respass had to be wounded too, and the others with him subjected to the horror of the occasion.

Perhaps worst of all was the legacy of guilt needlessly laid on the survivors. I don't know how Cpl Max Shaffer or Lt Ralph Schmidt felt afterward, but Ross Novelli says, "You see, Bob, that stupid Costain affair has rarely been off my mind for all these years!" This from a man who seems to have done all he could to save his battalion commander.

Fully as absurd is Wayne Gilliland's remorse at not having been there. I thank God that he did not go along and get himself killed as well. The loss of the battalion's senior enlisted man would have been every bit as serious as the loss of its senior officer.

Appendix

One final postscript from George M. Knudsvig, of the 915th Personnel Section:

We lived in Minot, ND for many years, and while there became acquainted with Mrs Col Costain. You perhaps know this; she married the Colonel's brother, so didn't change the name. Our kids attended the same school, and [we] attended the PTA meetings. As I recall, she was a partner in a business preparing income tax reports for the local people - just a point of interest.

PART II

Surviving a Mortar Barrage

Although the German 88 mm gun had the most fearsome reputation of all the weapons in their extensive arsenal, most military experts agree that the 120 mm mortar was the one which inflicted the most casualties. The 88 **sounded** worse: it made that terrible screeching whistle as it came in with its flat trajectory and velocity so high that it burst before you had time to react. Mortars, on the other hand, were deceptively quiet: you hardly noticed the incoming shells until they burst.

Here is the story told by Captain Harvey Safford, Liaison Officer #1, 915th FA Bn:

The 90th Division attacked, starting the morning of July 3, 1944. The 1st Bn, 359th Inf Regt, was assigned a mission to the right of Pretot in the direction of Foret de Mont Castre.

My liaison section was following Lt Col Hamilton, Bn CO, and at the same time maintaining a telephone line to the 915th FA Bn switchboard.

For the first time a tank platoon was attached to the battalion. Sgt Thornton complained the tanks ran over our telephone wire and he could not keep it repaired. This was the last I saw of him.

The section telephone/radio operator was wounded by a small arms bullet through his arm, and I sent him back to the First Aid Station. About this time a shell burst killed the D Co commander and wounded Lt Col Hamilton. I gave this information to the Bn ExO and then went back to our jeep to get the radio and Pvt Voigt, the driver, to help carry the radio.

While the battalion was reorganizing, we ate K rations. It was about 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Capt Pond was called in from A Co to assume command of the battalion. He asked for an artillery preparation to precede the attack he planned to resume at about 5:15 p.m. I made the request for the artillery fire by radio.

While we were waiting, there were a couple of explosions about 400 yds ahead of us, about where the lead infantry were. After we moved, we saw the result of the explosions. There were 3 dead infantrymen in a road near a gateway, It went through my mind that mortars had registered on the gateway. I turned to the right and started along the road. At this time the mortars started firing in front of me. I realized that I might be in the middle of a mortar barrage. There was no roadside ditch and no depression of any kind that could offer protection. I figured that I was about 40 yds from the edge of the approaching mortar bursts and started running along the road to get out of the box.

I was hit in the leg, I thought from behind, and went down. The mortars went through the box 3 or 4 times; 2 near misses scattered dirt on me. After the mortars stopped, 2 infantrymen showed up and provided first aid. They used our First Aid Packets, a rifle, and my jacket. They separated the stock from the barrel of the rifle and with the jacket fashioned a splint. They injected one syrette of morphine, and then after looking at my leg, injected a second syrette of morphine. They sat down to think over the situation. I gave them my pistol and map case. There was no one else around and no sound of battle.

Appendix

The morphine took effect and I was in and out of consciousness. One man said to the other, "He's not going to last much longer. Let's go." The other agreed and they left.

About 3 1/2 hours later four men with a stretcher came for me. They apologized for taking so long to come. I was so glad to see them that I felt no apology was necessary. They carried me to the Aid Station and then sent me, by jeep, to the 91st Evacuation Hospital, near Utah Beach.

I did several strange things which were related to trauma. Except for hands and arms, I was unable to move. I gave my pistol and maps to the men who administered first aid. They didn't know what to do with them, but took them. When I was in the Aid Station I was sick and lost the meal that I had eaten 6 hours before. I read at a later date that this could result from severe trauma to a major bone.

I had to revise my original perception of how I was wounded. I thought that I was hit in the back of the calf of my right leg hard enough to "see stars." The scars, after the cast was removed, showed that I was hit on the outside of my leg. What I thought was "stars" was the flash of the mortar burst. My right tibia was shattered, but neither artery nor the major nerve was cut. I was discharged from the hospital in Galesburg, IL, in April, about nine months after being wounded. It was another 8 years before edema and lymphangitis disappeared. The leg was shortened 1 3/8 inches. Months later when the cast came off and I examined the scars, I found one on the outside of my leg about the size of a nickel. It was an entry wound. The exit was on the inside and big enough to hold my hand.

PART III

Adventures of the Personnel Section

The 915th Personnel Section performed behind the scenes. As long as they were there and functioning properly, which they almost always were, the rest of us tended not to give them much thought, especially during combat, when they were physically separated from the rest of the battalion, back with the Division Rear Echelon (Unicorn Rear), sometimes as much as a hundred miles away. If they had not functioned, though, we would have noticed soon enough. They kept the records which insured that we all got paid, that we got credit for being promoted (and the pay to go with it), when we were wounded or killed, and a host of other vital services.

Being separated from us did not mean that they led uneventful lives, doing nothing but peck at typewriters all day. It did mean, however, that they became a close-knit group of friends. And here at last we have a few scraps about what was happening to them. First, let Loren Fred, in a letter of January 24, 1996, introduce them all:

Introduction by Loren Fred

There were 10 of us in the personnel section. We have more or less kept in contact over all these years. For a number of years the 90th reunion was in Kansas City, MO, where Ed Calvin lived. For years he wrote to all of us exhorting us to come to the reunion. Sometimes Clyde Kennedy wrote to us too. The year Ed was president of the association all but one of us still living were there.

Ed Calvin originally was in B Battery, but it wasn't long until he went to officers' school with the specific intent of becoming a WOJG (I never heard of a WOSG, but I assume there were some) [actually there weren't. The rank above Warrant Officer Junior Grade was Chief Warrant Officer, abbreviated CWOJ, just for the 915th. After the war he returned to Kansas City, married Jewel, to whom he had written during the war, and had a government job. They had a nice house in Raytown, a suburb. Two or three years ago he retired and they moved to Lee's Summit, not far away. It was largely through his efforts in the early years that all of us stayed in contact. My wife and I stopped to see them three or four times.

Loren Fred. Before I went into the army, I was a linotype operator for the daily newspaper here in Wichita, and married. After I came back, I resumed that work. I retired in 1976 after having that job 44 years. In 1961 my family (one daughter) began traveling more widely, and after 30 years we got to all 50 states, all but one province of Canada, and five states in Mexico. Whenever we went in the direction of the home of a personnel member (my daughter grew up and left in the meantime) we made an effort to go there.

Just a few years after the war we found out that Eddie Dies had died. We never did know why. None of us ever got to see him again after we left Europe. He was from New York. He also spoke of Lon Gyland. When we were cleaning our carbines he would ask who had the earl can (oil can).

Appendix

He was a nice fellow. All our personnel members got along splendidly, even though there was probably 12 years difference (I was the oldest) and we came from different parts of the country.

Clyde Kennedy came from Colorado. He had gone to military school (I believe it was Kemper in Missouri). Since he had already had that much training, I think he went right into the personnel section to head it (under **Mr.** Calvin). [For the record, the military school was Wentworth, not Kemper, and he had a couple of intermediate jobs before he became Personnel Sergeant Major. More about him in Section 3 of this appendix.] He used to type off stencils without an error as fast as the rest of us could type anything. He married the English girl he met in Wolverhampton, came back to Grenada, Colorado, to work for years in a bank and sell insurance. He has prospered considerably. He and Marie have made six or seven trips back to England and Ireland.

John J. Berky originally came from North Dakota, I believe. He was one of the two "kids" in our section. After the war he became a PhD and for a while he worked at the Pine Bluff Arsenal in Arkansas. He married Helen, and after moving around a few times, they now live in Hot Springs, Arkansas. They are retired now, and in the winter time they take their trailer and go to Florida.

Douglass Blocker was the real Southerner in the group. He came from Marshall, Texas. The family had a large plantation near there and at one time they had slaves. The large plantation house is on the National Register of Historical Places. We stopped there three times (once nobody was home) to see Doug and his 90-year-old mother. Bill Moyers (TV) also came from that area, and on one of his shows (Amazing Grace, I think) he interviewed Doug. At one time Doug was a librarian in Brooklyn, before he returned home. A historical group now has the house and Doug lives in Marshall. His mother died several years ago. He never did marry.

Bob Clelland was the other "kid." He came from Ohio. After the war he returned to Lancaster and became a building contractor and married Lura. Of course they had a fine house. We stopped in to see them a couple of times.

Leo Hellman was another Texan, but he came from Hereford in the western part, completely different from the east in many ways. Hereford is the place where everyone has such good teeth because of the water. He came back to marry Elizabeth and work in the office for a feedlot. I think he owned stock in the company too. We stopped to see them three or four times on the way to the Southwest. The last time we were there, Leo had cancer and it wasn't many more weeks until he died.

Joe Cardinal came from Michigan. He was a fast typist too. When he came home he married Ardith. He drove a bread delivery truck, but he must have done well; they had a fine house in Standish. We saw him several times at reunions, but before we could get up that way, he too died. We did stop to see Ardith after that. She has since remarried and moved to Wilmington, North Carolina; we still exchange Christmas greetings.

Personnel Section

George Knudsvig, of Norwegian descent, was the oldest one, after me. He was married to Gerd before the war. He didn't think much of the army issue winter socks and had Gerd send him some good ones. I was always glad when I had a chance to eat beside him. He didn't like desserts, and I could have his. He came from Minot, North Dakota (the place that gets so cold in the winter). After the war he went back to his job as a pipe fitter (don't call them plumbers - pipe fitters work above ground and plumbers dig in the ground). They too had a fine house in Grand Forks (it gets plenty cold there, too). We stopped to see them three or four times; once they weren't there - a neighbor said they were out traveling in their trailer.

There, now you know more about the personnel section than you ever wanted to know ...

Well, not really. Before going on to more war stories from Ed Calvin and Clyde Kennedy, let me mention a little gem that Calvin told me in 1955 or thereabouts at a reunion in Kansas City. One of the most tiresome but important chores of the battery personnel clerks was typing the monthly payroll. Not only did the bookkeeping have to be precise - details like extra pay for longevity or hazardous duty; deductions for family allotments, forfeitures, or lost government property but the names had to be in proper order (alphabetical by rank), and most frustrating of all, the serial number of each man had to be copied exactly. When you consider that each enlisted man's serial number would have some eight digits and there were a good hundred men in each battery, one can see that it was an enormous chore. The clerks used to have a friendly competition to see who could be first to finish typing his payroll. Finally one of them - probably Berky or Cardinal, although I can't remember the name Calvin gave me solved the problem by *memorizing* the complete serial number of every man in his battery! From then on, he was always first.

Pete Van Buskirk, who left the personnel section to become Hq Battery supply sergeant and later became First Sergeant and finally Battalion Sergeant Major, remembers that in the headquarters building we shared with the 345th, the Coke machine was near our personnel section. "However, it usually was empty, which made a good conversation piece."

I remember that Coke machine too, Pete. Officers were forbidden to gamble with enlisted men, but we commissioned types had an intricate game we called "kingfish" to determine who paid for the cokes, and whether they got a kick-back from the other participants.

Appendix

And now let's hear about some combat experiences of the **Filing Tigers** (Mr. Calvin's term) from Tech Sgt Clyde B. Kennedy, Personnel Sergeant Major.

Excerpt from Letter by Clyde B. Kennedy, Grenada, CO, dated Nov 3, 1995

... I don't remember the extent of casualties in the 915th, but when I occasionally hear someone remarking about the "good life" that we lived in [Unicorn] Rear, I like to tell them about the two times that we suffered casualties. The first time was on August 5, 1944 at Landivy, France, when the German Air Force thought we were reinforcements for a battle that was going on at Mortain - and we learned what being bombed was really like. I don't recall the casualty count, but I know it was said that there were over fourteen killed and over twenty wounded. (I am enclosing an account of that event, which will remain in my mind forever.) [See the following document] The other was when a rumor was out that the Germans had broken through while we were bivouacked in the outskirts of Le Mans. One of the [Unicorn] Rear guards challenged a convoy headed by a weapons carrier that tried to pass through our area. After yelling Halt! a number of times and getting no response, he fired his weapon. The half-track sprayed the area with machine gun fire, killing one of the 712th Tank officers and wounding others.

Now I am not trying to imply that we had it as rough as those on the front lines, because we felt rather privileged to be serving in the Rear.

You will recall that Edwin L. Calvin was the Personnel Warrant Officer. I think he got that job just prior to our going on Louisiana maneuvers, because that is when I was promoted from Message Center Chief to Personnel Sergeant.

Ed Calvin soon found out that I could handle the Personnel Section as good as he could. This gave him a lot of free time to do what he wanted to do, like exploring wherever we went. He also spent hours on his typewriter writing to his girlfriend Jewell, whom he married after the war. I have told Ed many times that if he would give me the letters he wrote to Jewell that I could come up with a book that would be a best seller. He detailed everything in his letters to her. I am enclosing one of his letters which he graciously let me copy due to the fact that he and I happened to be the center of attention on Armistice day 1944 in France. I think you will be able to see that his girlfriend was kept very well informed.

If Ed Calvin happened to be gone from the Section, all of us in the Section could forge his initials and signature so that there was never any delay in processing papers. One time when we were getting close to the Rhine crossing, he was gone for three days. He had confiscated a car from a German garage and drove it toward the front. He was one of the first to go across the ponton bridge at Oppenheim in his liberated vehicle. He said that when he started across the bridge, the GIs thought he was a special person and waved him across in short order. Getting **back** across the bridge was another story.

[Right. That was a one-way bridge going east for some time. See Chapter 17.]

Personnel Section

I was always an ardent letter writer. ... When I left my girlfriend in Wolverhampton, we promised to write to each other every day. It was difficult but we did. She numbered her letters to me. Due to censorship, I could not number mine. We saved each other's letters. She wrote me over 400, so I must have written about the same number. I also wrote my parents and they saved all of my letters. I thoroughly enjoy using them for references when I am thinking about the days when we toured Europe the slow way.

* * * * *

An excerpt from a letter written by Tech Sgt Clyde B. Kennedy ... to his girlfriend, Marie Arrowsmith, in Wolverhampton. The letter was dated November 6, 1944. The happening occurred on August 5, 1944.

Let me tell you about one day - just one day in France. I cannot mention dates, names, places, or casualties.

The breakthrough from Normandy was on. We were traveling at blitz-krieg speed through France. Our temporarily motorized Infantry and our Artillery were far ahead, and we were hurrying to catch up with them. Through city, town and village we sped - through streets and down roads lined with shouting cheering French who were yelling "*Viva la Amerique*" and waving the "V for Victory" sign as they threw flowers into our vehicles.

The signs of war were evident - we passed wrecked and burned German tanks and vehicles along the road - some villages and parts of towns and cities were demolished - only skeletons of buildings and heaps of rubble remained. But the French didn't seem to care - they were happy in their liberation from the hated Boche.

In the early afternoon we pulled into some fields and we camouflaged our vehicles. We ate chow and waited for further movement orders. The sun was shining brightly - it was one of those few beautiful French days. We sprawled lazily on the grass under the trees. A couple of French kids came from a house nearby with pitchers of cider and some glasses. We quenched our thirst and thanked them with some of our hard candy ration. The little boys happily sat beside us, smiling and sucking on their candy.

Suddenly, out of the blue sky, came two airplanes. We glanced up - we were accustomed to seeing planes - and our air superiority was so great that we had almost grown careless.

Appendix

The planes came nearer - then circled toward us - and someone yelled "German 109's!" We scattered. I jumped through a hedgerow and lay flat on the ground. One of the little French boys followed me. The planes began a slow sweeping dive - anti-aircraft guns started firing at them from somewhere - but they unswervingly continued on their course and their machine guns began to spray lead when they started strafing. The little French boy snuggled close to me. I looked at his face. I had never seen a greater look of stark terror written on a person's face in my life - his eyes were wide with a questioning look of horror in them - his face was bloodless - his breath came in jerks as he trembled and half-sobbed a question - *Boche? Boche? Boche?* "Oui," I had to reply. I wanted to comfort him but I didn't know how, so I put my arm around him as we lay there together. Both of us must have been praying the planes did not strafe our field and they disappeared quickly into the blue horizon. We relaxed.

But the day was not over - and the worst was yet to come.

Later in the afternoon we continued our motor march and traveled into the night. Before we reached our destination, a moon had risen in a cloudless sky. A number of vehicles were ahead of us and a number were behind us. In convoy we moved slowly up a hill to our bivouac areas. Some of the vehicles ahead of us had already pulled into their designated areas and were being unloaded.

Our vehicle had reached the summit of the hill and we stopped as the driver prepared to make a sharp turn from the narrow road into a field. We found that it was necessary to unhook the trailer in order to make the difficult turn.

Some of us had dismounted and were preparing to help the driver when, in the distance, we heard the drone of approaching aircraft. We listened a moment - then began to proceed with our work when we stopped and listened intently to the sound of the motors - yes - we could hear the uneven grind that meant just one thing to us German planes!

"Perhaps they'll fly over," we told ourselves. Then the sky lit up with a half circle of flares bursting into brilliant blossoms. We ran to the shadows opposite from the flares. Then there were no shadows. It was brighter than day and we were surrounded by a huge circle of flares as the other half circle suspended themselves in the sky above us.

Where to go? What to do? Should I stay on this side of the hedgerow or go to the other side? We were helpless, as we had not had a chance to dig foxholes or slit trenches to protect ourselves. I could see soldiers either crawling or flattened to the ground. I hugged the edge of a hedgerow bank - then moved to the other side of the bank away from the vehicle-lined road. I flattened myself to a small depression in the ground.

The plane circled overhead - a thousand thoughts churned through my mind then a green flare was dropped in the middle of the circle of flares above us and it hung there as the target marker.

I glued myself to the ground and clawed the earth. The planes roared louder and louder and then dived - one after another. Came a whistle - a shriek - I clenched my teeth and every muscle in my body went tense. I prayed and waited - a bomb struck with a terrific explosion and flash - others followed - another and another and another.

Personnel Section

I waited for every whistling shrieking bomb to hit me squarely in the back. I was prepared for them and I felt that everyone of them was aimed directly at me. I was showered with dirt - bomb fragments tore into the tree branches above me - the smell of powder and brimstone filled the air. A lifetime later bombless bombers flew away.

I jumped up - my teeth chattered - I was cold and trembling and I spoke with a quiver in my voice. A cloud of smoke and dust hung over the ground.

We returned to our undamaged truck and moved it into our bivouac area.

I had never been so thoroughly scared as I was during those minutes of raining hell. The nearest bomb crater to the place where I had lain during the attack was large enough to hide a 2 1/2 ton truck. The bombs had uprooted trees, stripped them of their leaves and branches, and hurled their trunks into the air.

We dug in that night. I dug a four-foot slit trench through rocky soil, and the sky was beginning to gray with the approaches of dawn when I fell asleep exhausted. (FOR SECURITY REASONS I COULD NOT MENTION THE CASUALTIES, BOTH DEAD AND WOUNDED, THAT SOME UNITS SUFFERED.)

A Current Postscript to the Letter to Marie

At the time we were being bombed, the 915th Personnel Section Warrant Officer Edwin L. Calvin remained in the back of the 2 1/2 ton truck. Everyone else was attempting to take cover to afford themselves some protection.

I marveled at Mr. Calvin's fatalistic attitude in electing to remain sitting in the truck throughout the entire attack. My admiration for his bravery was further reinforced when, after the attack, he merely spread his sleeping bag on top of the ground and went to sleep.

At one of the 90th Division reunions, I mentioned my thoughts as to how brave I thought he was to remain in the truck while the rest of us were getting as close to the ground as possible. He responded by saying, "Hell, Clyde, I wasn't brave. I couldn't get out of the truck!"

And then another sidelight of the day unfolded upon Mr. Calvin's frank admission.

As we traveled down the road in convoy during the afternoon taking the cheers of the French along the road, we noticed a Frenchman running out of his house toward us with a bottle. He could not catch up to us, so he gave it to the driver in a jeep behind us and pointed to us, indicating that he wanted us to have the bottle. The jeep driver speeded up to the rear of our truck and handed us the bottle, which turned out to be a liter of Calvados. Calvados is an apple brandy famous in the Normandy area of France. We opened it up. One of the clerks, Corporal Hellman, took his steel helmet off, removed the liner, and poured a little Calvados into his helmet. He then touched the liquid with a match and it burned with a blue flame.

Appendix

"Man!" someone said, "that must be powerful stuff!" At that Mr. Calvin said, "Oh it couldn't be that bad. Let me show you." At that he lifted the bottle and took a big swig. We could tell that it burned all the way down. And his nine section GI companions riding in the back of the truck with him cheered him mightily. Then someone said, "How could you stand it, Mr. Calvin?" And Mr. Calvin said, "There's nothing to it." And he took another big drink. The cheers went up and Mr. Calvin seemed to begin to enjoy his applause. At intervals as we continued our travel down the road, Mr. Calvin would take another drink. And each time his companions would cheer and make exclamations of admiration.

According to Mr. Calvin, when we neared our bivouac area prior to the bombing, he had finished a good part of the bottle of Calvados. When the attack began, he attempted to get out of the truck but found that he was stoned to immobility. Fortunately the flying shrapnel and falling debris missed him. And so it was that Mr. Calvin's honesty kept me from thinking forever that he had demonstrated a combination of bravery and fatalistic resignation that night at Landivy.

And now let's read another of Mr Calvin's adventures, this time in his own words, written not long after the event.

ARMISTICE DAY IN FRANCE

11 November 1944

by

WO(JG) Edwin L. Calvin

Armistice Day has never meant much of anything to me in the past, except that when those golden rule days were having a go at me, or I at them, as the case may be, we used to march down town to the City Square where there was a monument of the unknown soldier, someone always addressed us or undressed us, just which I'm not sure, then someone fired a few old muskets and we held our hats over our hearts, if any. I mean hats, not hearts. Then we sang the National Anthem, and were really thinking more about being released for the rest of the day to romp and play if we were still that age. That was my conception of Armistice Day, until this year when I sort of got a different slant on it in a foreign country. In the following you will notice the name of Sgt Kennedy appears quite frequently. That name will be referring to Technical Sergeant Clyde B. Kennedy, Personnel Sergeant Major.

Personnel Section

'Twas on one of those days of days, and nothing like the usual type of day which is spoken of in that way. It was not clear, the sun did not shine forth with all its gentle warmth, a gentle breeze didn't blow from the south and the birds didn't chirp merrily overhead. On the contrary, it was a cloudy day, with cold mist swirling about every now and then. The overcast was broken only intermittently by a mere shadow of what is usually known in many circles as "sol." For some reason the old boy seemed to be just a bit ashamed of his weakness and only put in an appearance to sort of buck up his spirits at infrequent intervals. Does it seem possible to you that on such a day some of the strongest, most stirring, yes, even heart rending, experiences should be shown to Americans by a display of the utmost in humble yet magnificent gratitude by a proud but gracious and truly grateful people? We weren't showered with flowers, or kisses, as the heroes of a conquering people. We didn't walk down streets littered with ticker tape. Cheers of the multitude didn't greet us on every side. The key to the city wasn't given to us in a large and blatant ceremony. Yet, I can speak with all earnestness on my behalf and, I think, on behalf of my friend Sgt Kennedy - technically I should refer to him as my fellow benefactor, since the two of us couldn't have helped but be extremely moved, moved to the point of tempering us with a bit more tolerance of a people which we so easily misunderstood, due to the fact that in our barest moments we are so much better off in worldly goods than are they. The simple gratitude of these kindly people gave us an experience which will not be equaled on any Armistice Day so far as I am concerned. I shall always be eternally grateful to a little French lad named Gaston Gasporoto. Had it not been for his friendship we never would have experienced a very great quality of the French people, namely hospitality, although that is a very poor word to express the way the French can make you feel when in their presence.

I had been invited by Gaston to go to a little village some three kilometers from his home to see the celebration which the French were having for Armistice day. Frankly I admit that I was more influenced into going by my interest in just what a celebration by the French would be like and with the hope of getting a picture of the celebration, rather than any reverence upon my part for participating in an Armistice Day celebration. But for that bit of curiosity I was to be shamed into more of a contemptuous bit of introspective reflection than has happened to me in many a day. Upon Gaston's suggestion I asked Sgt Kennedy to accompany us, so at ten o'clock he and I were on our way to meet our newly found friend, Gaston, at Number One Rue de la Haye. We met our friend about a block from his home, since he had started out in our direction to make sure that we hadn't changed our mind about going with him.

Gaston was dressed up in the very best clothes which he possessed and I rather imagine according to French styles he was right on the beam sartorially. During our trip to the nearby town - did I say nearby? It seemed like miles and miles to me before we got there. The French seem to have no conception of distance whatsoever. That fact has probably been helped out by war time conditions - of too little gasoline, lack of transportation of any sort in general, and much dependence on Shank's ponies to get wherever they wish to go. To our friend, Gaston, the distance to the town was nothing out of the usual walking sphere, but to us it seemed like a trip that should have been made with an overnight's stay in between.

Appendix

Sgt. Kennedy and myself got quite a few laughs out of our French friend's dodging the vehicles which passed by in a swirl of splashing mud and water, which would have made the light colored clothes of our friend look anything but the trim neatness with which they shone upon the start of our pilgrimage.

On the way we stopped and bought tickets for the cinema which we were to go to that afternoon at two o'clock. Both of us were interested in what a strictly French show would be like. We soon found out that you have to buy your ticket in advance when you are in France. A box office as such is non-existent in smaller towns; all tickets are bought in advance of the showing regardless of the program playing. Movies are rare over there because of the war and the destruction of much of their equipment and film by the Germans that any type of picture is looked upon with awe as a great luxury. Even the buying of theater tickets in a bar was a new experience to me. The bar maid had a chart of every seat in the theater and persons buying tickets were allowed to pick out seats in any section of the theater. When your choice was made, a ring was drawn around the seats desired and the number of those seats written on the reverse side of your tickets. The price of the tickets was ridiculously low - seven francs per ticket - which is about fifteen cents in the coin of the realm. Upon possessing myself of the theater tickets we were upon our way once again.

Continuing on down the road, we were to learn one more lesson before reaching our destination. It seems that doctors are almost revered over here. Their houses are pointed out to one, and we were informed with pride that the Doctor lives there. The doctors evidently do very well for themselves, too, judging from the size of their homes in comparison with the homes of people in other professions. Possibly the great pride the people take in their doctors is because of the preponderance of education which the doctor has in comparison to the average person. The average person finishes their educational career at the age of fourteen unless they have a great deal of money or family position with contacts in the right direction, in which case the youngster goes to a university which is about the same as our high school. Consequently the doctor is so far above the average person educationally that he is looked upon almost as a super being and is revered as such.

Just beyond the doctor's house we could see a small cluster of buildings with the most prominent point of the landscape being a church steeple. Even before we arrived there, we almost knew we had reached our destination. The village was like anyone of hundreds of other villages in France. Its sole source of support being the mine on the outskirts of the town. The mine over here is all important to the livelihood as well as the very existence of the individual. Most of the houses are built by the mine to be lived in by the workers in the mine. The electric power is furnished by the mine, as is the water. Provided it doesn't happen to be a coal mine, coal is brought in and rationed out to the worker. Consequently the mine owner, or owners, practically control and operate the village which surrounds it. Unless the villagers have given up the age old custom

Personnel Section

of eating, they must needs work at the mine in order to earn the wherewithal to buy the necessary food which they must buy. Even though they farm the small plots of land they have, earnestly and thriftily, they must still have money to buy the items which they are unable to raise themselves. By using your imagination you can readily see that the people living under such conditions and circumstance would be the hard-working variety, yet very easy-going as far as the meager and limited means of their amusements are concerned. Strictly the type that would give you the shirt off their back if they thought it would make you happy. Now you have a background of the scene in which Sgt. Kennedy and I walked into flat-footedly, not knowing what was to happen to us, and neither did the villagers.

We arrived at a monument which Gaston pointed out to us with great pride. It was the monument of the unknown soldier, the familiar figure you see in almost every village of France. This one was no exception to the usual rule. It, too, was decorated with numerous potted flowers. On that day it seemed to shine with a new brilliance, a new significance, as though the inert mass of bronze realized that this was the day for which it was created - November 11th. From the monument we could see the door of the church about half a block away on the same side of the street. The monument was set in the center of a grassy plot of ground practically in the front yard of the church. Gaston told us that the services in commemoration of the Armistice were not as yet finished and as soon as they were the people would assemble in front of the monument for the celebration. There was nothing to do but wait. It was cold and the wind cut though us. I could not but wonder at our French friend who seemed not to mind the cold though clad very thinly for that time of the year, wearing only a light suit with a scarf, I should say the inevitable scarf, around his neck. The scarf seems to be as much of a part of the national pride as is the beret. We had waited in front of the monument for perhaps ten minutes when we noticed a Frenchman approaching us from the church. From appearances he looked like any other Frenchman you might see in a village of that size - same beret, same small stature, the only possible difference between him and any other Frenchman you might see was the fact that perhaps his clothes looked just a bit more expensive, his manner just a bit more predominating. We didn't know it then, but he was to change the whole course of the celebration so far as we were concerned. In fact, we like to think that perhaps in some small way the whole populace was changed insofar as the celebration was concerned.

The Frenchman came up and greeted our friend Gaston as well as us, although his greeting was somewhat one-sided since our French was no better than his American, which was non-existent. Gaston asked him what time the church services would be over, and when we could expect the celebration in front of the monument to begin. This, or the resulting information, was translated by Gaston for our benefit. Then Gaston explained that he had brought two American friends with him to attend and observe the celebration, at least from the gestures without which the French seem incapable of

Appendix

expressing themselves, that is what we assumed. Then it happened. The "mayor" for that is who the gentleman was, asked us through the help of Gaston to stand one on either side of the monument of the unknown soldier during the ceremony. We became the guests of honor for the Armistice Day celebration for that little French town. I don't think that it was until after the ceremony that we realized the honor bestowed upon us, because we had no idea of the ceremony to follow. Needless to say, we accepted how could we refuse without endangering international solidarity? Seriously though, we were hooked, the stage was set and we were to be the props. I don't think I shall ever be sorry of the part which I played in the celebration, but I would have been sorry had I missed it. We had no idea what was expected of us, since we had no idea of what was to come off. We were sort of in the same boat as the crumbs which were tossed upon the waters. Right then and there we decided that our friend Gaston should be quizzed as to what was to take place, but fast. However, just as we were about to give him a mild third degree, in order to get posted on what was to be expected of us, the mayor took each of us by the arm and led us toward the local tavern. The answer to my questioning look at Gaston was that we were to go inside where it was warm and have coffee. Sounded good to us even though we were still a bit perturbed about our part in the ceremony a bit later on.

The coffee turned out to be a rare old liqueur, which had been as the French said, "cached" for the past four years during the occupation, but which had been dug out for the special occasion of Armistice Day. The tavern looked much like any other bar or tavern in France or for that matter in America, some tables and chairs with a bar reaching around two sides of the room. The bar incidentally was well filled. Evidently Armistice Day was receiving a festive welcome. But we tarried not among the people in the main tavern room, but were led into another private room off the main drinkery, but evidently the first room wasn't to the mayor's liking so to another private room we were taken. This one, judging by the size and appointments, must have been used for private parties, club meetings, and the like. The main fixture of the room was a large circular table of oblong design stretching from one end of the room to the other, covered with a checkered cloth of red and white material. A stove and a sideboard were the other furnishings, besides the accompanying chairs for the table. And as I remember it, a few hanging potted flowers were in one corner of the room. Close to the door was a stove which was giving out with a welcome glow of heat, very welcome because of the cold wind outside. But we were not to enjoy the welcoming influence of the fire for very long, but never mind, we weren't to be snubbed - far from it - the welcoming influence of the aforementioned liqueur was to warm us both inside and out. The liqueur was very good and very sweet - the type of concoction which goes down very easily, smooth as the silkiness of gossamer, but in any quantity would make you wish you'd never been born. Between rounds we passed around cigarettes which to the French are as highly appreciated as was the rare old liqueur by us. Between rounds Sgt. Kennedy

Personnel Section

and I managed to corner Gaston and find out what was to come off at the monument, but all we could get out of him in the short time we had for interrogation was that they would play music. We asked if it was to be the Marseillaise - it was. After the second round it was time to go back to the monument and begin the ceremony. Sgt. Kennedy and myself had a harried discussion pro and con about saluting when they played the Marseillaise. We decided to salute.

The mayor motioned for us to take our places. From this point on the description of the ceremony cannot be adequately done - first because technicolor would be necessary to record the record of the ceremony accurately - secondly because from the first of the ceremony Sgt. Kennedy and myself were rigidly at attention, which position if held doesn't allow one to look about to see anything that happens around them except for the field of vision directly in front. I regretted missing any part of the ceremony because of my position. However, it was my thought that the least I could do to repay them in part or at least not to disappoint them entirely was to remain rigidly at attention as though I realized in part the honor being paid us. Evidently the same thought was shared by Sgt. Kennedy, since he likewise reacted to the honor paid him by remaining at attention through the entire ceremony. It was the least we could do. Perhaps some small details can be picked up by the flashback method from things which Sgt Kennedy could see from his side of the monument which were out of my line of light. I had given my camera to Gaston to take pictures of the ceremony, but the crowd was either too large or he was so wrapped up in the ceremony that he was unable to get a picture of us and the crowd, which was a deep disappointment to both of us.

First of all, the crowd emerged from the church and were formed in sort of an arch around the monument with the center left open. Through the open center of the living arch marched three little boys dressed in black gowns, trimmed in white starched lace, full skirted, which worn with the little black skull caps gave them a saintly appearance - these were the "servers." They marched sedately to their places directly in front of me. The rest of the procession followed the servers. The priest of the village church advanced toward the monument of the unknown soldier and up to a place directly in front of the honoring bronze, or at least that was my assumption. He was followed by a flag bearer, or bearers, one bearing the national flag, the other a religious banner of some significant meaning unknown to me. The national flag was brought to a position in front of Sgt. Kennedy, the religious banner was placed at the edge of the living arch on the left side. The village fire department, consisting of six regular members, of whom some were veterans of the First World War, were turned out in resplendent brass helmets, so highly polished as to have hurt the eyes had the sun been honoring us. Their uniforms were of dark blue trimmed in red braid and worn with a polished leather belt, black in color, and fastened with a shiny buckle. These firemen were the envy of any parade. When the wearers of the resplendent bonnets arrived at the living arch, they did a single file and marched up beside the flag on Sgt Kennedy's side of the monument. They were

Appendix

followed by a six man front, two ranks deep, of veterans of the last war, bespangled with medals which literally made their clothes sag from the weight. So many ribbons and medals on such a small number of men I have never seen, not even at a presentation of medals to a military group. All of them were dressed in olive drab shirts and ties. Some of them were possessors of matching overseas caps. Others were attired in berets or hats. These shirts, ties and hats were evidently cherished relics brought out of their places of storage for very special occasions such as these. They took the place of honor directly in front of us and facing the Unknown Soldier. The honor guard of twelve was followed by a band made up of what seemed to be people from all walks of life, both young and old. Some were on the declining side of middle age; others were mere boys in their teens. The band took up a place just outside the living arch, and at this point the arch was brought in to form a semicircle around the guard of honor.

The priest, who I presume was kneeling in front of the Unknown Soldier, began a prayer, none of which I understood, being either in French, Latin, or both. After the prayer, the band gave forth with The Star Spangled Banner, whether a tribute made to our presence or a regular feature of the Armistice Day program, we know not. But whatever the playing of the band may have lacked in melody, it made up in volume and sincerity of the members of the band. Sergeant Kennedy and myself saluted at the opening strain and through the playing of the Star Spangled Banner. Our national anthem was followed by the Marseillaise. Again we did the honors, holding it through the playing of the French national anthem. And it was at this point that a rather amusing incident happened on Sgt Kennedy's part - the wind got in his eyes, making them water. According to him, the tears just flew. When the French people saw that, they were much impressed by what they thought was a touching display of emotion. At the moment, I'm wondering if it was wind in the eyes or not, because I, too, noticed the wind's effect on my eyes - if not quite so noticeable. But somehow when they cut loose with the Star Spangled Banner, it sort of slipped me the knockout punch emotionally. Be the reason what it may, the spray on Sgt Kennedy's part had a telling effect on the crowd. They practically carried him out on their shoulders after the ceremony was finished. At the time, I couldn't figure out why he was receiving so much more attention than I was.

The Marseillaise was followed by the reading of the names of the soldiers who died in action in the First World War. After the reading of each name by the priest, the Guard of Honor would reply in chorus, "Died for France" - although at the time all we could understand was the word "France." The honor guard stood rigidly at attention during that part of the ceremony, which was quite a task for some of the more aged members, since there were many names being honored on that scroll of the village dead from the last world conflict. Ending the ceremony was a minute of silence honoring the memory of all the dead of the last war. That mute silence in honor of the dead seemed to have a much more telling effect on many of the people than did the colorful ceremony.

Personnel Section

Many a cheek was wet at the end of the silence, and many a look of grief for loved ones could be seen in the fleeting moment before facial reaction once more hid their sorrows from public view. After the moment of silence, the band struck up a marching song and the crowd started marching off in the direction of the mine on the outskirts of the village to celebrate further.

As long as I live, I shall never forget the look of pride on Gaston's father as he came up to me and silently shook hands with me. The barrier of language at that moment was not apparent to either of us. No words were necessary. It is rare moments like that which people live for but don't realize it. The honor guard, each in turn, came up to us, saluted, and shook hands murmuring something which we understood not in words but comprehended perfectly emotionally as if it had been spoken eloquently in English. Many of the civilians followed their example, shaking hands with us and murmuring the one word, "*Merci*" - but saying volumes with their eyes. Then we were gathered up by the crowd and taken back to the tavern for further celebration on somewhat less solemn lines but nevertheless heart-warming.

At the tavern once more the rare liqueur was brought forth and made the rounds.

Sgt Kennedy and myself noticed that all the people were chipping in to pay for the liqueur consumed. We started reaching for our billfolds to contribute also. We didn't get far with that gesture - it was met with such a torrent of French as I have seldom heard in such a short space of time. It was easily seen that we were practically slapping them across the face with a glove by offering to pay. We had been invited there as their guests, and as such we were to be treated whether we liked it or not. That part of it bothered us no end, because we knew all too well the long hours of toil these people put forth to acquire the money that they were so generously shelling out for our benefit. The only thing we could do was pass out more cigarettes, since that was all they would allow.

It was during that pause when the waitress had gone out for another bottle that one bespangled veteran started speaking. He was practically round-shouldered from the medals that covered the front of his shirt of olive drab. We could tell from his gestures which accompanied the torrent of French that he was speaking about us and the ceremony which had taken place a few minutes before. We were puzzled and thought perhaps we had offended someone. To this day or for that matter to the end of time, I don't think either of us will have the solution to the whole problem. But we were to gather from what Gaston told us that the old boy was unhappy because we hadn't been allowed to march down the street behind the band and finish up the ceremony at the mine in a blaze of glory or some such thing of a like nature. In any case, our fans, the populace, seemed not to agree with him, because now and again one of them would motion at him and give out with the universal gesture meaning he was just a bit screwy in the head or had lapped up a few too many. There was one guy wearing a white scarf who was really going to bat for us, but I guess the medals on the old boy's chest just gave him too much push, because he stayed right in there pitching. It was at this time that one of the visiting firemen in the resplendent bonnet motioned to us to follow him and led us out of the tavern. We didn't know what the score was, but since popular opinion seemed to be with the fireman, we followed him. Evidently our diplomatic choice was correct, because all the rest of the people followed us out of the tavern and up the street.

Appendix

We knew not what was to come off, whether there was another part to the celebration or just what. Nevertheless we followed the visiting fireman, who wore the resplendent bonnet with a more jaunty air than when we had first seen him. We left our international relationship, which was gradually growing into a more liquid status, in the hands of the friendly fireman and followed him down the street.

I was determined to follow him to death's door if necessary, because I had made up my mind to get a picture of that bonnet of his at all costs. I had previously had ideas about the six of them together, which would have been the photograph to end all photographs, but ahead of me I could see them splitting up and going off in different directions. So this last lone fireman with the photogenic bonnet was the last chance I had to get a picture. It was with that idea that I trailed him closely, hoping that he didn't think me a bit too greedy at accepting his hospitality too readily. But he was a pretty jolly fellow and getting a bit more so every minute. We walked up to a spot where the street widened out a bit and he looked about. It was at that moment that I began to figure out what was coming, because he had that look you always see when someone is ducking into a bar before or after closing hours. He led us between the buildings and down a sort of alleyway and into the back door of a tavern. About six local citizens were already present and about eight or nine more followed us in. It was quite a crowd in a small tavern which had no distinctive features except that the chairs and tables were stacked one on top of the other in mute evidence that the tavern was not officially open for business. It seemed we had been accepted into the inner sanctuary of the local citizenry. I had noticed the glance of suspicion on the barmaid's face when we first stepped in the door, but that immediately disappeared miraculously when the possessor of the photogenic bonnet said a few words to her and a smile of welcome greeted us. I gathered the fireman had worked up quite a flame with the barmaid, one which he had no intentions of putting out from a professional point of view. However, perhaps I was merely deducing smoke which was non-existent.

Sgt Kennedy and myself were to be introduced to a concoction which the French relish very much. It is known to them by the title of "Mirabelle," and I do mean titled, not named. Any concoction which embodies as many alcoholic evils as that stuff deserves to have a title. Mirabelle is a very powerful drink, similar to Calvados in potency. Calvados goes by the name "Jersey Lightning." From that I leave you to your own conclusions. Our friend the fireman bought us a round of Mirabelle. We clicked shot glasses all around, murmured the appropriate *Viva La France's*, and bent the elbow. I waited to see how our friend the fireman fared with the Mirabelle, because I had but slight acquaintance with that liquid. Seems the preferred method - or at least his - was to take a sip of Mirabelle, let that burn out one tonsil, and deluge the other with the remainder of the glass - and thus the neatest tonsillectomy ever performed was accomplished painlessly with the bend of an elbow.

Personnel Section

After our friend the fireman had bought us a round, I noticed our champion with the white scarf edging up to the bar. He made us do an encore. Those poor shot glasses sure took a beating from being clicked together so much. It was at this time that a staggering thought - but staggering, and I mean that literally - became apparent. From the action of these civilians, I could see that unless some diplomatic step were pulled and pulled quickly, the solidarity of the American soldier was going to be put to the test the acid test at that. We were really in a spot. There were about twenty Frenchmen in the tavern, and we could see that each of them was intending to treat us to a round of Mirabelle - only there was one catch - in order to conserve their funds, each was buying us one drink, then dropping out of the competition, which left us to drink down twenty Frenchmen and still hold up our heads like the hearty and indomitable Americans which they expected us to be. I looked at Sgt Kennedy and he looked at me with silent resignation. He too saw the spot we were in, and he determined to acquit himself in a manner to equal the highest expectations of our friends even if it shivered the very roots of the Kennedy family tree. I am not a man of action, but I was a man of desperation. I realized the necessity of getting out of that tavern and still leave French-American relations in a friendly state. Besides, my idea of getting a picture of that photogenic bonnet was still buzzing around in my head. So I pointed at the door, and my camera - then at the fireman, and started out toward the street. He got the idea, and I have yet to see a Frenchman who was the least bit shy about having his photograph taken, so he followed me obligingly outside. I took a round of pictures, and I assure you it didn't have the telling effect on us that the other rounds that we had been having. When we were in the tavern, we had been trying to get the local citizenry to allow us to buy them a drink, but they wouldn't hear of it. So now that we had the odds sort of even, and whittled down to more our size considering the language difficulties, we got busy with Gaston and made our fireman friend agree in letting us buy a round for the whole crowd, or we wouldn't go back inside with him. He begrudgingly agreed, so back we went for some more punishment. Once back in the bar, he tried to get out of letting us buy a round by starting the old "comrade" stuff again. We insisted, and fished out the money - made a flourish to the bar maid which included everyone in the bar - she got the drift and started filling glasses. At last we had realized our ambition - we were buying these gracious, grateful people a drink. Then we passed around the remaining cigarettes we had and made our exit under protest after one more round, with many gestures to show our friends that we hated to leave them but we must if we were to make the cinema in the next village. Each of them shook our hand as we left, murmuring something to the effect that they wished we could stay longer, but that they were happy that we had been with them.

Appendix

We were out in the cloudy, misty, cold air, and this time we were glad, very glad, that it was as cool as it was. We had a long way to go to get back home. Actually, I guess it was a good thing we had that distance to walk, since I imagine the Mirabelle would have had a telling effect if we had not walked it off.

We went back to Gaston's house and ate dinner with him, then to the cinema, but although the cinema would have proved a highlight to any other day, on this day of days when so much had happened to us, it was decidedly on the declining side of the climax of events that had happened to us. The show we couldn't make heads nor tails of because everything was in French. The only thing we could fathom was a Short Subject somewhat similar to many of our Modern Mechanix reels. And that was understood only because the actions of the artisans and mechanics, machinists, or whatever you call them, would be apparent and comprehensible in any language. The show ended, the curtain rang down, ending the show and the most eventful Armistice Day of my life to date, and I hardly think I can be fortunate enough in my lifetime to experience another which will equal it.

PART IV

The Falaise Gap

Statements of officers of the 915th Field Artillery Battalion about action at *Le Bourg St. Leonard - Chambois*, 16-21 August 1944. These statements were written immediately after the action by

Captain Wilmer T. Beck, Liaison Officer #1

1st Lieutenant Maurice H. Smith, Liaison Officer #2
(unfortunately missing the first page or pages)

Captain James D. Richter, Liaison Officer #3
(Plus an excerpt from a letter by Captain Poley Evans, CO, K Co, 359th Inf)

1st Lieutenant Raymond J. Wright, Assistant S-2/Survey Officer

1st Lieutenants Victor P. Rizzo and George W. Kilmer, Liaison Pilots

Captain William S. Jacobs, Jr., Communications Officer, CO Hq Btry
(with comment from Clarence Hollandsworth, Lineman)

Captain Donald E. Thomson, Assistant S-3

Our good fortune in having these irreplaceable documents is due to the forethought of Don Thomson, who not only bullied the authors into writing them, but then preserved them for fifty years. (Even he isn't perfect: that's why we are missing most of Maurie Smith's narrative.)

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by Wilmer T. Beck

On the morning of August 16, the 1st Bn 359 took over the area of Le Bourg St Leonard from the 5th Armored. Two platoons of infantry were assigned the death sector of Le Bourg St Leonard. To the north of the town was Chambois and to the west was a forest and the main Argentan Road.

In the later afternoon the Germans counterattacked Le Bourg with tanks and infantry. Because of surrounding forest and the fact that Argentan-Le Bourg route was a direct route to Paris, the Germans were able to sneak tanks into town unobserved. Another company of the 1st Bn 359 attacked toward Le Bourg St Leonard on the left flank and repelled the German attack and took numerous prisoners.

That night when the prisoners were taken to the rear, pockets of Germans were encountered along the supply and communication line. During the night of the 16th our wire lines were cut and our position was entirely flanked. The next morning at dawn a new German attack started with tanks and infantry. This time the attack was beaten off by the Battalion Commander, Major Pond, leading through a platoon of tanks into the southeast of the town. The G-2 report of the scale of the attack and prisoners' reports were that the German attacking force consisted of a Battalion of 800 men from the *Das Reich* Division and a Bn of men 300 in strength from the *Der Fuhrer* Division. These 1100 were reinforced by at least 20 tanks.

The arty action at this point was the unobserved fire completely surrounding all roads from the north and west and fire in the forest to the west. Also attached 155 mm guns fired on possible enemy positions. The enemy attacks were coordinated with the leanest enemy art fire we had faced to date.

During the 17th we lost the town four times, but came out ahead because we regained it five times. Our own artillery fire which we fired continuously stopped the Germans from bringing up reinforcements and inflicted heavy casualties.

The next morning we found the reason for the ferocity of the German counterattack. We had by this time moved into Fougy and on Hill 129 and were able to look into the valley from a good OP. This was the funnel of the whole Falaise gap. The Germans were desperately trying to break through the valley and get out.

We had one particular point of woods that we made a precision adjustment on. Around this point of woods streamed tanks, guns, half-tracks, horsedrawn guns, trucks, and infantry riding and on foot. Nowhere has an artilleryman had better observation nor better targets. For two days we poured every available bit of artillery into the valley. On the point of woods we had vehicles piled a mile long and four abreast. This would force the Germans to try a new route. A slight shift in deflection and range would again bring them under the terrific artillery fire. From my viewpoint the holding of the 1st Bn with direct support of the 915th FA Bn at Le Bourg St Leonard made possible the final closing of the Falaise Gap and led to the artillery destruction of the large part of the German Seventh Army.

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by Maurice H. Smith

[Most of this narrative has been lost. However, even these two final lines tell us quite a bit.]

... That ended two days of the most spectacular artillery firing I have ever seen. The 2nd Battalion 359 Infantry had now processed some 4000 German prisoners.

The Falaise Gap

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by James D. Richter

On the morning that the Germans started the big breakthrough I started back to the forward switchboard with two men to start wire forward and bring up a new forward observer. A short distance from the 3rd Bn OP, two Germans clambered out of a ditch with a white flag and shouted, "*Kamrad.*" While disarming them, two others were brought in by a tank Lt and a Sgt, and a fifth prisoner walked in with his hands up.

We proceeded on to the rear and were soon joined with another column of prisoners and the number soon grew to 40 odd. One man and Pvt George Bell and myself marched back with the column until we had to turn off to go to the switchboard.

As the two of us climbed the hill, we looked back and saw the Germans trying their breakthrough. It was a sight such as man seldom sees. Trucks burning, artillery bursts galore, tanks and TD's firing; in general it was bedlam and confusion.

We soon got near the road and saw a column of German vehicles approaching, led by a jeep. The forward switchboard crew must have recognized the column as German too, for they opened fire at about the same time we did. The column halted and we continued firing for a few seconds, and then the Germans started shouting, "*Kamrad.*" The prisoners were led away quick, and the wounded and dead Germans had to wait their turn. The column consisted of approximately 2 jeeps, 2 motorcycles, 2 half tracks, 1 radio truck, and a few other small trucks.

A short time later a tank came up whose turret could not traverse too well. We held him to control the road - he fired his machine guns through the nearby hedgerow, and shortly 14 or 15 prisoners came up with white flags; a few were wounded.

Things calmed down, but about fifteen minutes later an assault gun, 150 mm, came abruptly out of a field not 20 yards from our tank. Everyone shouted at once, and the tank crew fired a shot in about two seconds. The HE hit the side of the gun tube, and immediately we heard shouts of "*Kamrad.*" Three men, one of which was wounded, climbed out and marched forward to give up. The motor of the gun was left running, and two badly wounded Germans were dying in the rear of the gun. No more action worthy of note took place here.

[Here is a good place to plug in a report from an infantryman. Poley Evans, commander of a Company in the 3rd Bn 359th Inf, wrote me, in a letter dated June 18, 1996, the following comment]

My Company was K Company of the 359; we had the mission, 3rd Bn, of cutting the road at Chambois, my Co on the left, L Co on the right. Orders from higher headquarters told me that I had at my disposal all the fireworks from Battalion to Army. Three-quarters of a mile to my front and across the road was a wooded area. I started calling for artillery fire at 4 p.m. and continued throughout the night.

Appendix

The next morning Maj Messinger [sp ?] said to me, "Captain, I believe there are people who want to come out of the woods." I held up fire and we got 1500 German soldiers. It has been stated that you could go on the road, and for two miles either way you could walk on human flesh.

I got my Silver Star here.

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
By Raymond J. Wright

On the 18th of August in the afternoon, I established an OP at about six hundred yards east of St Leonard; from this OP, I could observe almost the entire valley running from Chambois toward Argentan. In this area the enemy was moving toward Chambois, trying to escape the trap that was closing in on them.

During the afternoon of that day, there were several targets, mostly columns of motorized and horse-drawn equipment. These columns appeared from our left front and could be seen in several places from there to Chambois. We fired on these targets all afternoon by adjusting on the road several hundred yards ahead of where we expected the target to appear. This lead would enable us to get artillery fire on the road just as the target reached that point, causing many fires and explosions. Late in the afternoon the smoke and dust became so dense that we were unable to observe artillery fire.

On August 19 we fired on similar targets including groups of enemy personnel. The roads were becoming congested, and each time I called for artillery fire on these targets, I could observe burning tanks, vehicles, horses and men trying to flee from the area in all directions. The long columns of trucks, armored vehicles, horses and men continued to by noon. The whole valley was a sea of flame, smoke and dust from bursting shells.

One of the infantry battalion commanders called me at about 1400 that afternoon, gave me the coordinates of an area where he thought the enemy were massing armor and personnel for a counterattack. I could observe a group of houses about three hundred yards short of that area, so I adjusted the 915th Field Artillery Battalion on the area, asked for all additional fire, and they immediately put the fire of 344th light and the 345th medium Battalions on the same target. I called for continuous fire on this target for several minutes. This evidently had good effect, causing numerous fires and explosions.

Early on the morning of the 20th I moved my OP to a point eight hundred yards north of St Leonard, just above Fougy. From this point I could determine the location of our own front lines very well.

Just as I finished establishing my OP, the enemy made an attempt to break through between our 1st Battalion who occupied the high ground around Fougy and the 3rd battalion to my right front. The enemy appeared from a valley to my left front, and came directly toward our lines, moving southeast. They were in a mass of trucks, tanks, and horse-drawn vehicles. The vehicles were in column about five vehicles in width and in a long line. The personnel was a solid mass on both sides of the vehicles.

The Falaise Gap

At first I hesitated to call for artillery fire because they were so near our own front lines, but decided that we must put fire on them. I made a sensing from a previous concentration and the fire came out very quickly, landing directly where I wanted it. I called for continuous fire on that point. The enemy started milling around in every direction, several trucks were burning, and several white flags appeared. I believe this was the best target that I observed during the operation. We fired on several targets during the afternoon, but the enemy began surrendering in large numbers and later in the afternoon we found very little to shoot at.

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by Victor P. Rizzo and George W. Kilmer

We had first encountered the enemy in the vicinity of St Leonard on August 16. We took off alternately to observe and fire on targets of opportunity. On our first flight we found four Panther tanks and laid on them. On another flight we found sixteen Panther tanks and fired on as many as we could without endangering our own forces. Meanwhile the tank battle raged on. Several enemy tanks were seen to go up in flames and the others were forced to withdraw.

Just before nightfall we observed two enemy artillery batteries firing on our positions. We stopped their fire. On the same flight an anti-aircraft battery was seen firing on our attacking planes. We stopped that too.

On the morning of August 17 at 0905 hours, we reported two huge columns of enemy vehicles approaching Chambois from the west. Our fire was delayed however as reports had Chambois and Trun held by Poles, and a "no fire" line was established. Several hours later we were able to bring fire on these columns. We started at Chambois, where enemy vehicles had congested the roads and had established motor parks. This artillery fire caused many vehicles to burn and destroyed others. In turn these vehicles formed road blocks and the accumulated vehicles were easy targets. These, in turn, caused congested areas westward. Again we traversed our artillery on these congested roads.

The huge columns of vehicles, bumper to bumper, seemed like ants and congested crossroads and junctions to such an extent that our fire had practically 100% effect wherever it hit.

Burning vehicles were everywhere. Exploding vehicles set fire to those nearby and by nightfall the entire network of roads were blocked at important points. The effect was wholly successful. About 800 to 1000 enemy vehicles were destroyed and stopped for the night.

Appendix

On August 18, our first flight disclosed about 2000 more vehicles using the same roads to Chambois. Despite the heavy mist and intervals of flak and small arms fire, we were able to observe all points. We brought artillery fire down on various prearranged points, causing the columns to jam to such an extent that they were forced to swing around burning and destroyed vehicles. Despite their mad dashes across country, our prearranged data caught many on the run. The entire gap was full of vehicles and fire was easily brought to any point needed. Much artillery fire was planned to actually meet the vehicles dashing toward a "zeroed" check point. We could almost see their consternation. We forced them to stop in orchards, hedges, and small wooded areas. We noted their positions and fired on them after moving vehicles were stopped. A tremendous amount of vehicles of all sorts and many horse-drawn units were thereby destroyed. A column of twenty-odd vehicles parked in St Eugene were sighted and destroyed.

On August 19, we flew over this tremendous graveyard and sighted many German soldiers on foot. Fire was brought down on them. Later we sighted a garrison of the enemy waving white sheets and clothing at Bon Monil. We dropped notes to the enemy directing them to the nearest unit. About 200 prisoners were accounted for in that manner. The others decided to make a run for it and again took to the roads in cleverly camouflaged vehicles. We dropped notes to nearby tanks and anti-tank units. They accounted for many vehicles. The remainder of the day was spent in firing on motor parks, individual vehicles, and enemy personnel.

Air Observation Posts played a tremendous part in his operation, due to the defilade of the terrain. This defilade cause ground observation to be delayed for almost two days.

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by William S. Jacobs, Jr.

Hq and Hq Btry, 915th FA Bn, arrived in the vicinity of Nonant Le Pin on 15 August. Registration upon arrival. Normal communications were established.

During the action of the days immediately preceding arrival in the position referred to above, only the most sketchy of communications nets had been established, but reports from liaison officers and forward observers soon after arrival at Nonant Le Pin soon indicated that a more complete wire installation would be required.

The following day, the battalion displaced to a forest in the close vicinity of La Couchere, and a forward switching central was immediately established near the CP of the 1st Battalion, 359th Infantry, located at Le Pin Au Harris. The liaison officers were tied into this switchboard.

The Falaise Gap

On the 18th of August, when the battalion was most heavily engaged in firing upon enemy personnel and materiel endeavoring to escape from the Chambois-Falaise Gap, the forward switchboard was displaced forward to the vicinity of Le Bourg St Leonard. Distance from the battalion command post and enemy artillery action made it almost impossible to maintain any kind of successful wire communications with forward elements, but by attaching an additional wire team from each firing battery of the battalion, the liaison officers, with the additional personnel and equipment, were able to maintain adequate communications.

The following day the battalion displaced to the vicinity of Le Pin Au Harris, and a forward switching central was re-established about two miles south of Chambois, where heavy fighting continued. Battalion OP lines had been installed, one near Le Bourg St Leonard and the other at the CP of the 359th Infantry north of the town.

The night of the 18th-19th was uneventful, a large amount of interdiction fire being maintained, but about 0730 on the morning of the 19th I was awakened by a call from the operator at the forward switching central, T/5 Amos L. Davis, who reported, "We are being attacked. Can you send us some help?"

I instructed Davis to splice the Liaison One and Two lines to the two lines to the rear switchboard and abandon the position until the situation had been cleared up, but I learned later that my instructions were not received, because of the excitement that prevailed at the time.

Then after instructing Lt Raymond J. Wright, the battalion observer at the Regimental CP, to dispatch a squad of infantry to the vicinity of the forward switchboard without delay, I set out with about 25 men on three trucks to endeavor to extricate the men and equipment. Lt Oliver W. Rodman, assistant battalion communications officer, accompanied me.

Reaching a point about one-half mile south of the forward switchboard, we were stopped by an officer of the 712th Tank Battalion, who informed us it was unsafe to proceed further. He was uninformed as to the situation in that vicinity at the time, and the only way Lt Rodman and I could discover if it were possible to proceed further was to attempt to. We did, together with the driver, Pvt Jay Grendahl, leaving the trucks behind. We found that a tank had taken up a position about 25 yards from the forward switchboard, and was engaging what appeared to be an SP gun emplaced across the field to the right. We were able to get to the forward switchboard by taking cover behind the tank and running across the road at that point. The exchange of fire at this time was not heavy. Here we encountered Cpl Earl R. Grise, a wire corporal, and PFC Frank J. Schraer, switchboard operator, who had managed, about five minutes before, to extricate themselves and their three-quarter ton truck.

We found the switchboard operator, Davis, still at his board, two wounded Germans lying in the same room, one of which he had shot himself, quite unaware of the skirmish that had taken place outside.

After sending for an empty wire truck, we made the required splices and removed the switchboard to the rear to the vicinity of the CP of 2nd Bn, 359th Infantry.

Appendix

Piecing the story together, we learned that at the time Davis had called for help, a column of German reconnaissance vehicles had approached down the main road, reaching the entrance to the switchboard position at precisely the same time that the truck under the direction of Cpl Grise was starting to leave. Both were quite surprised. An exchange of shots followed, in which four Germans were killed and one wounded. One of our linemen was wounded in the arm and was evacuated. Thirty-five prisoners were taken and removed to the rear, but not before two were shot and killed by T/5 Heinrich Gergs, a German-speaking lineman, when he heard them scheming to jump the guard, secure his weapon, and escape.

The remainder of the enemy, who could not be handily covered from the front of the column, left their vehicles and escaped into the woods. These were rounded up later by the infantry after making a half-hearted attack on the position.

The battalion depended a great deal on radio for fire control during this period, owing to the difficulty of maintaining satisfactory wire communications. The SCR 610 and 608's worked to perfection, but the operation of the net was complicated by an order, in the midst of the hottest part of the action, to change radio frequencies, a highly technical and time-consuming job. This was accomplished however, after two days and nights of constant work on the part of the radio technicians, without ever losing communications with the observers or liaison officers.

Technical Sergeant James W. Rose, Staff Sergeant Clifford W. Hand, and T/4 Edwin A. Erickson and Edward G. Ryan deserve special commendation for the accomplishment of this task. The requirement of changing frequencies at his particular time placed the battalion radio communications in an especially precarious position just when the observers and liaison officers needed faultless radio communications most.

The maintenance of communications for the remainder of the period of the firing on the Chambois-Falaise Gap was uneventful.

To Captain Jacobs's account should be added this postscript from another eye-witness to the Battle of the Forward Switchboard, telephone lineman Clarence Hollandsworth, who had already earned the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart just after Hill 122:

... from the best of my recollection I was with the forward switchboard at Falaise Gap, when the German tried to break out and we had one casualty that got shot with a burp gun. His name was John Henderson; he got two or three shots thru the leg and his testicles. Maybe this is one you didn't know about.

The Falaise Gap

Narrative of Action at *Le Bourg St Leonard - Chambois*
by Donald E. Thomson.

On August 16, the 915th FA Bn was in position south of Exmes. The 359th held a line from Le Bourg St Leonard to the east. At about 1400 on the 16th, Co A, which occupied Le Bourg St Leonard, was attacked by the enemy, who was in considerable strength. The attack came south down the road from Chambois and southwest through the Foret de Gouffern. Artillery fire in the woods and on the road, and TD's emplaced in the town aided materially in repulsing this attack.

During the evening of the 16th, the whole 1st Bn moved up to occupy Le Bourg St Leonard. The rest of the Regt was brought up to effect a turning movement from the east around to the north of town. Plans were being made to displace the 915th to a position south of Le Bourg St Leonard.

At 170630 the enemy fired a fairly heavy preparation with tanks on Le Bourg St Leonard and began an attack. During the morning a reconnaissance of the new position was made, but the battalion was too heavily engaged to move until 1030.

During the afternoon and early evening the action in Le Bourg St Leonard was hot and close. Numerous missions were fired into the Foret NW of town to stop the infiltration of enemy tanks. Our planes adjusted several missions on enemy tanks in groups of 2 to 5 north and west of town.

During the evening the 2nd and 3rd Bns completed their turning movement and reached the road north of St Leonard and the enemy withdrew through the forest.

On the 18th of August the 359th advanced slowly along the road toward Chambois and numerous missions were fired for the Air Observers on enemy columns.

At about 1730, Lt Kilmer, the Ln pilot, reported a huge enemy column moving to the east through Bon Menil and St Eugenie. Artillery fire was placed on the head of the column and then moved down the length of the column. The column was left halted and helpless on the road as a group of P47's came over to strafe and bomb the remnants of the column.

At the close of the day the woods and the town of Fougy had been cleared and some ground observation of the area had been obtained.

On the 19th of August many missions were fired on enemy and infantry groups by both air and ground observers. There were many conflicting no fire lines and alternately we were allowed to and then could not fire into Chambois because of reports of U.K. Troops there. During the day we refused to fire several times on columns reported by our Air Observers because they were in or north of Chambois.

Late in the afternoon the 915th displaced to a new position close to Le Bourg St Leonard. At 1800 the 2nd Bn 359th occupied Chambois and the gap was closed. The 915th FA Bn was in position to cover the entire east end of the pocket and our observers could see over the entire area.

Appendix

At 200700 the enemy made a mass attempt to break out between Chambois and St Leonard. Lt Raymond J. Wright was in position to see the whole attack and directed the fire which broke it. When he reported the target he said, There's a column of vehicles 10 vehicles wide and 600 yards long. They're coming across the open fields right through the middle of the 3rd Battalion. "

The 915th Bn fired 2 volleys per minute for ten minutes to break up this attack. The fire was lifted to cover the entire length of the column.

The remnants of the enemy who broke through in this push reached the vicinity of our forward switchboard. A brisk skirmish developed there and most of the enemy were captured.

The switchboard operator, T/5 Amos Davis, was left to operate the board and guard 3 prisoners while the rest of the crew went off to find more.

T/5 Frank Owens and Pvt Erich Gergs, of the forward switchboard wire crew, had captured several of the enemy including two young paratroopers. Owens was guarding the prisoners when Gergs, who speaks German fluently, overheard the two paratroopers planning to attack Owens, kill him, and escape. Gergs spun around and shot them both with his carbine.

At 191335, Captain Beck, Ln Officer with the 1st Bn, made the first adjustment on concentration 306, at coordinates 33.4-25.5. Throughout the 19th, 20th, and until about 210700 this concentration was fired approximately 20 times and was used as a reference point to fire on about a dozen other concentrations within a 1,000 yd radius. At times when fires were not massed on this point, it was interdicted by 1 or 2 guns. In all about 2,000 rounds were fired on and in the vicinity of this concentration during this period by the 915th alone.

At about noon on the 20th the enemy began to surrender in large numbers and the fire slacked off a bit. Lt Maurice Smith, Ln Officer with the 3rd [2nd ?] Bn, called for considerable fire north and just west of Chambois during the late afternoon and evening of the 20th. As a result of this fire a large number (1500?) of the enemy surrendered.

At 210315, Capt Lepine, 2nd Bn 359, through an Inf Co observer, adjusted on an enemy battery which had been firing from north of town. After a few volleys from us the enemy fire stopped and did not again occur.

Only 7 concentrations were fired on the 21st, the last one at 1350. The day was mostly spent in taking in and evacuating prisoners.

During the entire action from the 16th through the 21st, the 915th was estimated, by a count of all observers, to have destroyed 35 tanks, 9 SP guns, 400 trucks and vehicles, 30 artillery pieces, and AA guns. An accurate count was impossible. Besides this, a much greater amount of materiel was abandoned.

The Falaise Gap

During the 19th and 20th, our fire direction center was frequently firing as many as four missions at one time. At one time there were 6 missions going on for our battalion and two supporting battalions firing.

Throughout the entire period the Cannon Co, 359th was employed through our fire direction center, as is our custom, and delivered fire along with our own batteries.

During the period 16-21 August, inclusive, the 915th expended the following amount of ammunition:

7,367 - M48 - Shell HE, Quick
315 - M54 - Shell HE, Time
223 - Smoke - White Phosphorus
58 - Propaganda Shell
Total <u>7,963</u>

During the same period the Cannon Co fired the following:

426 - M48
906 - M54
9 - White Phosphorus
Total <u>1,341</u>

A45, (A46 blank)

PART V

Sergeants Major

The Sergeant Major of the 915th was a Very Important Person. He was usually the senior enlisted man in the whole outfit, and always the most prestigious. Although he had no direct command authority, he was understood to speak for the Battalion Commander. In particular, he was the overseer of the five First Sergeants, who occupied an equally important niche within their own batteries. He held meetings to inform them of battalion policy and smooth out inter-battery disputes. And he saw that they got their morning reports in on time. All this by charisma, terror, or sheer willpower.

Aside from that, a Sergeant Major had two other personas. First, he was a sort of executive secretary to the Battalion Commander and the Executive Officer, preparing official orders and correspondence. He oversaw the Message Center, which made official papers flow up, down, and sideways; and the Personnel Section, which did what the name suggests. Second, he was a sort of Aide to the Battalion Commander in the field, riding shotgun in the back seat of the Old Man's command car. The two jobs were not always compatible, and I have often wondered why both roles were expected of him, but they were firmly imbedded in tradition.

The first Sergeant Major of the 915th was Master Sergeant Jack Moir, who looked exactly like the sergeants shown in cartoons - thick-chested, red-faced, grizzle-haired, and scowling. He was one of the most forceful men I have met; he would finish a telephone conversation by mashing the telephone into the cradle with a violent full-arm sweep. He was wise, and careful, for although he had most of the Army Regulations memorized he always looked them up again just to make sure.

I was a 1st Lieutenant when I first knew him, and I often wondered if I shouldn't salute him first - an idea that would have puzzled him, for he was punctilious in matters of military courtesy and always spoke to officers with deep respect whether they deserved it or not.

I remember overhearing one occasion which must have shaken his resolve. He had gone to Captain Paul Pickel, then the S-4 (Supply Officer) for guidance as to how to word the paperwork on some matter. Pickel gave him an off-the-cuff answer which turned out to be wrong. "Sir," said Moir, "I got that document all typed up just the way the captain told me, and they sent it back to do over."

"That's too bad," said Pickel. "You should have checked it with someone else before you went to all that trouble."

Appendix

The Sergeant Major's complexion turned from fiery red to purple. "Sir, when the captain told me that was the proper way, I supposed - "

But , sergeant, I didn't tell you that was the proper way. I said **I thought** it was the proper way. You can see the difference, can't you?"

Mr. Sgt Moir shook his head slowly from side to side. "Yes, sir," he said.

Moir was a perfectionist. He overlooked nothing. "**Kennedy!**" he would roar, his face maroon, "look at this letter! You put a comma here, where it should have been a semicolon! Now type it again, and get it right this time!" He'd rip up the offending letter - and all four carbon copies - with a flourish. "How the hell can we expect to win a war with recruits like this?"

And T/5 Clyde Kennedy, a scrawny, freckled young man, would retype the letter without even allowing himself a sigh. He had been a new recruit undergoing basic training when "discovered" by Lt Thomson during a class on military courtesy. Kennedy, it seemed, had taken a year of ROTC at Wentworth Military Academy, and could have taught the class himself. When it also turned out that he had a high IQ and could type 60 words per minute, Lt Ronne, the Headquarters Battery Commander, decided that he didn't need basic training and sent him to Mr Sgt Moir to be Headquarters Clerk. Many men would have cracked under the pressure, but Kennedy hung on long enough to win Moir's approval - a rare honor.

I too was once so honored. One of my duties as S-2 was to station route markers - human road signs - along the route the battalion was to take to get to our destination when we went out to fire service practice or to practice maneuvers. I went on reconnaissance with Lt Col Pierce, the Battalion Commander, taking copious notes on every conceivable spot where some idiot might go the wrong way and get lost. If the movement was to be after dark, I made even more notes.

Then, just before the battalion started, I would take a truckload of soldiers out and station them at the appropriate spots. Another truck came at the end of the battalion column and picked up the route markers after the column had passed. Only once did anyone make a wrong turn, and that was when a battery commander thought he knew better than the route marker.

Once, while I was scrawling my notes, Mr. Sgt Moir, sharing the back seat of Col Pierce's command car during the reconnaissance, commented to the colonel that he had never seen a more thorough job of route marking than the 915th's.

Sergeants Major

I wouldn't have felt prouder if the Commanding General had said it.

The only things that made Sgt Moir angrier than someone's mistakes were his own rare ones. When he had made one, his repeated apologies soon became unbearable, even though it was obvious that he was trying to convince himself more than anyone.

Even old soldiers are often ambitious. Having watched a lot of lesser men depart for OCS to become 2nd lieutenants, Sgt Moir and his best friend, Mr Sgt Johnny Yarborough, both applied to be made Warrant Officers - an odd position midway between an enlisted man and a commissioned officer.

When Yarborough was selected and Moir was not, the latter was crushed, but only temporarily. He arose from his ashes and applied for a direct commission as an officer. This time he rang the bell, and was made instantly into a Captain of Military Police - many grades above WOJG Yarborough.

Just before he departed to become a Provost Marshal somewhere, Moir made sure *Tis* Kennedy was not lost in the shuffle. He got Kennedy made Message Center Chief, a Sergeant's job, and not long after he became Personnel Sergeant Major, with the rank of Technical Sergeant. Now and then the Army system rewards talent.

Master Sergeant James Schneider was Battalion Communications Chief, the principal enlisted assistant to the Communications Officer, who oversaw all radio and telephone operations. Schneider was a rough old soldier, more brawny than intellectual.

On our first Army Ground Forces Firing Test, a full-scale field operation for which we went all the way to Camp Bowie, Texas, we had some communications problems. Sgt Schneider was out desperately checking on wire lines, driving a truck with smoke pouring out from its underside, when Lt Col Pierce, the Battalion Commander, pulled him over.

"Sergeant, why don't you take off your emergency brake?" Schneider flushed and his jaw dropped. "Hell, sir, I haven't had time!"

Despite this incident - or perhaps because of it - Mr Sgt Schneider was tapped to replace Moir as Sergeant Major. He was the senior enlisted man in the Battalion, but somehow he could not be taken as seriously as was Jack Moir. However, he kept the First Sergeants cowed, and was in a fair way toward learning the intricacies of the paper work when he made a serious error in judgment.

Appendix

It was the evening of payday, and he was engaged in a high-rolling crap game. Payday gambling is an old army tradition: soldiers did not have very much money to lose, and being flat broke was not much of a threat when one considered the possibility of becoming rich.

Although gambling is not officially frowned upon by the Army, Non-coms' gambling with privates is, and a Standing Order of Headquarters Battery specifically prohibited it. Sgt Schneider may or may not have noticed the privates in the crap game circle but they were there, and he was caught cold, down on his prayer-bones trying to make his point of six.

Generally such an offense was taken care of by the Battery Commander, who could be expected to feel that anyone who wanted to gamble with privates should instantly become a private himself, so he could do it legally. However, busting a key member of the battalion staff was too delicate a matter to handle arbitrarily, so Mr Sgt James Schneider was tried by court martial and Pvt James Schneider was transferred from the battalion after serving his sentence.

* * * * *

About the same time as I became aware of Jack Moir, I also met the Battalion Operations Sergeant, Tech Sgt Wayne R. Gilliland.

Gilliland, then about 23, looked his age, but was already an old soldier by wartime standards. Let me give you a few of his credentials gleaned from his own letters:

On pages 1 and 2 you sketch the evolution of the FDC. I was privileged to catch a glimpse of that transition at Fort Sill in the latter half of 1940. I was assigned to the 1st FA there, and participated in several exercises as an enlisted battery computer using the tabular firing tables. Later we fashioned crude GFT's (slide rule type) and deflection fans based on FAS guidance. I remember that many of the more conservative, older officers were very reluctant to concede that an increasing number of soldiers could handle the mathematics of fire direction and the artillery survey. The 1st (still a regiment and freshly motorized) was "school troops" as were the 18th FA, which was still partially horse-drawn (one battalion, I believe), and the 80th(?), a motorized 155mm Schneider battalion. The 1st and 18th had modified French 75s.

Gilliland was blond, blue-eyed, and well-scrubbed. He was courteous without being obsequious, but had very definite opinions and spoke without embarrassment about things like patriotism and duties to *one's* country which sounded very like the dogma I had been brought up on: World War I style patriotism. Most of the soldiers I knew in World War II tended to hide such feelings, mumbling something like "Well, I suppose we have to stop Hitler, the S.O.B." or "Since I was drafted, let's get it over with." I found Wayne Gilliland's outspoken love of country refreshing.

Sergeants Major

When I was kicked upstairs from C Battery to become S-2 and Assistant S-3, I leaned rather heavily on Tech Sgt Gilliland's experience concerning matters such as how to make up a weekly training schedule for the battalion or to prepare a safety plan for service practice (to insure that we did not fire the howitzers outside the designated impact area) or the storage and issuance of maps or any of a dozen other esoteric matters for which working in a men's clothing store had not prepared me. He never disappointed me.

Then something happened to the Headquarters Battery First Sergeant - I don't remember whether he went to OCS or was busted for inefficiency - and Gilliland replaced him. At that time Hq Btry was generally considered to be a mess: too many men doing too many kinds of jobs under too many or too few supervisors, too many chiefs and not enough Indians, discipline unevenly enforced. The situation quavered on the brink of being out of hand. Being First Soldier in such an outfit was a challenge. Gilliland accepted it, worked with judgment and enthusiasm, and might have gotten the battery straightened out, had he stayed longer.

Then he was abruptly transferred to Service Battery to become 1st Sgt there - a job that he assures me was an even more insuperable job. Most of the personnel there had civilian-type jobs - mechanics, clerks, truck drivers, supply handlers. Consequently they tended to act like civilians too, and since they were doing work essential to the welfare of the battalion, there wasn't much a military disciplinarian could do about it.

Consequently, when Schneider fell from grace and Gilliland was tapped for the nominally more demanding tasks of Sergeant Major, he may even have felt a sense of relief. He filled the position well. He kept a lower profile than Moir's - there were fewer fireworks emanating from his desk - but he didn't take any guff from the battery First Sergeants, most of whom were older than he, and he was universally respected. He had picked up some administrative skills, partly from his brief tenures as First Sergeant and partly by osmosis while at battalion headquarters. And he was superbly qualified to perform the tactical duties of a Sergeant Major, being more at home in the field than behind a desk. Eventually he served four battalion commanders: Lt Col Pierce, Maj Hughes, Lt Col Costain, Lt Col Peach, and finally Lt Col Hughes (again).

Here are a few excerpts from Wayne Gilliland's letters about experiences as Sergeant Major in combat and my own responses.

Appendix

Gilliland:

If you write more, one of the first SNAFU's might be worth considering. You will remember that everyone was fully briefed aboard ship regarding the location of and routes to an assembly area beyond the beach and the inundated area. It was emphasized to vehicle commanders and drivers that their mission was to get to that area at any cost, disregarding any attempts to divert them. When we finally got the CO's command car towed out of the chest-deep water where it had stalled, we learned that the so-called assembly area was still in enemy hands. The next hours were spent racing about intercepting 915th vehicles and persuading everyone to ignore their original orders and proceed to a less contested place.

My Reply

Yes, I remember that we were to rendezvous at the village of Foucarville (mispronounced by the troops as might be expected) and that the Germans were still there when we landed. Major Hughes caught me just behind the beach, or I would have tried to go there. I wasn't with you and Costain until about dark, after you had gotten everyone on the right path and started visiting assorted CP's of the 4th and 90th Divisions.

Gilliland

I don't remember where we were located when we were blessed with a number of young and very frightened replacements. One dark night in still darker woods, I was half asleep under the one ton S-1 trailer when I heard one of the new men on sentry duty challenge someone. The someone, it developed, was the mess sergeant, who had worked late at his field kitchen and hadn't got the password. The sentry quavered, "I'm sorry, but my orders are to shoot anyone who doesn't give the password." I came out from under that trailer rather hastily, banging my head in the process, and shouting, "Don't shoot him, son, he feeds us!"

I don't remember that mess sergeant's name. He was a hard-working, well-intentioned soul but impossibly hard-headed - a characteristic that I steadfastly refused to attribute to his Polish derivation. That he either didn't realize or chose to forget that I had saved him from a 30 caliber wound was made very clear when sugar was in short supply and he positioned himself in the chow line to dispense the single spoonful of the sweetener allowed each soldier. We had oatmeal one morning, a food that the Army had been unable to screw up, it being already dry and light in weight. I liked oatmeal, even when contaminated with reconstituted milk, and sweetened coffee is to me, even today, an abomination [to me, too]. So I asked the sugar-scooping mess person to put my spoonful in the cereal, rather than the coffee. He refused, maintaining that each person got only one spoonful in the coffee. Words were exchanged, but I moved on in consideration of those following me in the chow line. Capt Jacobs, Headquarters Battery Commander, happened by just then and I suggested to him that his mess sergeant was again making an ass of himself. Jacobs had been a journalist in civilian life and could handle the language effectively. I don't know what three letter words he used to reason with Hard Head, but next morning I got sugar in my cereal. I got no response, however, to my cheery "Good Morning, Sgt."

Sergeants Major

My Comment

The mess sergeant whose life you saved, and who wouldn't let you have sugar in your oatmeal instead of your coffee, was Henry Zieleskiewicz (give or take a few consonants), generally called Hank for obvious reasons. He kind of took turns being mess sergeant with John, whose equally unpronounceable Greek name I have forgotten. They were both hard-headed and arrogant, and fought constantly. Sometime later we got another cook, one easier to get along with, who eventually became mess sergeant and made some sort of peace in the kitchen crew. I think John was transferred to a wire crew I recall seeing him with a pike-pole in his hand.

Gilliland's response

I believe the Hq Btry mess sergeant you credit with having organized the mess was a dynamic Scotsman named Ewing (perhaps Euing - I'm unsure of the spelling). Your description of Hank and John was on the mark.

Mr Sgt Gilliland would have remained Sergeant Major until after the war, had he not contracted yellow jaundice. I'm not sure whether he caught it from Maj Myers or vice versa, but Gilliland left for the hospital only a week or so after Myers failed to return from his pass to Paris. Bob Hughes was the Battalion Commander at the time, and he chose to bring Tech Sgt Clyde Kennedy forward from the Personnel Section to be Acting Sergeant Major, rather than choose one of the Battery First Sergeants or some other ranking NCO. We have already met Sgt Kennedy as Sgt Moir's clerk. I don't know why Hughes made that choice, but I suspect it was because Clyde Kennedy had impressed him when they were together on the advance party which preceded the 915th to England. Kennedy tells about the advance party in a letter to me dated November 14, 1995.

You might remember that a group of officers and enlisted men (Master Sgts and Techs) from all units of the 90th were selected to go to England on the *Queen Mary* and set up the camps for the Division. We debarked in the Firth of Clyde, traveled to Birmingham, and set up headquarters in the King Edward School. The 915th officers were Capt LaVerne Sumner, Lt LW. Smith, (I think the third was Lt Greak, but I am not certain). [Note: I am positive that Major Bob Hughes was there too.] The enlisted men were M/Sgt Loooper, Battalion Motor Supply; T/Sgt Downey, Battalion Supply, and myself.

Appendix

Those of us from the 915th were given the job of picking the exact site and drawing supplies, equipment, etc. to set up a camp on the grounds of Davenport Hall on the hill above the little village of Worfield. It was named Camp Davenport. The labor was provided by army personnel not from the 90th.

We went here and there around the country picking up loads of provisions so that when the 90th arrived we were set up with a tent city and some Nissen huts for offices.

I enjoyed my days with the Advance Party. We enlisted men were treated like civilians - could go out every night and expected to be back at a reasonable hour. I don't mean to imply that we were treated like officers, because officers always had an edge on the enlisted men. But we were so brainwashed that we didn't resent the discrimination at all.

I was the only Personnel Sergeant selected for the Advance Party. As I recall, I only had to use my personnel expertise once - the rest of the time I might as well have been a supply sergeant. When we were about half way across the Atlantic on the *Queen Mary*, an officer came to me and said, "Sergeant Kennedy, the men have gambled away all of their money. I want you to make out a \$5.00 partial payroll so that the men will have some money." I had been extremely seasick from the time I first went down to breakfast to eat kidney stew and a GI across the table from me vomited in his plate. But I asked where the office was that I was to use, and I staggered up to it and made out a partial payroll and each man was given \$5.00.

I have many non-military details of my experiences with the Advance Party recorded in letters to my parents that they saved. And they reveal that I had a ball.

Once in a while I would have to drive a Jeep for Lt Smith and received my first experience at driving on the left side of the road. He had a girl friend in a suburb of Birmingham called Smethwick, and after we left headquarters and before the Division arrived, he would have me drive him from Camp Davenport to see his girl friend. We would always leave in daylight. I would drop him off at his girl friend's house, go to a pub, and wait to pick him up at an appointed time. It would be dark then, and I had to get him back some fifteen miles in the blackout. I was able to memorize landmarks in the daylight and read their shadows at night. Undoubtedly I was smarter in those days, because I could never perform feats like that now.

Kennedy was a bit bewildered when he first arrived at the forward CP to become Sergeant Major, but he was a man of keen intelligence, and he soon mastered the required administrative work. The tactical part of the job took a bit longer Kennedy had had little field experience even on Stateside maneuvers - but he soon became a fixture in the back seat of Lt Col Hughes's command car. He told me later that during the pursuit across Germany [Chapter 18] he was a little disconcerted by Hughes's casual habit of proceeding along side roads not always previously passed over by friendly forces.

Sergeants Major

Now and then their little party would be the first Americans to enter a German village. Soon, however, he lost his nervousness and learned to enjoy the adventurous tours. Here is his recollection of a particularly momentous day:

May 6th found us well on our way across Czechoslovakia. All of us knew that the German Army would not survive much longer. Our immediate goal was to drive toward and capture Prague. It was generally believed that we could do this rather quickly because the German soldiers knew they would receive better treatment if they surrendered to the Americans. However, our high command issued orders to move slowly and let the Russians take more territory. General Patton was furious because he thought the Americans should continue to make rapid advances and prepare themselves to drive the Russians back if necessary.

During the morning of May 7th our Battalion of Field Artillery advanced into a new area. Without waiting for lunch, the Battalion Colonel [Hughes], a Major [Moore], the Jeep driver, and I went on reconnaissance in search of a new and better position. The country was wooded and hilly between patches of farmland, and the country roads over which we traveled were very rough. The Colonel studied his maps and gave instructions to continue forward. Coming over the crest of a hill, we could see a pretty red roofed village nestling in a little valley. We proceeded onward with extreme caution because our infantry had not been through that area. We stopped about half a mile outside the village and scanned the landscape intently with our binoculars. We saw Czech flags flying from all the buildings, which indicated that the German troops had all retreated.

Feeling fairly safe, we drove into town. I saw people opening the doors of their dwellings and peering out of windows, half afraid, watching and wondering if we were really Americans. We drove up and down the streets and around the outskirts of the village as the Colonel picked out positions for the 105mm Howitzers that would be brought up by the firing batteries.

Returning to the center of the village, we saw that the word was spreading - the people were rushing outside. Little boys and girls, big boys-and girls, men and women of all ages were rushing to the roadsides to wave and shout to us. We waved back and drove to another edge of the village where we stopped to make a last minute check of the positions before radioing to the Recon Party to bring the Batteries forward.

We had just finished sending the radio message when we were surrounded by happy handshaking people. A Czech flag was tied on our Jeep, into which were thrown hundreds of flowers. Some of the men, who had long hoarded their supply of spirits, handed us drinks in crystal glasses. They tried to talk to us, but we couldn't understand their words. However, we easily understood the radiant look of happiness on all of the faces.

Appendix

We positioned ourselves in our flower-decked Jeep and drove through the village again. A woman came running toward us from her home to throw a cake into our vehicle. Another tossed in a gigantic loaf of bread. Everyone wanted to do something to express their gratitude. A young lady that appeared to be about 18 years old ran up to us with a cup and pail of milk. We had been warned from the beginning to avoid drinking raw milk in Europe. And I had firmly avoided subjecting myself to possible milk-borne diseases. The girl handed a cup of milk to the Colonel and he drank it down. I said to myself, "They'll never get me to drink any raw milk!" And I remarked to the jeep driver, "This is where I draw the line!" But a cup of milk was poured and offered to me. I refused it. She offered it again and again, and I continued to say, "No. Nix," and every other negative word I could think of. She pleaded to no avail. But when this beautiful girl climbed into the Jeep, put her arm around my neck, and held the cup of milk to my lips - I drank like a famished baby.

Then we heard a message on our Jeep radio saying that the Battalion radio section had picked up a message that the war was over. We were interested but gave it little attention because we still had orders to advance and attack.

Knowing that the Battalion would soon be coming forward, I walked to the edge of town to give direction signals upon its arrival. A host of people came up to me and began showering me with flowers. I was embarrassed, but I didn't want to hurt their happy feelings. I carefully took the posies and put them in a nice heap where we could later place them in the Jeep. For some reason, they seemed to want to decorate my body with flowers, so I let them stick the flowers in my shirt, my trouser pockets, and anywhere else they could get them to stick. When the Battalion arrived I looked like a living walking florist shop and the razzing I got from the troops was heavy. But the Czechs seemed very pleased and happy.

Toward the middle of the afternoon of the 7th we received some almost official news about the impending surrender of the German army and we felt that the war was about to be over. Then we heard a radio broadcast from London with news that V-E Day was coming at last and that hostilities had ceased.

There was no whooping or yelling when we heard the news - but the word was quickly passed around that the news of the end of the war was not a rumor. Everyone was calm, very much relieved, and extremely thankful. When one of our Messengers reported in, we told him the good news, and he simply remarked, "Well, if this damned war is really over, I wish someone would tell those Heinies back up there in the woods to stop shooting at me when I pass through there!"

We all decided that we should do something special that night - that night of the 7th. Although we had been given orders to stop and hold our positions, we felt sure that we could relax. The Czechs knew where to get a couple of kegs of beer, and about seven o'clock that eventful evening we tapped the kegs. The beer wasn't good, but it was a catalyst that drew everyone together including many of the Czechs.

We thought we needed a little music, so a couple of GIs from one of the Batteries who played accordions came into the large room where we had congregated and began playing some of our favorite tunes.

Sergeants Major

In about an hour and a half the villagers were aware of a celebration and the girls began to arrive. A few brave souls asked the girls to dance, but all shyness vanished when a spry little old man over seventy years old grabbed a young lady and took a whirl around the floor. In a very few minutes a six piece Czech civilian band came in and set up in a corner of the room with the two accordion players, Nearly every tune the Czech band played was a polka. Boy, did we dance! I danced for the first time since I had been in England.

The Czech girls flocked into the building to dance with the GI's while the older Czech citizens crowded the walls and windows. The electric lights which we had rigged up beamed out through the windows - and for the first time since we left the States we had no black-out.

The language barrier kept us from conversing with our dancing partners and I found out that "one doesn't have to feed a girl a line to make a dance enjoyable." When we disbanded at four o'clock in the morning, everyone knew that our enjoyment was super-deluxe. This was further evidenced by the fact that the Czechs flocked back the following evening with an even larger polka orchestra and for seven nights straight we had a wonderful time. But the time came when we had to return to Germany to become part of the Army of Occupation. Before we departed, our Battalion had a Victory in Europe Day of Thanksgiving on a pretty hill overlooking the Czech village. The American flag and our Battalion standard waved in the breeze. We sang; the Chaplain gave a message; the Executive Officer made a talk; we prayed and thanked the Lord for our blessings as we remembered our comrades who had fallen in battle. There were tears in the eyes of more than one Czech as we headed back to the land of the grim-faced conquered people - back to the land of the buildings displaying white flags of surrender - and away from the happy friendly Czech people who were truly grateful for having been liberated.

Here is another episode that Clyde recounts from about that same time:

At the close of the war in Europe the 915th Field Artillery Battalion of the 90th Infantry Division was in Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovakia was a freedom loving nation and was enthusiastically celebrating being liberated from the domination of Germany. For over six years the Czechs had been under German rule, and during that period many thousands of patriotic Czech resistors had been murdered or shipped off to concentration camps or labor battalions.

Near the little town of Klitivy [κλατοvy?], two buddies and I were returning to our headquarters area in a Jeep when we noticed a man ahead of us slowly limping his way along the side of the road. As we approached, he courteously stepped back waiting for us to pass by. His clothes were worn and torn - he had no shoes and his feet were bound with bloody rags. His face evidenced much suffering by its deep lines and his hollow eyes that made him appear much older than his actual years. His legs, which we could see through his tattered trousers, were like blue bones that came from a starvation diet.

Appendix

We stopped to give him a lift in the Jeep. Terrified and distrustful, he backed away, but when we gently helped him into the Jeep he managed a weak smile.

Our Jeep driver, who could speak a little Czech, asked where he had come from and where he was going. He said that over five years ago he had been dragged out of his house in the middle of the night by the German Gestapo and sent to a slave labor camp in Eastern Germany. When the Russian army approached from the east, he had managed to escape from his captivity and had walked over a hundred miles toward his home. "Home," he said, "should only be about three kilometers away now." But he didn't know if he had any family left, because he had not been allowed to correspond with anyone. We decided to take him home.

As we drew near to his home, the look of almost frightened anticipation shown in his face. Not knowing whether his wife was living or dead, he was a picture of restless suspense.

We drove up near his home and helped him out of the Jeep. He staggered toward a woman who was hanging out some clothes to dry in the yard at the side of the house. "Anna!" he cried. "Anna! Anna!"

The woman turned and stared in disbelief. Who was this ugly crippled man who was shouting her name? And then came a piercing scream that rent the air - a screaming cry that I will remember forever. She ran quickly to embrace him. Her husband had come back from the dead.

We Americans stood in the background, too moved by the reunion to even talk.

We turned to leave. Sobbing almost uncontrollably, he said something to his wife. She came running toward us to shake our hands and then fell on the ground attempting to kiss our feet.

Through our interpreter she invited us into the house so that her husband could give us something. We protested, but only after we accepted the most valuable gift she could find did she go back with tears of happiness to her husband - the gift was a sack of hen eggs that we could not refuse.

As we drove away, we looked back to see the woman tenderly running her fingers over her husband's tired and worn face - and he knew for certain that he was free at last.

Tech Sgt Clyde Kennedy was Acting Sergeant Major for a few weeks, but he was never promoted to Master Sergeant or out-and-out given the job, possibly because Bob Hughes expected Gilliland back momentarily and wanted to keep the position open for him. In fact, he did return, but not until after V-E Day and our move to Schwandorf. I do not know how Kennedy felt about losing the job, but I believe he was happy to be rid of it, so he attained an even more important goal. Now that the war in Europe was over, he wanted to get to England, for he had left his heart in Wolverhampton, and Marie Arrowsmith, his fiancée, was waiting for him there. Somehow he contrived to get a furlough long enough for a wedding and brief honeymoon.

Sergeants Major

Sgt Gilliland didn't stay long in Schwandorf. He had plenty of "points" for return to the States, and he left us on 7 July. He was replaced as Sergeant Major by E.P. Van Buskirk (generally called Van by his buddies, though he prefers to be known as Pete). Van Buskirk also had an interesting military history. He started out as a clerk in the Personnel Section, where he did a good enough job to catch the eye of Captain Jacobs, Hq Btry Commander. When Jake needed a new supply sergeant, he tried Van Buskirk, who managed to handle the most complex supply room in the Battalion, issuing and keeping track of esoteric survey instruments, radios, and telephone equipment. The communications items were farmed out to a number of different users, and were particularly liable to loss by people working in blackout.

Van Buskirk did so well as supply sergeant that he was later kicked upstairs into the even more critical position of First Sergeant of Hq Btry, handling a mixed bag of non-commissioned prima donnas and a few privates. [You will remember that this was an ordeal Gilliland had faced before he became Sergeant Major.]

Sergeant Van Buskirk, a man of multiple gifts, seemed able to do well at any task given him, so he became the fifth and last of the 915th Sergeants Major, where he upheld his reputation.

People writing war memoirs, including myself, have a tendency to pay more attention to the activities of officers, particularly commanders. They sometimes forget that command decisions are of no value until they are put into effect, and that the people who put them into effect are the enlisted men who lay the wire, fire the cannons, drive the vehicles, cook the meals, fetch and distribute the necessities of life and war. All honor to them, and to their ranking representatives, the Sergeants Major.

PART VI

The Battle of Service Battery

Service Battery was a low-profile outfit which most of us didn't notice much, primarily because they did their job so well. If we had not gotten the beans and the bullets when we needed them, if the motor vehicles had not been kept in condition to move, then they would have been noticed! Anyhow, here are some notes on their finest hour in combat.

Comment of Wayne R. Gilliland

Another unusual happening that might be worth writing about: *The Battle of Service Battery*. I don't remember who was commanding the 915th then, but I was with him when the radio squawked something about Service Battery being under attack. We did an immediate left about and sped back to where Service Battery had very recently moved. We found that the battery was indeed under attack. A few Germans were peppering them with 20mm fire from a small wooded area nearby. Service was responding with what they had - several 50 caliber machine guns on vehicular ring mounts (hardly ideal for the situation). I believe it was "B" battery that was caused to pull a howitzer out of its pit and lob a few rounds into the woods - mixed HE and WP, to drive the bastards into and out of their holes at the same time. I don't remember who made the adjustment, but I do remember wishing I'd got the honor. Mighty Service battery survived the grand battle ready and willing to fight another day, if necessary. The "engagement" didn't make the news, but the 359th got wind of it and scolded us for not calling on them to settle with the attackers. Our infantry types were extremely protective of their cannon-cockers.

My comments

The Battle of Service Battery certainly deserves mention. I remember about it, but I thought it had happened somewhere between Reims and Gravelotte, shortly before or after the Division and Div Arty CP's were attacked. However the S-3 Journal places the event on March 25, the day after we crossed the Rhine. The battalion commander must have been Bob Hughes. According to my memory, this time in agreement with the S-3 Journal, Capt. I.W. Smith, Service Battery Commander, adjusted the artillery fire into the woods. Anyhow I'm sure it wasn't Lt Greak, the motor officer. He had a lot of mechanical talent and plenty of guts, but gunnery was not his strong point.

Appendix

From Earle Sumner, Battery B, comes another view of what was probably the same event:

The next day, we had moved up a ways, and they were bringing the infantry, and they were walking up the road. We were off to the side, and up on the hill there was a German Anti-Aircraft outfit that opened up on the infantry.

They all scattered. We turned one of our howitzers around and put about four or five shells of White Phosphorus up on the side of that hill. That stopped all the fire coming from up there. That White Phosphorus was really something. I got caught under it one time; I think I was with Lt Mendicino at the time, and there was a WP explosion and the wind drifted it back over us. We looked like we had the measles. Our jackets practically disintegrated in another day or so. In a couple of days they looked like they had been dropped in acid. We had to get new jackets. That stuff was pretty potent.

Another comment from me:

At Camp Barkeley early in 1943, the 90th Division had pretty well completed its training *cycle*, so in order to keep busy, we embarked on a grueling physical fitness program. Extended calisthenics periods were scheduled, confidence courses run and *re-run*, five mile and nine mile speed marches were *made*, with the goal of performing the former in one *hour*, the latter in two. Then there were twenty-five mile marches to be made in eight hours. All in all, everyone was kept tired and miserable.

I was lucky enough to be away on TDY every time a 25 mile hike was scheduled, but almost everyone else was in on one or more. Service Battery did substantially less fitness training than the other batteries, because most of their personnel was too busy to train - too busy getting food, supplies, and equipment for the rest of us, too busy maintaining the battalion's vehicles and taking care of all the other logistical details.

At the end of the fitness cycle, there was to be a test to see how much good the program had done. One unit from each battalion was selected at random to take the test: pull-ups, push-ups, squat jumps, timed marches - the works. I groaned when Service Battery, the one least trained, was picked to represent the 915th.

You know what? They were in top physical condition - not run down from over-exertion. And they had the will to win. They got the best score in the Division!

PART VII

Snapshots

Recollections of Francisco Martitegu

by Ross Novelli

Your man Martitegui - probably a Basque of Spain. He was in front of us in the back of a 2 1/2 ton GMC, standing, bare-chested, ranting and raving as we drove along. Klas and I following. Klas, smiling, told me to talk to him in Spanish. I stood up and screamed several times "*Callete*" (shut up). He ignored us and we always knew he was bucking for a Section 8.

by Earle Sumner

Martitegui was in Baker Battery for awhile. I remember one day he pushed up to the head of the chow line - bucking the line. Sgt Red Garrison came up to straighten him out. Martitegui hit him. Martitegui was a big strong Spaniard, but Garrison was a big strong rough Texan, and he purely creamed Martitegui. I heard he broke his jaw, but I don't know about that for sure. Anyhow Martitegui went to the hospital, and I never saw him after that.

A Recollection of Joseph Forand

by Ross Novelli

Private Forand in Military Courtesy crowded class - 2nd Lt Novelli conducting during basic training. Forand horsing around in back. Insignia of rank on board display with explanations. I asked Pvt Forand, "What is this rank?" pointing to 2nd Lt bars on the board. He squirmed. I prodded, holding my own bar, I asked "What rank am I?" No answer. I said, "I'm a second what?" His nearby buddies prompted him and he proudly proclaimed, "You're a second Sergeant, sir!" All laughed, including me.

Assorted Memories

by Harvey Meltzer, Co F, 359th Infantry

I admire your ability to remember all that you have remembered ... names of towns and rivers, etc. I was only 18 in March 1944 and after volunteering to speed up induction, I quickly was drafted in May, finished infantry basic training in September, went overseas with the 42nd Division in November, and reached the Bulge and the 90th on December 26, 1944. I remember many things that happened, but in several of them I don't remember all that happened. You are obviously older than I am, so maybe you remember more at age 24 than at age 18.

For instance, a few days after we heard of the Malmedy massacre, we had captured German prisoners, and I remember someone saying, "Let's shoot the bastards," but we never did. However I can't for the life of me remember how we captured them.

Another time we were in a small town or village and I entered a house, went up to the second floor, and looking out the window, I saw a cemetery and a German soldier crouched down behind a headstone. I aimed my M1 at him, but all of a sudden he jumped up and surrendered to another GI down below. There went my chance for a clean kill!

Appendix

How we got into the town and out again escapes my memory. Do you know why we only remember partial things?

A few of my recollections based on your book follow. You said, "I think it was the 26th Yankee Division" who we replaced in the Bulge. Well, it **was** the 26th. It was my first time in combat, and as we passed the bedraggled 26th, I thought to myself that I should have been with them because I was a "Yankee" from Massachusetts!

In Czechoslovakia my experience differs from yours. We were greeted with cheers and smiles and women throwing flowers at us. The only negative was that they were not the "enemy," and we went back to living in the barns and not in the houses!

After the war I did guard duty at a displaced person camp. The inmates were from the Ukraine, Latvia, and Lithuania, and it was pretty clear to all of us that they had come west with the Germans because they were Nazi sympathizers. They might have been escaping communism, but they all fought with the Germans. We loaded them on trucks at gunpoint when it came time to send them back to their homeland.

In your book you refer to the German artillery as nebelwerfers, but to us they had only one name screaming meemies! I had nightmares for years over those babies.

You wrote how the infantry also picked up souvenirs and we had plenty of cameras, pistols, and watches. The only problem was, as soon as we hit some resistance and had to crawl on our bellies, the ground was strewn with the discarded extra weight we could no longer afford.

My only contact with artillery was the time I spent at an unknown river with some forward observers, and I never heard our own artillery fired except for one instance. The night before we took Mainz, we could all hear the zooooom and whoooooosh of the shells overhead pouring into the city all night. Nice sound, when it is aimed at the other guy!

Again, thanks for the book, or as Bob Hope always wound up ... "Thanks for the Memories. "

From the memoirs of Raymond Bell, then Commanding the 359th Infantry Regiment.

When I first wrote Chapter 13 "Our Bloody Nose" I believed that Col Bell, CO of the 359th Inf, never crossed the Saar River in person. Apparently that was not true. The following is an excerpt from his (unpublished) memoirs, furnished by his son, Brigadier General Ray Bell Jr.

My men reached the trenches of the enemy and for the first time in the war there was some hand-to-hand combat. They had to be careful with their rifles because in some cases they were dropped in the slush and mud and became almost inoperable. **Every night I crossed the river and visited the Bn Hqs** to see if I could be of any help and at the same time test the morale. The leading elements had taken a few pill boxes and located some other positions which were embedded in the stone wall of a cemetery. The positions were well camouflaged and were difficult to discover. The Germans were very good in camouflage and we were very poor. At times I had to upbraid some units for being so careless. It was a false sense of security they had acquired because of our air superiority; they were prone to neglect camouflaging their positions.

Snapshots

One night I had with me a young Captain, who had been evacuated in Normandy and was returning for front line duty. We crossed to the east bank and as we did the Germans put in a concentration of mortars near our ferry site. The Captain panicked and I couldn't find him. The next morning he came to see me and he told me his story. He said he couldn't take it and the shelling had brought back memories of what had happened in Normandy when he lost almost a platoon of his men. I listened to his story and decided to send him to my Supply Section, instead of sending him to the rear in disgrace. My compassion paid off, because he made one of the finest supply officers I had during the war.

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PART VIII

The Account of Louis Larrey

From Letter dated November 15, 1996, Pearland, Texas

I was not a charter member of the 915th. I was commissioned in FA upon my graduation from Texas A&M in May 1942 and was sent to Ft Sill for the basic FA course. After four weeks, I was transferred against my will to the Ordnance branch. Many attempts to be returned to FA failed. I was assigned to the 90th as a 2nd Lt, Ordnance, in July 1942. Eventually, I went overseas to England with the Division as CO of the 790th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company. In August 1944, I was transferred to the Division G-3 section as a liaison officer under then Lt Col Richard W. Stilwell. In December 1944, I requested a transfer back to FA; Col Stilwell was kind enough to grant my request and I was assigned to the 915th when they were in the Saar Basin, overlooking Saarlouis. After a "quicky" refresher course with the firing batteries and the FDC, I was sent to a battalion of the 359th Infantry as a forward observer. At the time of this assignment, the FA Combat Liaison Officer with the Inf was Captain Richter. He was killed in Luxembourg a day or two later. He was replaced by Captain Wilbourn.

I continued serving as a FO until the abortive attempt of the Inf Bn to cross the Our River between Luxembourg and Germany. A few infantrymen and I were pinned down for six hours in the river by enemy machine gun fire from across the river; the remainder of the infantry pulled back over the hill. That evening we were evacuated with frozen hands and feet.

After a stay in a Paris hospital, I rejoined the 915th in time to cross the Rhine west of Mainz. At that time I was assigned as Combat Liaison Officer to the same battalion of the 359th. After passing through Mainz, the 359th Regt Combat Team was detached from the Division to follow and clean up after the 10th [4th, but who 's counting] Armored Division. We followed them as they proceeded in the general direction of Gotha-Erfurt-Eisenach until we reached a position opposite the northwest corner of Czechoslovakia, when we returned to 90th Division control. We then proceeded down the German-Czechoslovakian border.

Later on in this effort while I was looking for an observation point to support an effort by the infantry to cross the border into Czechoslovakia, I was shot and captured along with my sergeant and driver by German infantry. [2 May 1945, according to official records.]

About a month later I was liberated from a German hospital by a friendly cavalry reconnaissance outfit. I was evacuated from the ETO through the hospital chain to Brooks General in San Antonio. After several months in the hospital, I was assigned to Ft Bragg; upon arrival there, I was separated from the service and became a civilian once more

Appendix

Two more stories and I will quit. My transfer from Div HQ to the 915th was somewhat informal; I think the only formality was a telephone conversation between Lt Col Stilwell and Lt Col Hughes; apparently no paper was prepared.

On my first morning breakfast with the 915th, I was sitting opposite Lt Col Hughes; I was still wearing Ordnance collar insignia. [Ordnance insignia is a shiny globular bomb with a burning wick] After his first glance at me, he said forcefully, "Get that piss-pot off and get cross cannons on!" I took that as my formal transfer.

* * * * *

Larrey's following story should be compared with my account in Chapter 18 of the time we fired 180° out.

My next and only personal encounter with Lt Col Hughes was during the period of our support of the 10th Armored. In the vicinity of Bad Hersfeld, the infantry Bn were requested to clean out some Germans who were firing on supply convoys on the highway from a village on the east of the Werra River. From an observation post in the second floor of a house on the west side of the river, I requested artillery fire on the coordinates of a prominent crossroads in the village opposite. After several consecutive reports of sensing rounds "on the way," I was unable to detect any sensing rounds arriving; after confirmation of the original coordinates, I requested additional sensing rounds. Still no rounds!

I was getting very nervous when a jeep containing Lt Col Hughes roared to a halt on the road outside my OP. His irritation was clearly visible. This did not relieve my nervousness.

Simultaneously with his arrival, the FDC reported to me that the firing battery had introduced a 180 degree error in laying the guns. Their rationale soon became apparent. The 10th Armored, the front, and the position of the battery were all northeast of where I had requested fire. Their reaction to this was obviously wrong and their "correction" would compensate for the error made by this dumb CLO. Actually, my target was on the battery's right flank and rear.

Needless to say, my relief on the discovery of this and my ability to explain the foul-up to Lt Col Hughes was great.

I'm sure that it was, Louis! And while we're on the subject of being fired at and returning fire across the Werra River, let's read an account from Sergeant Major Gilliland:

The incident of the backward shooting battery reminded me of a similar situation that was solved much differently, or perhaps it was the same event seen from a different perspective. We were burning up the roads with the 4th Armored Div. I was in the CO's jeep in the command group behind the lead tank battalion. The east-west road paralleled a river on the right (south) and there was a village on the slope rising from the south side of the river. Letting the leading elements pass, Germans fired on the command group from the south. The column halted, and everyone made for low places.

Account of Louis Larrey

I think: it was "C" battery that was on the road behind us and got in on the action. The No. 1 piece was raced forward, doubling the stalled column, with orders to be prepared to lay direct fire into the village. The gun crew put on a good show. In true light artillery fashion, the piece was rapidly unlimbered, manhandled into the bar ditch, and put to slamming HE rounds into the village as the section chief sighted down the tube.

The enemy fire ceased, the gun section withdrew, and the column moved on. Afterward, I heard that the German dry-gulchers had not been in the unfortunate town, but were dug in between the highway and the river. I guess that 105 blazing away over their heads (charge 7, of course) influenced them to change tactics. The cannoneers obviously enjoyed observing the effects of their efforts - a rather rare treat for them.

PART IX

The Sumner Saga
by Earle F. Sumner, Battery B

CHAPTER ONE – STATESIDE

Going back to the time I came in the Army, let me tell you a little bit about myself. There had been somebody in my family in every war in the United States since the Revolution: War of 1812, Spanish-American War, World War I, and myself in World War II.

I didn't go to college because my Dad had been in the lumber business, but during the Depression his business had folded, so I really didn't have the money to go to college. I did have an aunt and uncle who would have sent me to college if I'd wanted to go. But I didn't want to go.

There was a boy who lived across the street from me. We grew up together. He was an Italian boy, Carmine Dintino. We both went to work in machine shops. He went to one shop and I was in another.

When the war started, we went in the Service. We tried to get in the Air Corps, but we couldn't make it because of our eyes. Carm's cousin Bob made it. He was a P47 pilot later on.

When we went in, we went into Ft Devens, Mass. We were interviewed there, and took all the tests and so forth. After we took all our exams, there was a full colonel called me out and wanted to know if I would go to OCS. I said, "No, I don't think so, why?"

He said, "Well, in two exams, you got 111 on one and 128 on the other. We'd like to have you as an officer. "

And I said, "No, I don't want to be an officer." I've always been that way, I guess, in my whole life. I was the same with the Telephone Company. I had quite a few offers to go up into higher management, and I just didn't want the job. I guess that's just my nature. I'd rather kind of take it easy and try to have a little fun out of life.

After I said I didn't want to go to OCS, I said I wanted the Air Corps, but they had no openings, so they assigned us to Ordnance. From Ft Devens we went to Chicago, and from there to St Louis, then to Kansas City, and finally ended up in Abilene, at Barkeley.

For all the good our tests and ratings had done, we got off the trucks and lined up by fours, and I was a three and Carm was a four, and I went to artillery and he went to infantry, the 357th. That's all the ratings amounted to, and the tests. Anyway, we were in basic training there, and there were two fellows - Henry Sleeper was one of them - from Vermont. We were in the 343rd Guard and Training Detachment. The other fellows in the 90th were all on maneuvers in Louisiana. There was three guys from Maine. There was Alexander Gillis, - who you probably knew, he went to Hq - and Wallace Knox and Carleton Bailey.

Appendix

We used to get out in the morning at 5 o'clock in the dark and stand out there in the cold while somebody read off the roster and called our name out, and we said "here." They were reading it by flashlight because it was so dark you couldn't see anything out there. So I said to Bailey one day, "You know, it's stupid to go out and stand in the cold for half an hour. Your name begins with B and mine with S, so when they call Bailey, you say 'here.' When they call Sumner, you say 'here.' I'll stay in and sleep. Then the next day, you stay in and sleep, and I'll call 'here' for the both of us.

It worked pretty good. We did that for about a week and a half, until finally, I think it was Sgt Herman Standiford got onto us. He'd gotten acquainted with us well enough to recognize voices. He was walking around behind Bailey and Bailey said "here" for Sumner, and he knew it wasn't Sumner. So he came in the barracks, and the next thing I knew, I was down on the floor with the bunk on top of me. So we had to dig a couple of extra ditches that day, but that was about all. We had a pretty good time there for a week and a half.

I got even with Standiford for dumping me on the bunk. One day a little while later when we were cleaning up and policing the area, Standiford sent Knox over to the PX for a couple of cigars. When Wally came back, Standiford had gone to the orderly room or somewhere, so he put the cigars on Herman's bunk. It just happened that I had a couple of exploding devices for cigars. So I went in and took one of the cigars, put the exploding device in, pushed it down about half-way with a toothpick, and folded the cellophane back on the cigar again. I went back out to doing police duty in the street, cleaning and so forth, and Herman went in and got a cigar and came back out. I was just waiting anxiously for that thing to go off, but evidently he took the one that didn't have the explosive in it.

Anyhow, at night he used to like to come into the barracks and tell us what Army life was going to be like, and so forth. We used to say he had his stripes tattooed on his arm. He really didn't, though. Anyway, he was sitting there this night with his hands behind his head, and he had his hat on, and he lit this cigar. He was puffing away and talking to us, when all of a sudden that cigar exploded.

It was just like a Laurel and Hardy movie. It was the funniest thing, because when that thing blew up, it spread at the end with a bang, and Herman just sat there for about five seconds, numb. Then he jumped off his bunk, and he ran down and grabbed Wally, picked him up off his bunk, and started to shake him, yelling at him. Wally said, "I didn't do it, Sarge! I didn't do it!"

Then Herman realized that Wally wasn't the kind of guy to do something like that. So he came stomping up the barracks saying, "I want the man who did that to admit it, right now! Because I'll find out who it was, and I'll make your life miserable."

The Sumner Saga

Well, I knew better than that. I knew better than to admit to anything like that! So I never said a word about it. Two years later, when we were at Metz. France, one afternoon we were around a fire, a damp cold day. Of course I was a sergeant by that time. Standiford lit a cigar, so I looked up at him, and said, "Be careful. Herman, it might explode."

He said, "You S.O.B., I always had you figured for the guy that did it, but I never could find out for sure."

I told him, "Nobody knew but me!"

I guess I was always pulling something. I remember that I didn't like to be a cannoneer. I'd rather be a truck driver, and that's what I finally ended up as for awhile, was a truck driver. But we were out one day doing Cannoneer's Hop, in the Motor Pool, which is about as dumb a thing as I've ever had to do, and Standiford said. "Well," he said, "when I tell you something is so, you say, 'Yes, Sergeant, that's it.' If I tell you this white building in the Motor Pool *is* black, you say, 'Yes, Sergeant, it's black.'"

I said, "It looks white to me."

"All right, Sumner, do you see that other building down there on the other side of the Motor Pool?"

I said yes, and he said, "Well, see how fast you can run down there and back."

I ran down there and came back, and he said, "Now, what color is this darn building?"

I said, "White."

He said, "Down there again." So down and back I went again. About the third time I did it, when I came back he asked again, "What color *is* that building?"

I said, "Gray."

Everybody broke up then, and even Herman had to break up a little bit on that one. Anyway, he was a pretty good boy, and we had some good times afterward. I went back to Verdun with him later, on pass, and we had a good time.

We went to the desert. I had been driving the gun truck for the third section. Ben Walters was the regular driver, but I think Ben had got in some trouble. Maybe from the time Sgt Hester was cold-cocked - hit over the head with something - and they found him at two o'clock in the morning, and tried to blame Ben for it.

Ben had come in late that night, and about midnight he came and sat down on a bunk and bummed a cigarette from me. So when they found out that Ben had an MP report for being in town beyond his pass, they thought maybe he was the one who hit Sgt Hester. I alibied him, because I knew he hadn't been out there; he was with me at the time. They never did find out who *it* was. Of course some of us fellows *did*, we later found out who *it* was: it was another sergeant that did *it*. I guess *it* had to do with a woman and so forth. Anyway, I won't say any more about that fiasco now.

Appendix

When we got to the desert, I was driving the command car for the Exec, who was Mendicino, and in between times I'd be driving some of the RO officers. I remember one day, I had Lt Volker. He was a pretty good guy, and he had to go to Hq, and be there at a certain time - say two o'clock in the afternoon - and at one o'clock we didn't know where the place was. I had the old command car, and I stopped a lineman, someone laying a wire there, and I asked him where Hq was. He said, "Oh, it's about six or seven miles around the mountain there."

Volker said, "Oh boy, we'll never get there on time! I should be there for this meeting."

The lineman said, "If you could go across the mountain, it's only about half a mile or so."

So I said to Volker, "You want to try it?" He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Let's try going over the mountain."

"Do you think you can?"

"I don't know. You've got these lava beds that are flat; they run up a little way, and then you've got a gully; you can get down across that to the next one," I said. "You can run up through."

So I headed for this saddle-like that was up there off to one side of the peak. We got up there; didn't have too much trouble getting up, though the ground was pretty rough at times. Then we started down the other side, and there was a place - oh, about eight or ten feet wide maybe - and on the right-hand side Lt Volker said it dropped off probably two or three hundred feet or more. It was pretty steep going down this pathway, too. I had it in second gear, and I started down. When I hit the brake, I had no brakes at all! I'd evidently torn a brake line out. I had no hydraulic brakes, and the emergency brake hadn't worked for a month.

So we went down the mountain pretty fast. When we got to the bottom, Lt Volker was white as a sheet and hanging on for dear life. He said, "You didn't have to come down **that** fast, did you?" I said, "Yes, sir, I did. I don't have any brakes." And then I thought he was really going to pass out on me.

We drove up to where we were supposed to be, and Lt Healy was there: I think he was Motor Officer. He was standing in the road there, and of course I had no brakes, so I dropped it down into low gear and shut off the switch, and the command car kind of jogged right up there and bumped against his leg.

He said, "What are you, a wise guy or something?"

I said, "No sir. I just don't have any brakes." Well, his face turned a shade whiter, too. I guess that was why they didn't like to ride with me. I scared them off. Capt Wilson once asked me, "What are you trying to do, scare all my lieutenants?"

The Sumner Saga

There was another funny incident on the desert there. One Saturday afternoon I was underneath the command car, greasing it, cleaning and greasing, and Capt Wilson had a meeting with the officers and Sgt Hester. They were handing out ratings to different fellows, and Wilson said, "I've got one PFC rating left."

Mendicino said, "Sumner rates a PFC, driving for me."

And Bob Wilson said, "Ah, he's a poor soldier. I don't want to give him any rating."

Well, that made me mad. That weekend I had a pass to go to town, to San Bernardino, with Mayo Aube and a fellow named Gniot, from Chicago. Gniot is in that book, in the picture where they're firing the guns, the German guns.

The three of us got to San Bernardino and got off the trucks, and I said, "Heck, there's no sense in being in San Bernardino. Let's go to Hollywood." So we took a bus to Hollywood, and got out there and went to the Hollywood Canteen. We had coffee and doughnuts and saw Simone Simone and a few other movie stars there.

When we got back to Los Angeles, to the bus depot, we were trying to get a bus back to San Bernardino. They had a big iron fence there, with a gate. They'd let so many people through the gate, then they'd close it. Gniot and Aube got through the gate, but they closed it on me. I said, "Hey, I've got to get in there with those guys."

The fellow on the gate said, "Too bad."

I hollered at Aube, "Hold the bus!" Then I ran down the side of the fence - it was about an eight to ten foot iron fence - and I started climbing over it. The bus driver was going to pull out, but Aube grabbed the keys out of the ignition so he couldn't drive the bus. He was running from the front door of the bus to the back door and back again, with the driver trying to catch him.

Well, I got over and got on the bus, so we started back. We were late as it was in getting back, and the bus broke down at one point, but they finally got it going again. When we got back to San Bernardino, all the trucks had gone back to camp, Camp Granite Mountain, out in the desert.

We didn't know what we were going to do, so we started walking up the street, and I guess we stopped in a place and had a beer. We came out, and as we were going along, we saw a truck with 90th Division on it!

I said, "Well, it must be going back to the desert sometime; let's get in."

Nobody around it, so we climbed in the back. Laid down. I guess I was dozing off, when all of a sudden somebody hit the bottom of my feet with a stick, and it stung.

Well, I never even looked. I just came out of the back of that truck and grabbed whoever it was that did it. It was a lieutenant in the MP's. There were two MP's who must have been six feet six and weighed three hundred pounds. They kind of picked me right up off my feet.

I said, "Sorry, sir. I didn't realize you were a lieutenant."

They checked our passes and of course we were overdue. So they said, "You guys are under arrest. You're going back. We'll take you back to camp, but you'll get a report on it."

Appendix

We said, "OK." Anyway we got back to camp. I think I got there just about in time to fall into line at reveille and say, "Here."

That was kind of a rough day. That afternoon Lt - **Capt** Wilson, I guess he'd made Captain then - called each one of us into the orderly room. I'd told the fellows, "We've got to have the same story, now, so be sure you stick to the same story, that the bus broke down." Which it really did. That wasn't the cause of our being late, but we used it as an excuse.

He called in Aube, then he called in Gniot, and I was the last one. I gave him the story, and he said, "Well, I don't know whether to believe you guys or not, but you've all got the same story, so I'm going to have to let each one of you go. But you were late, and you've got a report, so we'll have you digging a couple of garbage pits."

Which was a very small thing for it, and we had a good time, anyway.

One day we were digging a sump pit for the kitchen. It was a big hole, probably eight or ten feet deep. We had a ladder going down into it. They were bringing rocks from the mountains, and they'd fill up the hole and then they'd dump all their water and stuff into this hole.

Digging the hole involved the whole Battery, I guess. It was a hot day, and Sgt Gault was in charge of it - Staff Sergeant. Nobody liked Gault too well - he was one of the old-timers - so when Fitzpatrick and I came up out of the hole, up the ladder, I said to Fitz, "Let's get out of here."

So we slipped around the back of a tent and went to the next street and bummed a ride on a supply truck going down the road. We went down to the PX. We got down there, and were waiting in line, where you could get two beers, I think it was. 3.2 beer. It was all we could get. Lt Volker was there, and he saw us standing in the line. He said, "You fellows want a drink?"

We said, "Yes, but we can't get through the line. It's too long."

He said, "Give me some money, and **I'll** go around to the officers' side and get it for you."

So he went around and got us, I think, four or six cans of beer. We were sitting in the shade there; we'd been there about three quarters of an hour or more, and here comes Sgt Gault, with one can of beer.

He said, "How did you fellows get down here and get all that beer?"

"Well," we said, "We had a little extra luck today. A little magic." He didn't say too much, because he wasn't supposed to be there either, so we got by with that.

I had one job on the desert there that I didn't like, and also on the train going back to Ft Dix. I got picked as a prisoner chaser a good share of the time, because I was familiar with the A5's, having had one of my own at home, and being on the pistol team and rifle teams at home, shooting with the State Police. I could handle a gun pretty well.

The Sumner Saga

Chasing prisoners wasn't a very good job, because the prisoners were hauling coal, and I had to walk along behind them, and it was just as hard for me as it was for them.

Well, not quite; I didn't have to carry the coal.

The Sumner Saga

CHAPTER TWO - FRANCE

I have contacted some of the other fellows: Loren Fred just the other day, and I called Red Garrison, but I got his wife, who told me Red is in a nursing home, and not expected to live more than a couple of months more. I just thought you'd like to know that. I've also talked to Bill Pike down in Midland, Texas; Bill Dick in Lady Lake, Florida; and Bob Fitzpatrick down in Florida. I've not been able to get hold of Bonaquisti. I talked to Capt Bill Beck, and he's doing pretty well. Loren Fred was having a few problems: his wife isn't very well, and they aren't doing anything to speak of. I just thought I'd let you know.

I've also talked to Rudy Felice, out in Utah, and he's fine. He went to the reunion this year. I guess he'd like to go next year, but he said he had other things going on at the same time, so he didn't know whether he'd be able to or not. Call from other fellows, like Bill Pike - Quinten O. Pike, really, but we called him Bill. He was Capt Wilson's driver, one of my radio men. I also talked with Srstka. We all agree that Baker Battery landed the 6th and 7th.

One morning before the landing, I remember sitting on a hatch cover on the Liberty Ship eating breakfast - that cereal stuff in the 10-in-1 Ration that you just add hot water to - when there was a terrible explosion as a nearby ship hit a floating mine. I jumped, and my breakfast spilled all over the deck.

I was standing there, disgusted and hungry, when a member of the ship's crew came by and asked, "What's the matter, soldier?" I told him I had just lost my breakfast, and he said, "Come along with me, and I'll fix you up with some breakfast. I'm a cook." Naturally, I went with him and got the best breakfast I had ever gotten on a ship.

Well, Pike went off the evening of the 6th, driving Capt Wilson, and I was supposed to go at that time, but it got too dark, and they held us back, so we didn't go off until D+ 1, early in the morning. I don't know what time exactly - it was after daylight, probably around 5:30 or 6 o'clock in the morning.

I was driving for Lt Vince Mendicino, B Battery Exec. Our command car was the first vehicle off the ramp of the landing craft, and the engine died. Lt Mendicino sat up on the back of the rear seat, put his feet on the back of the front seat, and said, "Pretty cold out there?" I was up to my neck in cold salt water, but I managed to move the car ahead by using the starter until we were almost on the beach. Then a tank dozer happened along and threw us a line. Glen Smith, who was with us, climbed out onto the hood of the jeep and hooked the line onto our front bumper. As soon as we got on dry land, Glen opened the hood and found that the coil was wet. Glen was a car mechanic as a civilian, and he managed to dry it out, and then I coaxed the motor into starting.

Appendix

There's one other thing I remember. In driving in - going up over the sand dunes - there was a German soldier with a leg blown off lying across the left-hand track of the road. I started to go around him, then Mendicino yelled at me that the sides had not been cleared of mines. "Go over the fellow: he's dead, won't hurt him anyway." But it gave me a kind of funny feeling, being so green in combat anyway, to drive over somebody like that.

We went in, and I remember going through Ste. Mere Eglise; there were some buildings still burning there from the night before.

After B Battery got into firing position, we started hearing noises and stirring around in the field in front of us, on the other side of a hedgerow. Something was out there! We were new in combat, and everybody was scared and nervous.

Lt Mendicino told me, "Take two men with you and go see what's in that field." "I'm only a PFC," I said. "You should send a sergeant."

"Go!" he said.

So three of us, Glen Smith, another private, and I went forward to the hedgerow, keeping our heads down. When we got to the embankment, I told Glen, "Look over the top and see what's there. "

He said "Go to hell! **You** look, if you want to know that bad."

So I crawled up the bank and peeked between the bushes. There was a cow, eating the grass and minding her own business.

On the way back to the battery, we heard someone yell "Fire Mission!" and we moved off to the side to get out from in front of the guns before they fired.

A good thing we did, too. **That** was the time that the First Section howitzer got the muzzle burst that wounded Philip Yazzie, also the gunner, Carl Ford, and I think one other guy. Sgt Red Garrison, the Chief of Section, was saved by the stock of his carbine, which was hit by a shell fragment and shattered. Part of the stock hit him in the belly. He wasn't actually wounded, but later he had to have a hernia operation.

We had a medic, an aid man, with the battery, but he didn't have any supplies - only his personal first aid kit and those on the wounded men - so Lt Mendicino told me to go find some.

"Where do I look?" I asked him.

"How should I know? Just keep looking until you find some stuff for our aid man. And hurry!"

So I drove around and finally found a tent with a red cross on it that turned out to be the aid station for a battalion of the 101st Airborne Division. The medical officer, a major, didn't want to give me anything - "I can't outfit every aid man in the area" - but he finally let me have some medical supplies, and I brought them back so our aid man could bandage up the wounded men.

The Sumner Saga

I remember Philip Yazzie well. He used to laugh at me because I couldn't do but about half as many push-ups as he could: but he could do more than anyone in the Battery. He kept people from getting lost, too. Many times I'd start out the way I thought was right, and he would stop me and point another way. He always turned out to be right.

That night we got set up. I think it was kind of foolish now, but in those days we used to have the radios set away from the guns. We were afraid the Germans would use direction finders, I guess. So most of the time I was stuck out fifty to a hundred yards or so from the gun battery, all by myself, except that Sgt Harmon, who was the radio sergeant, was there some of the time. Harmon did most of the radio work for a while, when he was there. Harmon wasn't the bravest soldier I ever saw. He went back to the rear - I think it was hemorrhoids or something. He never showed up again until we were in Schwandorf after the war was over with. He stayed with us until the latter part of July.

I remember one night - I guess it was the first or second night on the beach that we had a gas alarm. The funny part about it was that a German bomber, what we used to call Bed check Charley, went over and dropped a couple of bombs. The smell of their powder was different from ours, and along the beaches there was a lot of fog, so I guess somebody thought that was gas. I remember two fellows put their gas capes over them instead of putting on their gas masks! Wouldn't have done them much good if it had been gas.

I had been a day and a half without much sleep then. I was sitting in the command car with the radio on. When the gas alarm came we put on our gas masks, and when a little while later they gave us an All Clear, so I cleared my mask out, took it off. I was sitting there, and I guess I fell asleep. Some time later, I'm not sure just when, Lt Mendicino started shaking me and hollering, "Sumner!" at me.

I looked at him and said, "What's the matter?" and saw he had his gas mask on.

"Didn't you hear the gas alarm?"

I said, "Yes, I heard the gas alarm. Then we got the All Clear, so I took the mask off."

"Oh," he said, "we got another alarm after that."

I said, "Well, I must have fell asleep."

"Well, there can't have been any gas or you'd be dead."

So he took his mask off. That was about the last time we ever used the gas masks.

I remember the first time we got shelled. Everybody was in a panic, naturally. A boy by the name of Sisk got hurt. He got a piece of shrapnel in his leg and groin. Why he ran over to where I was, I don't know, but he did. Ben Walters was with me. Sisk said, "Don't let them hit me," and he was on the ground, so Walters and I kind of laid over him a little bit and tried to get his pants cut off him, so we could see how badly he was hit.

Appendix

We hollered for the medic - his name was Pullen - and he didn't get up there very fast. Capt Wilson came over, pretty excited. Sgt Hester, the First Sergeant, came over, and it's a wonder he didn't choke Sisk to death, because he took the sufanilimide pills we had in our belt kit and stuffed six of them in his mouth at once. The kid couldn't hardly swallow them. We finally got the medic there, and he went off. We got him taken back to Battalion.

I remember Sgt Standiford said that was the time he really got full, because nobody was around the chow truck, so he got up and helped himself. Had plenty to eat that day!

A few days later Mendicino took Sgt Harmon, Cpl Harry Allan, and myself, and we went forward as forward observers. We had quite a day the first one up there. That day I stayed back near the forward switchboard with the jeep and the radio. Harmon went along up there with Mendicino and Allan. Sometime during the afternoon the wire got blown out, so I started up the line to fix it. I had two infantrymen who were supposed to be with me, kind of watching out. We went past a by-way that went into a field there in the hedgerows and I had no more than gone by when a machine gun opened up at us from the other side of the field.

Well, the two riflemen took off. I hit the ditch. I started to crawl up the ditch, but there was another by-way and I couldn't get by it. I couldn't stand up: the hedgerow wasn't very high right there. Every time I'd try to get up and move around, the machine gun would kind of trim the bushes over my head. So I laid there, and I'll admit that I was pretty scared. But I crawled around, and I finally found where the wire was broken. So I spliced it, and I tapped in with my EE 8 phone and Mendicino answered. He said, "Where are you?"

I said, "Do you hear that machine gun firing, down in back of you?" He said yes. I said, "Well, he's shooting at me."

Somebody at the switchboard had also heard the conversation, and so a squad of infantry came up. I think there was a captain with them. It was nobody I knew. They got rid of the machine gun nest: they cleaned that out. Then they went along on up.

I started back, and as I was walking along the side of the road in the ditch, I looked up and there was General Devine. A short roly-poly man, he had on riding breeches and boots, carried a swagger stick, and had a lieutenant right behind him with a machine gun. The lieutenant looked scared - probably as scared as I was. The general looked down at me at me and said, "That's right, Sonny, keep down. It's pretty hot up here."

I said, "By God, General, if you can walk up, I can sure as hell walk back down." He kind of laughed, and I walked back down the road. I thought, "If he can do it, so can I."

The Sumner Saga

That was my first day as a forward observer. I went up a few more times like that; I went with other people.

I don't know if you remember Sgt Wynn. He got a battlefield commission as second lieutenant a little later on that year. I was up with him a few times. I think I went up with Capt Beck - Lt Beck at that time - once, but I don't remember now whether I did or not. There were so many officers I went up with, but I can't remember who they were.

We had moved over toward Valognes to try to cut off the road to Cherbourg. I remember two funny incidents. One was that one afternoon Mayo Aube, who was one of the cannoneers, considered a little bit quiet by the others, asked permission to go over to a church on the edge of this town.

The church had been partially blown away: the wall and the ceiling were gone at one end. He wanted to go over there, so he asked if I'd go with him. I said yes, so we walked over - oh, maybe a hundred and fifty yards from the guns. He went up front and knelt down, and I sat down on a pew in the back of the church. We hadn't been there more than three or four minutes before a sniper took a shot at him, right up by the altar. We both took off out of there. He said, "It's a hell of a time - you can't even go to church without being shot at."

That night or another night in that same area, we had the radio on, keeping in radio contact, but I don't think we had wire in since we had moved. Lt Mendicino said, "I'm going to lay down over here in my foxhole and get a few winks. You stay on the radio there. If you get cold, put on my trench coat."

I said, "OK." I was sitting there, and it got cold, so I got Mendicino's coat and put it on. I was sitting there in the front seat of the command car when one of the guards came up to me with an infantry lieutenant, a second lieutenant from an infantry outfit. The lieutenant said he was lost and didn't know just where he was. He wondered if I could tell him. Well, I knew where we were on the map - we had the map right there in the command car - so I got it out, and he had a map, and we compared them, and I showed him where we were and got him oriented.

Then he stepped back and said, "Thank you, sir," and saluted me. Well, I returned the salute, but I didn't think anything about it. Then afterward, I thought: Well, he thought I was a **First** Lieutenant, wearing Mendicino's coat with the silver bars. There I was, impersonating an officer! I got a big kick out of that.

Bill Srstka and I talked on the phone the other day about the time when Col Costain was killed. John Southern had been the number 1 man on the howitzer that had the muzzle burst, and that had affected him quite a bit. He had been taken off the guns and sent out as a driver for the FO people. I almost think, and so does Srstka, that it might have been John who was up with Col Costain at that time. Now it could have been

Appendix

somebody else. But I know John had battle fatigue shortly after that, and the last I heard anything from him, he was back in Paris singing in the USO Club for the Army. He had the battle fatigue. I could be wrong on that - his being up with Costain - but Bill Srstka and I thought it might be. If you have any information on that, it would be something to look up. [I don't have anything so far to indicate that Southern, or anyone else from B Battery was with Costain at that time. See Chapter 2 - Hedgerows.]

A few nights later, after Cherbourg fell, Capt Wilson and Capt Klas from A Battery - Bear Tracks, they used to call him - and Sgt Caldwell and I went up to Cherbourg in a command car. I drove up, and when we got there, the Captains took off.

They told us to stay with the car, so I stood up in the command car and hollered, "Anybody here from New Hampshire?"

A fellow answered me and said, "Yes." A fellow from Manchester, a little French-Canadian kid. And he said, "What are you drinking?"

I said, "Nothing."

He said, "Well, give me some money; I'll get you plenty. I've been around here." So he came back with a bottle of cognac. Sgt Caldwell and I sat sipping that, waiting for the captains to come back. When they came back, we hid the bottle under the seat of the car. They wanted to know if we'd like a drink, and we said, "Sure." So we went up to a little cafe there and had a glass of wine or something with them.

Then we drove back. I was driving pretty fast, I guess, in the blackout. Caldwell said he'd never ride with me again.

So this was another time I scared somebody driving. Like when we were in the desert on maneuvers, when I drove Lt Volker. I remember Lt Belitsky and Lt Volker didn't want to ride with me. And Lt Mendicino used to call me "Barney Oldfield." So I guess I drove a little fast for them sometimes.

After that period of time we went down to Hill 122 and the Forest de Mont Castre. We had quite a time there.

An incident I remember happened back around, I think, the third of July. We had been firing quite a bit, using about Charge 3 or 4, and all the other powder bags had been thrown back into a pile. That pile must have been a good three feet high and four feet or more in diameter. We had some ammunition back of the guns there that had been unloaded. Somebody must have accidentally dropped a cigarette or something and it ended up in that pile of powder bags, because all of a sudden it took off like a blowtorch. Sgt Bill Page and I grabbed a tarpaulin and threw it over the ammunition, which was standing behind the guns, and Page had a pail of water here, and he dumped it over the canvas. Then we all took off. I think that flame must have gone 60 or 65 feet in the air. It must have shown up pretty well: some German observer apparently saw it, because before long we had some incoming mail. The fire didn't set off the ammunition, but it did burn a hole in the canvas.

The Sumner Saga

I remember that somebody said, "Well, we had a pretty good 4th of July celebration today."—

Then at St Lo, I remember the day the Air Force bombed. There must have been 3,000 planes - I think they said something in that vicinity - and I had a pretty good spot. I had been up forward or something, and I was sitting on a hill. I had binoculars, and I could watch quite a bit of it. Of course there was a lot of Ack-Ack. I think there were about five planes I remember being shot down. One of them was a B 17 that landed not too far from where we were.

It was quite a sight, because I guess the second wave of bombers dropped their bombs into the smoke, which had drifted back over the lines on our side. There was quite a bit of radio activity there for awhile, till they got that straightened out and stopped the bombing there.

I think it was a few days later that a B26, I think it was, a twin-engine, was shot down, hit with Ack-Ack. The boys bailed out of the plane. There were three of them, I believe. Two of the chutes opened, and the other never opened. He came right down, about three or four hundred yards from where we were.

We ran over there, but there was nothing we could do for him. He'd hit the ground pretty hard. We just called for the aid men to check him out. I don't know who it was, but he was from some other outfit that came over there too, along with us. It was quite a sight to see, him braking all the way down, with no chute.

Then I was doing a lot of message center driving. I'd go over to Headquarters and there was Sgt Gillespie in charge of message center, and a Cpl Gomez, and there was another private like myself - a PFC - named Barnes.

In the daytime they used to send us out alone, and they did a few times at night, but we got so we didn't like that; we wanted two men at night. Sometimes one would have to get out and walk in front of the jeep in driving blackout.

That sure was an interesting time, because you traveled all over the countryside sometimes, trying to find places. They'd come out and hand you a bunch of maps and overlays and say, "Here, take these to the 359th CP. You'd say, "Where is it?" and they'd say, "I don't know; go find it." That was about the way it was.

One afternoon, Barnes and I drove into a little French village and everybody came running out into the main street, and the mayor came out with his top hat on and a long coat and gave a speech. Neither one of us could speak French, but they handed us some fruit and some bottles of wine, and we all had a drink, and the girls were all giving us a hug and a kiss. Come to find out, they thought we had liberated the town: we were the first Americans they'd seen. We told them there'd be someone else around, and we took off again.

Appendix

I remember another afternoon while I was alone, and I forget where I was going. Sometimes we went to the 358th, the 357th, along with the 359th CP's. I drove for a long stretch, probably quarter of a mile, with woods on each side - open woods where the Germans had had an ammunition dump. It was burning. I was going on by, but there was a guard, who said, "You better not try going through there: that ammo is blowing up."

I said, "Well, they said this stuff was important to get up to the front, so I'll take a chance on it."

So I opened the old jeep all up and went through there as fast as possible, and there never were any big explosions. When I came back, I sat and waited for over an hour before the thing quieted down. Then I went through again.

One other time, Barnes and I had come back late in the evening, just before dark. We pulled into this field area where the Hq was, and there was a guard on the gate coming into the field. Had a foxhole dug there and was standing guard beside the road. So we pulled the jeep off, and Sgt Gillespie said, "Do you fellows want to dig foxholes?"

We said, "No, I don't think we need 'em tonight." So Barnes and I rolled up in our blankets and a shelter-half and laid down on a side of the field there.

Sgt Gillespie said, "There's an infantry patrol coming through some time after dark tonight, so expect them to come up along the road there."

I don't know what time it was - it was dark - when we heard somebody come walking up the road, and the guard challenged them and got no answer. He challenged them again, and they let loose with a burp gun! It was a German patrol.

They sprayed the field, and Barnes and I were right in the middle of it. We couldn't get out of our blankets, and I remember grabbing my rifle and rolling over into the ditch next to the road - there was a wall there - and Barnes right beside me. We got out of our blankets then, and just laid there until everything was quiet.

Sgt Gillespie said, "Don't shoot across the road, because there's friendly troops on the other side." So everybody laid there very quietly for - oh, I guess fifteen minutes, but it seemed like hours. Then we heard somebody coming up the road, and the moon had come up a little bit, so we could see something. And when the guard challenged them, it was our own infantry patrol coming through.

About that time, when they were standing there talking and when the moon had come up pretty good, two Germans stepped out and surrendered. Hollered, "*Kamrad!*" with their hands held up above their heads. Right on the other side of the road from Barnes and I, who had been lying there, within six feet of each other, for probably 20 minutes to half an hour! That would give you a little start, when they stood up and said, "*Kamrad.*"

The Sumner Saga

Another time on the message center driving, Barnes and I got about six or eight miles behind the enemy lines one night. We were lost. We had passed an outpost, but we didn't know if it was a guard or if it was a recon outfit. They didn't stop us or say anything to us, so we kept on going. We drove and drove and drove, and finally I said to Barnes, "Look, we've got to be somewhere. We're really lost." We came to a fork in the road, and there was a sign there.

I said to Barnes, "Go see what that sign says." So he went over there, and he said, "Turn the jeep around - we're about six or eight miles behind enemy lines!"

Well, it's a good thing nobody ever saw us. We went out of there about fifty miles an hour in the dark!

On another afternoon Barnes and I had been driving most of the day, and it was hot and dusty. It must have been in late August. We came to a road that crossed a little bridge, and there was a little pool, probably 50-60 feet wide, and a couple feet deep. I said to Barnes, "That'd be a good pool to take a bath."

There was an Ack-Ack outfit on the other side of the pool, so we drove around to them and asked, "Will you stand guard here while we take a bath and clean up?"

They said, "Sure." So we got our soap and towels and stripped down and got into the water. It was only up to your knees or so. And an Ack-Ack guy said, "That looks pretty good. I think I'll do the same thing." It must have been around five o'clock, I'd say, by the time we got cleaned up, and three French ladies came along and stood on the bridge and tried to talk to us. Well, the Ack-Ack guy got embarrassed, and he sat down in the water.

I said, "Well, if it doesn't bother them, it's not going to bother me." So I finished taking my bath, and we climbed out and got dried off. Anyway, we got clean that day.

It was shortly after that that I made Corporal, and then I made T/4 Radio Sergeant. I didn't do any more message center driving then; I stayed mostly with the firing battery although there were excursions up to the front sometimes; once in awhile I'd fill in.

When we broke out of Normandy and started the run across France, went through Le Mans and then up to Falaise and Alencon - the Falaise Gap - well that was quite a run. I remember making almost 170 miles in one day. It was all radio communications, so I was on the radio, driving all day, and up on the radio most of the night.

I finally hooked up a speaker on a long cord and had a long cord on the microphone, so I told the cooks to wake me up if they heard anything. I put the speaker right next to me, so if the radio came on it would wake me up and I could talk from there. Then I finally got a few hours of sleep. But that was a rough deal, being tired out all the time.

Appendix

There was a time, near the Falaise Gap, that the First [Second] French Armored, I think it was, went up through us toward Falaise, and they parked their vehicles all around a field one night and lit bonfires, cooking their meals and everything, and that night Bedcheck Charley came over and spotted it, and he came back about midnight with a lot of his friends. I remember the area getting plastered pretty well.

Sgt Allan got mad at me because I said, "You'd think the least they could do, dropping their bombs so they whistle like that, would be to tune each one so they could play a tune on the way down." Allan didn't think that was too funny.

That was also the place we had a new lieutenant come in. His name was Devine. He was only with us three days before he got shot up on the front. I never did see him or know what happened to him. [According to official records! Lt Devine **was** wounded before he was with us for long! but it was on July 5, while we were still attacking Hill 122]

I remember Sgt Bosserman, Siegel O. Bosserman. He was our Battery Mechanic. He was a clever fellow - an older man, in his late thirties, early forties. The firing mechanism on one of the howitzers broke at Falaise. Bosserman took a steel rod out of an ammunition crate, and by heating it, and bending it, and cutting it, he shaped it all up, and he put it in, and it worked. In fact, even after we got a new part, they left it in there just to see how long it would go. I don't know whether they ever changed it or not.

But Bosserman was a pretty clever man. He said he'd invented a waterproof outfit for a soldier. Put on your fatigues and never wash them. Just get them dirty, he said, and the dirt would hug the water and wash right off.

Running up through Falaise there, it was something that I'm sure if you ever saw something like that, you would never forget it. I think there were places there where you couldn't walk without stepping on a man or a beast. There were horses and cows, men, and everything else up there. It was a place where everybody got sick of war.

I remember when Division Artillery got attacked by a couple of German tanks that got in behind there. I don't know whether they were lost, or what, but anyway we were on the other side of a hill, and Lt Mendicino and I went up over this hill to look down there so we could see. We thought we might be able to take a howitzer, hook it onto the command car, and bring it up through the woods, but Capt Wilson didn't like that idea at all. It probably wasn't a very good idea, but we thought we could try it.

The Sumner Saga

Anyway, we walked up through there. I was walking ahead and Mendicino said, "Sergeant, you get behind me. I'm the lieutenant here and I'll go first."

I said, "Well, that's fine, but remember, all you've got is a .45, and I've got a Thompson. So if things happen," I said, "you'd better get your fat butt out of the way in a hurry."

He said, "I'm still in front, and my butt isn't fat."

We got to laughing about that, and when we got to the top we could see what was going on down below, once in awhile. We didn't see too much, so we went back down to the Battery. By that time things had quieted down.

I think that was when one of the Piper Cubs was flying around. It seems to me that the pilot was - it wasn't Rizzo, it was the other one. Chapman, or something like that. [It was Kilmer, and George Pezat was with him, as observer.] Just flying around and shooting his .45 at a tank. Saying, "I've got him covered!"

When we were going across France, I remember one day when we were moving up - the whole battalion was moving. The Ack-Ack outfit was ahead of us, with A Battery, but something happened and he got behind and lost A Battery. He pulled off to the side of the road and said, "I don't know where to go. You fellows go ahead and lead. "

I was leading, and there was nothing ahead of us. I couldn't catch up with A Battery: didn't know where they'd gone. We came to a fork in the road. Lt Mendicino said, "I don't know which way to go."

I said, "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe. I'll take the left-hand road." So went ahead, and hadn't gone too far up this road when we found a lot of heavy equipment, bridge construction and so forth - engineer - all double-parked along the road.

I started around them. Mendicino said, "Oh, you're not supposed to double a column."

I said, "What are we going to do? We've got a whole bunch of guns behind us." We hadn't gone too far up there when an officer came out. He was a major. And he was ripping. "What do you mean, doubling a column?"

Mendicino didn't know what to say, I guess, so I said, "Well, we've got to get these guns up there. They need 'em bad." I said, "This is the only way we can get them up there. We've got a whole line of them behind us, and we can't stop now." So anyway, he let us through.

So we went on and every so often we'd find a check point, and we'd call it in to Hq, where we were. Mendicino was looking at the map, and he said, "It looks like Check Point 26. "

So I called it in, and Maj Myers's radio operator came back and said, "Check your position again. "

Appendix

We checked it again, and came back, and I said, "Yeah, Check Point 26."

The Major came on and said, "Well, pull over and stop. You're way ahead of us."

Mendicino said later, "If we'd let Sumner go on long enough, we'd be in Berlin."

The Sumner Saga

CHAPTER THREE - MOSELLE AND SAAR

Then we got to Metz, and we sat there for about six weeks, doing nothing. I remember we had some pretty good dugouts there, Harry Allan and I. Harry had made Sergeant by that time. We made a dugout together: we took ammunition cases and made a floor and walls, and had a roof, and built a fireplace in the side of it, and I'd hooked up old radio batteries as flashlight batteries by breaking them apart and using just the right voltage. So we had electric lights in there and everything. We had a nice home - could have made the whole war right there.

One incident happened when Bill Dick, who was our aid man, had to go back to battalion for something, so I walked back with him, and I carried my Thompson [sub-machine gun]. This Thompson I had gotten in Normandy from a paratrooper of the 101st Airborne, who had been hurt. When they were lugging him off, I said, "What so you want to do with your Thompson?"

He said, "If you want it, son, you can have it." So I took it, and I carried it most of the war. Carried it in the command car, anyway. It got pretty beat up: got run over a few times, the stock was broken and taped up, but it still worked.

This day, coming back after leaving Bill at the battalion CP, I was walking along the top of the hill, and I saw an old 55 gallon drum. I thought, Well, I haven't fired this thing for a few days - actually it had been longer than that - so I let off a couple of bursts at this 55 gallon drum. Of course I knew you weren't supposed to shoot unless you were shooting at the enemy, but so ... Anyhow, I cleared the gun out. Coming back down to the Battery, it was about dusk and everybody was in their foxholes, and somebody said to me, "Did you hear the shooting up on the hill?"

I said, "Well, yeah, I heard something. Why?"

He said, "Well, we got a notice that there would be a patrol in the area, and we just heard machine gun fire up on the hill."

I said, "Well, I didn't see anything." And I got into my dugout and cleaned that Thompson pretty fast!

As we stayed there at Metz - I think it was about six weeks we were there - I remember we had a short-wave radio we had bought in the States. A bunch of us in the Battery had chipped in and bought it. I had it in the command car, stowed underneath the Army radio. We'd had the 610 radios and we took them out and put in the 609's and I had it stowed underneath that one, and we had it hooked up so we could use it all the time.

Appendix

At the time of the World Series, I took the short-wave radio out and put it in the exec tent and brought a battery out of one of the trucks to run it. I hooked it up and had a long antenna run up into a tree. We had a soundpower phone that I hung up by the speaker. And I tapped it into the line so the gun sections could hear it, and Capt Wilson had it up to his phone, and I had it down on my remote control in my dugout. So we listened to the ball game. This being short wave, it would fade in and out sometimes, but anyway the next day, so I understand it, Capt Wilson was up at Headquarters and Lt Col Peach and the others were all talking, and Captain Wilson was telling about the ball game. Col Peach said, "How do you know so much about it?"

And he said, "Well, Sgt Sumner had it hooked up to a short wave radio so I could listen to it on the telephone. "

Peach said, "Well, he's going to hook it up to battalion tonight, because I'm going to listen too. "

So we did. We ran it through the switchboard and wired back to battalion, and I guess everybody in the battalion was listening to it the next night.

Then was one night when I had it up, Lt Mendicino tried to adjust the radio and it threw it out a little bit and we lost the station. I was sitting down there, cussing about it, and Harry Allan reached over and threw the talk key on my remote control set so it got broadcast to everybody. And I said, "Dumb Lieutenants don't know how to run a radio! "

And I realized it too late, when Col Peach came down to our battery area and said, "What's the matter, Sergeant, you don't like lieutenants running the radios any more?" Well, evidently he'd heard what I said.

We could have stayed right there at Metz as far as I was concerned. We had it made. We got potatoes from the French people there, roasted them in the fireplace at night and had a bidon [5 gallon can] full of cider; we could have made the war very well right there.

While at Metz, I remember one day Lt Mendicino, Lt Nick Nobles from Service Battery and myself as the driver went back into France somewhere for an evening. We found a city back there - I don't know what city - where there was a dance going on. We got into the dance, and afterward Lt Nobles and I walked a couple of the girls home. We left them there and we didn't know where we were in the city. We wandered around there for twenty minutes or half an hour before we found our way back to where the dance was.

When we picked up Lt Mendicino, we started back, and it was so black I couldn't see the road. I ran right off the road and into a field at one time. Then Lt Nobles said, "Let me drive." Well, he couldn't drive any better than I did. We decided we'd better sit beside the road. Mendicino wanted to drive, but we wouldn't let him, because he was the world's worst driver. We stayed there and stuck it out until dawn, then we drove back into the area.

The Sumner Saga

Mendicino said, "Now, if anybody asks, we stayed over at Service Battery with Lt Nobles last night. "

Lt Nobles said, "Yes, and if anybody asks me, I stayed over at Baker Battery last night. "

I remember 1st Sgt Hester tried to pump me about where we'd been, but I wouldn't tell him anything. I just told him we'd stayed over at Service Battery that night.

It was while we were at Metz that I saw my first V-Bomb. I know it struck somewhere behind us and I didn't know what it was: it sounded like a Model T Ford going over. When I found out what it was, it was a Buzz-Bomb. I saw a few of them after that, here and there. I never did see the V-2' s, thank goodness, but we had those Buzz-Bombs going over and landing behind us.

After Metz, we went and crossed the Moselle. We had the biggest flood they'd had for 25 years or more. I mean it rained all the time. I know one afternoon Sgt Bosserman and I had dug in beside a little brook and Bosserman dug a little farther down the bank than I did. I was up near the top. We just dug an L-shaped hole, and one side was wide open toward the brook. We just had shelter from the front - from incoming stuff. And about five o'clock in the morning I heard Bosserman cursing and swearing and I thought. What's the matter with him this morning? Well, about half an hour later, I tried to roll over and I got soaked.

I was laying in water! The brook had come up and flooded out our foxholes. I remember getting up and wringing my blankets out by twisting them around a little birch tree there and hanging them up, getting out as much water as I could. And that's what I slept in for the next two weeks. Those wet blankets never did get dried out perfectly.

I remember the night we had the counter-attack when we had just unloaded quite a bit of ammunition - pretty close to 500 or 1,000 rounds for the howitzers - left beside the road because where the howitzers were, there was so much mud you couldn't get a truck in. When the counter-attack came, we needed ammunition, so we all were carrying ammunition. I remember picking up one box of ammunition [two complete 105 rounds] and putting it on one shoulder; someone else would pick up another and put it on my other shoulder. I was carrying a box on each shoulder all the way down to the guns, which was probably 150 to 200 feet. I tell you, I wish I could do that on my job today!

A few days later, when we got to cross the Moselle - after our bridges had been knocked out two or three times by the flood and by the Germans, we finally got one in - and we were moving down to it. We had a new lieutenant whose name was Podlesnik, something like that, a short, stocky lieutenant.

Appendix

We were stopped just before we got to the bridge, which was under a smoke screen at that time. There was some holdup there. Lt Mendicino left, went down to see what the problem was and Lt Podlesnik had walked up - I guess he was one of the RO's - and he was standing there by the command car when I got a call from Major Myers at battalion wanting to know where we were and what the hold-up was. So I started to encode an answer for him, and the Lt said, "Send it in the clear. "

I said, "Oh, no, you never send anything like that in the clear, not in a situation like this. I'll code it."

He said, "Sergeant, I gave you an order. You send that in the clear. " I turned around to Sgt Allan, and I said, " You're a witness, Harry. "

I sent it in the clear. Well, Bill Pike told me afterwards that he was driving Capt Wilson on the other side, having already got across. He said Wilson came right out of the seat of the jeep and said, "Sgt Sumner knows better than that!"

When we got into position, I got a call to report to Capt Wilson. I never did get to open my mouth to explain anything to him. He went up one side of me and down the other. And then he called Lt Mendicino up there and started in on him for letting me do it.

Mendicino came back and he was mad. He wanted to know what the story was, because he didn't know anything about it. So I told him, and I said, "You ask Sgt Allan, who was right there too."

So Mendicino went down and explained to Capt Wilson what had happened, and it wasn't two minutes later when Lt Podlesnik headed up to the captain's jeep too. And I imagine he got it more than I did. I'll never forget that, because that day I was so mad that I could have chewed up that lieutenant like nothing.

Right after Thanksgiving, after we had captured Metz, and before Christmas, probably the first part of December, I was taken sick. I had a very bad cold and got dysentery and everything else along with it, and Capt Wilson finally ordered me to the hospital. I wouldn't go until he delivered an order. When I went back, I remember riding to battalion, and Doc Davis putting a tag around my neck. I got put in an ambulance, and rode in that, and the guys got lost, and they were worried about driving into the German lines. I was so sick I didn't care whether they did or not. We finally got back to someplace in France near Verdun. They had a hospital set up in an auditorium - a school, I guess it was. I remember the surgeon there, a Major - I can't think of his name - checked me out and gave me some medicine, dosed me up. The next morning I felt a little bit better. Then they came around and checked me again and said, "Well, we've got casualties coming in, so we're moving you out." There was another fellow beside me from the infantry who had hurt his back from a shell concussion or something that blew him over. He had trouble even walking.

The Sumner Saga

They shipped us out of there, back to a Replacement Center, and were going to ship us up to most any place, but I said, oh, no, I wasn't going any place but back to the 915th.

Anyway, every time they had a roll call there - I was the senior non-com there and I found out about it - I'd disappear into the woods. So when they'd call out the names, I wasn't there. I'd come back sooner or later. It was a pretty good place: the band, the 90th Division Band, stayed there and the Red Cross girls came in and stayed there at night. We had a nice long dining room that was good and warm, but we slept in cold barracks. It was terrible out there, but it was a German barracks.

I managed to stay there for about five days, until I got to feeling quite a bit better, and I finally went in to the officer in charge, a major, and I said, "I'm going to pick up a rifle and some clean clothes and stuff and go back up to the front. "

He said, "Do you know where it is?"

I said, "No, but I'll find it."

So for two days I bummed rides on ammunition trucks and supply trucks until I finally got back up to the 90th Division Artillery. Then from there I rode the mail truck into Battery B. It took me about two and a half days to get there, but I got back to my own outfit anyway. I didn't have a bunk, I didn't have any blankets, I didn't have anything. I had to bum every minor item. When I'd taken off, they thought I'd never come back, I guess. But I got back there.

About Christmas time I remember that we had been pulled back from where we were trying to take Dillingen, I think it was. We had been pulled back, and were staying in a big chateau. Sgt Trotter the motor mechanic, myself, Sgt Bosserman, Bill Dick, and Hardy White were staying in a shed off to one side and we had a stove set up there. We filled it full of rocks and mixed gasoline and oil together and had a tank with a pipe and a faucet so it could drip down into the stove. When we got it going, it made a good hot fire, but every now and then one of the rocks would explode and the stove would jump around a little bit. Sgt Bosserman found some mash and we built a still out of a couple of old kettles we got from the cooks. There was a brook out back to run the tubing through and we brewed ourselves some white lightning. And I tell you, it was **White Lightning**, all right!

The fellows were trying to set up a Christmas tree, but they didn't have any decorations, but Ben Walters said, "There's a town up the other side where we ought to be able to get decorations. "

So Ben and I got a jeep and we took one of Bosserman's bottles of white lightning, because there was no windshield up on the jeep, and it was about five or six above zero that morning. So we got a supply of that anti-freeze in and we took off. Ben said, as we were going down the hill, "There's a couple of hairpin turns that are under observation, and they're liable to take a shot at us from the other side, with their Ack-Ack." There was a German 20 mm Ack-Ack outfit right across the river.

Appendix

The river ran through the town there, so that part of it was on the American side and part of it was German. We got down to the town and found a store. A millinery store - had a lot of women's hats in it. We took off our helmets and tied on those big hats with big bows and everything, and we walked down the street looking for Christmas decorations in the stores and houses. We met an officer, from an infantry outfit, I guess, and he said, "You guys must be crazy to be up here like that."

And we said, "Well, we don't have to be crazy, but it helps." Bill went into one place, and I was walking around and I found a post office. I thought there ought to be something in there. So I went in and was looking around, when I heard something rattle in the back room. Well, I figured there must be somebody back there: maybe it's a German soldier or something. A patrol? I pulled out my .45 and jumped to the door, and I gave it a kick and went through - into a kitchen. There was a big old tomcat lapping up what was left of a meal left on the plate. He came in through a broken window. He took off, out through the window. I guess he was more scared than I was. Anyway we finally got the Christmas decorations: we found a bunch of them and took them back and let the fellows decorate their Christmas tree up there in the chateau.

It was the same day when after dinner we found a motorcycle in the shed there, and I got it running. I was riding around the courtyard with fellows trying to knock me off with snowballs. Capt Wilson came out and told me to get off that thing before I broke a leg or something. Anyway, we had a good Christmas.

That was the first time - well maybe not the first time - I ran into a sergeant, I think it was Sgt Newton from A Battery, who was the radio sergeant. We had to keep radio communications in with Hq, every twenty minutes to half an hour. He couldn't seem to raise anybody, and they couldn't get him. So Capt Klas came over and asked Capt Wilson if he could borrow me. So I went over there, and Newt was having an awful time. I knew he was a good radio man, and I couldn't figure what he would do that wouldn't work. All of a sudden I remembered that I had run into a dead spot once while we were in the desert on maneuvers. So I said, "Let us take the set out," and we picked it up and took it to the other side of the chateau and set it up in another room about fifty feet away, and it came in fine. Captain Klas thought I was an awful smart radio man to know what to do. It was just luck that I did it, and from remembering what happened to me in the desert.

It was about that time - Christmas time, I think - that the Germans flew quite a few sorties with their fighter planes. When they went over they went up fairly high, and of course they picked up a lot of flak from all of us. When they came back, they were coming right down on the ground. The fellows in the top of the chateau were shooting out the windows - shooting **down** at them.

The Sumner Saga

I remember one of the few times I used a .50 cal on an air mount. I had been to machine gun school and I had taught machine gunnery. But when I grabbed the gun and started shooting it, the only thing I hit was a Signal Corps cable: I cut it right in two very nicely. So I said, "I'm not on this gun at all; I'm out of here, because if the boys come back they're going to be mad to have to re-splice that cable. "

Around about Christmas - Christmas Day or just after that - I had to take an ammunition report up to Battalion because Sgt Bosserman was under the weather. He had been sampling his own still too much that night. So I took the report up about 5 o'clock in the morning, and I walked up because it wasn't that far, but it was through the woods. I went up alone, and I came out on the road. There were a couple of guys standing there and they turned right around and pointed their guns at me.

I said, "Hold it: wait a minute!"

They said, "What's the password?" I gave them the password, and one of them said, "I don't know." Then the guy asked, "Who's Marilyn Monroe's husband?"

I said, "Joe DiMaggio," and he said, "OK, you're an American."

That was when we had found out that some Germans were infiltrating behind our lines in American uniforms, so nobody was taking any chances. But I'm awful glad I knew who Joe DiMaggio was!

The Sumner Saga

CHAPTER FOUR - THE BULGE

It was right after that that we started up to the Battle of the Bulge. It was snowing, and I remember we had to black out all our insignia on our vehicles and our TO's and everything, so that nobody would know what outfit we were.

We started early in the morning and drove all day. It was cold, and snowing: there must have been a foot of snow or more. We had the side curtains up on the command car, but it was still terribly cold in there, especially on the steel floor. Your feet were cold. Mine were, and I was driving. I remember we stopped one time up there and got out. I said, "Boy, have I got a tankful." Lt Mendicino said, "Me too."

I said, "I've got enough to write my name on the snow."

Both of us stood there, trying to write our names on the snow, and Lt Mendicino said, "I ran out. My name is too long."

We got into - I don't know just where it was - but it was on a hill and we had to put the guns down in a field at the bottom of this hill.

There was a pretty steep bank going down to this field. I put the command car down first, but there was a fence there, a wire fence. Nobody would ride down in the command car, but I had to drive it. I drove down and took the fence out of the way got it caught in the front of the command car and pulled it out of the way.

We had to leave one of the trucks at the top of the hill with a winch on it. We could never have gotten out of there without winching the vehicles out.

But we took the guns down, but the only things that went down were the trucks and the guns. The only way to get out was to chain the truck at the top to a tree and then run the winch down and pull each truck up, and then the guns, and my command car. Through the snow.

I think up there in the Bulge was the most miserable time I ever spent. About six or eight below zero some mornings, and sleep in the snowdrifts. I know one night we'd been up there awhile - we'd moved up: we'd taken our objectives that the other outfits hadn't been able to take, and this afternoon they called for a couple of guys to drive trucks. Cpl Speer and myself didn't have anything much to do, and we'd both been truck drivers, so we went back and they had gasoline that they wanted to take up to the tanks. They had great big International semi-trailers - tractor-trailer jobs with a cab-over engine. Neither one of us had ever driven one before. It was late in the afternoon when we started, and I don't know where we went back to; it was a depot of some kind.

We were following this jeep ahead of us with an officer, and we didn't know where. It got dark, and of course we just used the cat-eyes. Well, we started down a hill; it was pretty steep and there was a lot of snow on it. I thought something felt a little funny. I glanced back; the trailer was coming down practically sideways!

Appendix

The only way I could straighten it out was to give the gas to the tractor and put on the brakes of the trailer. By the time we got to the bottom of the hill, I was moving along pretty good, and I knew Speer was behind me: I could hear his engine once in awhile.

Down at the bottom was a sharp curve, and I thought, Oh, boy, I'll never make it! I must have had about 3,000 gallons of gas on the truck, and I thought that the five or six thousand gallons of gas if those two trucks piled up would make one awful bonfire.

Well, I still don't know how, but I made the curve. We finally got up there and left the trucks, and they took us back in the jeep.

The only place I could find to sleep that night when we got back to the Battery was in a house that was so full that I slept on the kitchen table, which was pretty uncomfortable and kind of cold too.

One night a line to one of the guns went out from our Hq - the exec tent - and the telephone operator, Albert Hills, came to tell me, "I can't get it through.

I said, "The snow is too deep. Run a new line up there."

He came back in half an hour or more and said, "I still can't make it work."

Mendicino said, "Earle, get out there and do it." Of course I had just got dry socks on and everything. Bill Dick and I were sharing a foxhole. So I got out there and took the wire in my hand from the center place where he had them all hooked up to the guns, and went up to the No.4 gun. I got up there and the wire was still in my hand. We didn't need a new wire. The new wire was hooked up to the connecting block, but the old wire was still connected to the phone!

Hills was pretty upset. So was I.

I just got a call from Albert today. He lives in Hollis, NH, on a farm. An awful nice fellow. He'd come to us from Africa. I don't know what had happened down there, but he was a replacement, and we got him.

I think undoubtedly the Battle of the Bulge was one of the worst times we had, that and of course Normandy in the hedgerows. But Normandy was when we were all green. When we got up to the Bulge, we were pretty well battle-seasoned. But it was a pretty rough deal up there!

One morning I had to go back to Headquarters to get some radio batteries: I was running low. I went over and drove into the barnyard, and alongside the driveway the house was on the left and the barn made a right angle down in front - alongside the house were two stretchers. They were covered with blankets, and I asked somebody who it was. Nobody answered me.

The Sumner Saga

It turned out that one of them was Henry Sleeper from C Battery, who I had been in Basic Training with. He came from Vermont, and he was a pretty good friend of mine. The other was Capt Richter. I didn't know Richter too well; I think I drove for him once, in the States, but that was about it. But I knew his reputation, and he was a pretty nice guy. I was pretty broken up about Henry, too.

So I went down to the barn, and there was a big door which had a small door in it. Just as I opened the small door, an 88 shell came through the other side of the barn, which was a stone building, and out the big door, right over my head. It never exploded: it was a dud. Thank goodness for that.

I opened the door and went in. Rudy Felice and some of the other fellows were sitting there. Their faces were cut with the stone - dust and pieces of stone that had fallen off when the shell went through the walls. Needless to say, nobody was very hilarious in there! I got my batteries and left quick.

I think it was around this time that we got the new shells - the Pozit fuzes. I remember it was supposed to be a big secret, and we kept a guard on them. Then Axis Sally came on the radio and asked us what we thought of the new Pozit fuzes. So it wasn't too much of a secret, so far as that was concerned.

We used to call them the Buck Rogers fuzes. The worst thing was, they'd go off in a rainstorm, right out in front of you. You had to be pretty careful. In rain or sleet or snow we didn't use them. We had them go off two or three times, right in front of us, but that was about it.

We had one other muzzle burst, back in France I think it was. I don't know what happened; it was a White Phosphorus shell that exploded out in front of the Number 1 Gun, which was the "Old Black Magic," and I remember the fellows refused to shoot the gun any more. They didn't want it. So they took it back to Ordnance and got another gun. Outside of that and the Pozit fuzes exploding, we never had any more muzzle bursts on the guns.

One night we were down to, I think, only 82 men instead of 105. Everybody was filling in on everybody else's job. Sgt Trotter the motor mechanic had one of the gun sections, and he had a bunch of green men up there, and it was raining and sleeting and freezing that night. It was terrible.

We got a fire mission, and Sgt Trotter said, "I can't get going. You'll have to call my gun 'out.' The shells are all covered with ice."

Mendicino said, "You've got to get to shooting, because if you don't, we're going to get overrun here. "

So I told Mendicino, "I'll go up and help Trotter out."

So I went up, and the boys didn't know what to do with the gun. So I took a hammer and started banging on the shells and knocking all the ice off 'em. Some of the new boys were pretty scared, because they thought the shells were going to explode when I hit 'em with a hammer. But I told them they were supposed to be bore-safe anyway. We finally got it shooting up there.

Appendix

That was a miserable time. A few nights later, I think it was, about when we were crossing the Prum River, that we lost Hank Simpson. He had been Chief of a Gun Section, as a Sergeant, and he got busted and was put on a Forward Observer crew. They found him the next day. He had been shot through the chest. He was leaning up against a tree, with the radio in his lap. The radio batteries were dead. That's where we found him. He was a pretty good fellow, from Texas, an acquaintance of Red Garrison's.

I think the 90th Division in the Battle of the Bulge showed a lot of other Divisions up there what a good combat outfit we really were, because we went ahead and took our objectives, then waited for the one on our right or left to come up, and they didn't get there, so we sent our regiment and a battalion over there and went through them and took their objective too.

I remember some of the fellows there when we were going through - we had everything covered, our TO's and everything - and they asked us if we were a green division who had just come in from the States. We told them yes. We never told them who we were, or what we were, or anything. They were kind of surprised, I guess, when we went through and took all our objectives.

After the Battle of the Bulge, Capt Wilson took myself and Capt Thomson took Sgt Rose from Headquarters, and the four of us went back to Brussels, Belgium. Had three days' leave down there. Sgt Wynn, when he was Forward Observer, one day had shot up a German payroll truck, and there was about \$5,000 in French francs on it. Wynn had all of us sending money orders back to his mother. I carried the rest of the money in the BC chest, because nobody ever went to it but me. If anyone ever wanted something, they would always ask me to go there in the trailer I had with the command car.

So when we went back to Brussels - Wynn was a lieutenant by then - he said, "Take enough money to have a good time." I took about \$500 in French francs, and I had a ball for three days, believe me.

On the way back from Brussels, it was raining and miserable, and we had a flat tire. I had a heck of a time changing it because there was so much mud in the road that the jack kept sinking. We had to build up some stones in the road so I could jack up the command car. We finally got up toward the front, and we didn't know where we were. It was dark, and we saw an outfit there, so Capt Thomson got out and started up the bank. A sentry hollered to him. Wanted to know what the password was.

The Sumner Saga

Thomson said, "I don't know what the password is. I haven't been back here for three days. But I want to talk to one of your officers and find out where we are. " So he started up again, and the guy said, "Halt, or I'll shoot."

Thomson said, "Well, you might as well shoot: everybody else has been shooting at me." And somebody up there hollered to the guard not to shoot, so Thomson went up and found out where we were. We finally got into Hq that night, and if I remember rightly, Capt Wilson and I stayed there that night and drove back to Baker Battery the next day.

It was on the way back from Brussels that we ran into a herd of deer going across the road. Capt Wilson said, "Let's get a deer! I had a carbine along, but I couldn't get out on my side because of the spare tire, not with the side curtains on, so I handed the carbine to Rose.

He got out and fired six or seven times, but he never came close to anything! Capt Wilson was yelling at him, "Give the gun to Sumner, give the gun to Sumner!" because myself and Sgt Trotter and Sgt Srstka were the top riflemen in the Battery. We had all qualified as Experts, and we had all done a lot of hunting. But nobody got a deer that day.

The Sumner Saga

CHAPTER FIVE - GERMANY

After the weather turned better and we got out of the Bulge, we went down and crossed the Moselle the second time. I remember the day we were heading for river, the Germans had dropped a railroad bridge right across the road where there was an underpass, and we couldn't get through. They had the engineers cleaning it up. So we pulled off in a field beside a farmhouse and garden. We didn't think we'd be able to get out that night at all, because there was such a mess for the engineers to clean up.

We were all carrying some wine that we had raided from a warehouse. I think I had five or six magnums in the command car. The truck drivers were all sitting there in this garden beneath the trees, sipping on the wine. Then all of a sudden, somebody hollered, "March Order!"

There wasn't a one of us could stand up straight, I don't think. I got back to the command car. Lt Curtis had taken over then because during the Bulge, Mendicino had gone up to Hq to take Capt Richter's place. Lt Curtis said, "Sumner, do you think you can drive?"

"Sure. All I've got to do is stay in the middle road." He said, "What do you mean?"

"I can see three roads. If I just stay in the middle one, I'll be all right."

He was pretty nervous, but by the time we got to the river and across it that night, I was very much sobered up.

When we got into position at the top of the hill, we were very close to C Battery. Sgt Garrison and I were trying to hook up the telephone panel for the guns, and I had a flashlight that was all blacked out but one little spot in the tape. I was trying to hook it up without any light, and Sgt Garrison got hold and said, "Oh, God, you can't see nothing without light." He ripped the tape off, and used the flashlight at full beam.

Capt Fauble was over at C Battery, to our left. He yelled, "Put that light out, over there. "

Garrison said, "Hurry up. We won't pay any attention to him." So we went on putting the wire down, and Fauble yelled again. The third time he yelled, he said, "I'm coming over there! 1f

Well, by that time we had the panel connected up. Fauble said, "I want that flashlight!"

Garrison said, "You can have it, then!" and threw it at him, right through the air. We took off. I don't know whether he got the flashlight or not, but it was off, so he probably couldn't find it in the dark. Anyway, I lost a flashlight, but Garrison got me another one from supply, a day or so later.

Appendix

From that time on, things seemed to smooth out quite a bit. The Germans were on the run, and we didn't have too much to contend with - a few fire fights and so forth. I remember getting to Frankfurt. There was an observation tower on a hill there, and a railroad track running down below it, with a bridge across the railroad track. Somebody thought it would be a good idea if we used that observation tower for an OP.

There was a big iron door on the thing, and it was locked. I tried to shoot the lock off and pretty near got myself killed by the bullet's ricochet. I was standing looking at it when a couple of engineers came by and said, "What's the trouble?"

I said, "I've been trying to get this door open, but I darn near killed myself with a ricochet."

They said, "Wait a minute." This was the first time I'd seen a plastique. They stuck it in the keyhole and put a cap on it, and a fuze, and ducked around a corner. Blew the lock off that door slick as a bean. So we started up the tower - Garrison was with me at the time.

But when we got up to the top of the tower, I guess there were 20 million bees who had made nests up there, so we decided we weren't going to use that as an OP. We'd blown the door open for nothing.

Going back, we were crossing the bridge over the railroad track and a dud shell came by. It must have been a ricochet, because it was going "warunga-warunga." Sounded like a freight train. Right over our heads. Both Garrison and I almost jumped off the bridge.

When we crossed the Rhine, I remember they moved us up - they said they couldn't get the infantry across the Rhine. The 5th Infantry Division had made a bridgehead, and the engineers had got a bridge across, and they wanted the artillery across, so they could bring the infantry in. Because we were mobile.

So they took us up there, and I had to cross on that ponton bridge. I think it was the General Alexander Patch Bridge. Just as we got up there - it was in the evening, we started across at dark - there was a truck that got hit. A gasoline truck. The German planes were strafing and dropping bombs there, and they said they were running rowboats down the river, too, filled with high explosive, dynamite, with fuzes on it, trying to blow the bridge out. We had machine guns shooting at everything moving on the river, up above there.

This gasoline truck caught fire while I was waiting to get onto the bridge. There was some hold-up getting onto the bridge; that truck had got stuck on the bridge or got off the track, or something. I remember there was an Army cameraman taking pictures of it. He wasn't more than fifteen feet from me, and in the light of the fire you could see everything pretty well. I've always wanted to see that, to see if my face looked as scared as I really was.

We got across the river and were driving down the road. It was a moonlight night. The German planes were going over the river and dropping their bombs, and when they came back they were strafing. The front gunner would strafe ahead of him on the road, and the rear gunner would strafe after they'd gone by.

The Sumner Saga

We had stopped for something, and Sgt Hester had gotten out, when a German plane came over, strafing. Sgt Allan was trying to get out and get in the ditch, and Sgt Hester was trying to get in, because I was trying to drive and move out. Hester said, "Allan, if you push me out, I'll shoot you. "

That was quite a night. We got into position, and everybody had pretty good foxholes that night, because there was a German strong point in a town up there ahead of us, I don't know how far away. It wasn't very far: maybe a quarter of a mile. They were shooting almost direct fire on us. But we had leveled some of our howitzers, and we were shooting almost direct fire right back. I know I was out in between there, laying a telephone line, when somebody hollered to Sgt Tenczar, wanting to know if he'd seen Sumner. He said, "Yes, I guess he's all right: I can hear him swearing out there."

I remember getting the lines in, and the next morning the cooks got the cook truck there. Cpl Standard - one of the cooks and also the driver - and Sgt Brumley, who was head cook, and Sgt Oakley, who was the other one. They were laughing at Standard because he had three flat tires on the truck. He was standing there cussing, because he didn't know how he was going to change all those tires. Well, the cooks climbed up in the truck and they started cussing because they didn't have a pot or a pan that would hold water. They had to go to A Battery and C Battery to get pots enough to have breakfast that morning. That truck had gotten riddled that night.

I had the antenna on the command car broken off right behind me that night. And a hole through the windshield of the command car, and a piece of shrapnel had hit my helmet and dented it. It was really pretty warm that night.

I think it was the next day, sometime in the morning or early afternoon. One of the anti-aircraft boys had a foxhole a little ways behind where I was sitting with some others, We heard some incoming shells. This Ack-Ack boy started to run for his foxhole. I remember he ran and dove for his hole, and just as he dove into the hole, an 88 shell landed in the hole and exploded. Another fellow and I started over there, but somebody got there and said - maybe the medics had already gotten to him, I guess "Too late for him," and I just backed off. That was no sight I wanted to see that day.

There's one incident I remember: it was the second of April. We were working with a Combat Command of the 4th Armored, I think. We had pulled into a field. There was a hill there, and the road ran around the top of the hill, and the Armored were all on this road. They weren't moving, for some reason or other. We pulled off into a field.

Appendix

Just as we were pulling off, Sgt Bosserman looked up and saw a couple of German Focke-Wolf 190's. He looked over to the other side, and the whole air was jet-black with planes. He said, "Boy, somebody's going to catch hell!"

Somebody else said, "Oh-oh! They're all German planes!"

And Bosserman said, "Yes, **we're** going to catch hell!" And we all piled out. Well, they bombed and strafed us, and knocked one gun crew out. Bill Dick had so many wounded men he couldn't handle it, and Sgt Hester was out there helping him, when Hester got hit in the back himself, by shrapnel. But he stayed right there until he got the other boys taken care of.

Lt Curtis, the Exec, yelled to me to call Headquarters on the radio. I was out in the middle of the field in the command car, with no place to go. But I called Headquarters and asked for some ambulances, help for Dick.

About that time there was an ME 109 coming right down the field, and I was pretty mad. Everybody was shooting, and I pulled the Thompson up. I guess I got eight or ten rounds out before he opened up with his machine guns. I tossed my Thompson aside and ducked. I figured I was no match for that guy!

I said Lt Curtis had me call Headquarters, but it might have been Lt Jackson. They were both Exec's at times after Mendicino replaced Capt Richter as Liaison Officer.

From that time on it was fairly smooth going, nothing spectacular that I remember, we just moved up a lot, had a few fire fights and so forth, but no big battles of any kind.

One incident I remember was humorous. We had stopped at this place, and there was a little brook there. I decided to go fishing; there were some fish in there: I could see they were carp. As a matter of fact, I've got a snapshot somebody took of me fishing in the brook.

I couldn't catch anything: they wouldn't bite. Everybody was laughing at me. Sgt Brumley, the cook, hollered at me, "Sumner, you get the fish and we'll cook it for supper for you."

Well, it teed me off that I couldn't catch fish, and I walked up the brook quite a ways, and I came to a little dam, with a pond on the other side. It was a hatchery, and the pond was just full of fish. There was nobody around, and I saw an old basket there. I had a hand grenade, which I took and tossed into the pond. Fish came up all over the place. I got the basket and scooped up half a basket or more of fish. I went lugging it back down.

I said, "All right, you cook 'em for supper now. They're for everybody." Well, they did. We had fish for supper that night.

The Sumner Saga

Before the war was over, somebody came to Sgt Srstka and myself, called us out. They wanted us to go back to Paris and go to OCS. Both of us had IQ's high enough for that. But I hadn't wanted to when I was at Ft Devens, and I still didn't.

It was after we got into Czechoslovakia, along the border somewhere, one afternoon Sgt Tenczar, one of the gun chiefs, and myself got permission to go deer hunting. We had our carbines and we took off into a hilly area. I guess we had been hunting about an hour when we spotted a deer. Bill had never hunted before, and it was too far away to shoot at, so I said, "We've got to go around and get on the other side of her, because the wind is blowing from us to her. She'll smell us. We've got to get around behind her, so it'll be the other way."

So we worked our way around the field, and came up, and there was a little wood oad there that ran at an angle alongside the field. We got over into the trees at the edge of the field. I told Bill, "I'll count three, then we'll both shoot." I figured we should get her: she was grazing there, a small doe. I said, "One," and I said "two." Bill fired and missed.

The deer took off, of course. She was running toward the side road there, so I ran over to the road, dropped down on one knee, and pointed the carbine down the left hand side of the road. She was coming from the right, and when she went to jump the road, I shot her right in mid-air.

We didn't dress her out there: I bled her, then Bill said, "Let's go up to the town, and see what's up there." So we covered the deer up with some brush and went up to the town. By this time it was getting late in the evening, but we found a farmhouse there, where some people had some schnapps or something, and we talked to them. Anyhow, by the time we started back, it was dark.

We got into the Battery late in the evening, at night, and we walked right into the Battery area and never got challenged at all. There was a new man - I can't think of his name: Donahue is the name that strikes me, but I don't remember now - a new replacement. We walked up, and he was sitting on the ground, leaning up against a howitzer, sound asleep. I reached down and took his rifle, and Bill slapped him side of the head about four times.

He said he was going to have us court-martialed for hitting a soldier. Hitting a private. We told him the next time we caught him asleep like that, we wouldn't bother. We'd just shoot him.

Then we went and told the cooks when they got up in the morning to wake us, and we'd go pick up the deer. The cook woke us up at five or six o'clock, and we went back up and got the deer. We rigged up a pole. It was a pretty hard job to carry her that way, but anyway we got back to the Battery, and the Battery was no longer there. They'd had orders to leave.

We sat down by the deer. I looked at Bill and said, "Well, good morning, Private Tenczar."

Appendix

And he said, "Good morning, Private Sumner."

His gun section and my radio section were all unattended!

It must have been three-quarters of an hour or an hour later, Bill Srstka came driving a jeep, laughing his head off. He said, "Well, boys, you guys are in trouble. Sgt Hester is madder'n a wet hen, and so is Lt Curtis."

We threw the deer on the hood of the jeep and went back. Hester and Curtis met us there, and they started chewing on us. Said, "Just wait till Capt Wilson gets here. You guys are going to lose your stripes."

When Bob Wilson came down, he looked at the deer and said, "Well, Sumner, I see you got a deer."

"Yes, sir, I did."

"Send me up a steak."

I said, "You'll have it." And that was all that was ever said. He got his steak, and the rest of us all ate deer meat that day.

One last thing I remember. When the German 11th Armored Division came in and surrendered there in Czechoslovakia, that wasn't officially the end of the War, but it really was. I'm not sure why I was driving in the column with one of their outfits, but I tried to double the column, and when I tried to go around one of the tanks, I ended up in the ditch. I'm not sure who was with me, but I think maybe it was Sgt Allan.

Anyway, one of the German light tanks came over and pulled us out, so I give them a pack of cigarettes, and one of the crew was so grateful that he gave me a 9 mm Mauser pistol, the kind with the long barrel. It came with a wood holster that you could clip on to make a stock for the pistol so you could fire it from the shoulder like a sawed-off carbine. It's a good gun, and I still have it.

We went on with the column to their assembly area and spent the night at a farmhouse there. I remember sleeping on the porch, with a pile of rifles and things, where the Germans had turned in their weapons.

It was kind of a funny feeling, just the two of us Americans right in the middle of several hundred Germans. Well, I think there were some American officers in a building on up the hill, but there were a lot of Germans in between, even if they had turned in their weapons. I don't remember who the American officers were or why they were there, any more than why Allan and myself were.

Anyway, nothing happened. The German soldiers didn't bother us, and we didn't bother them. They had surrendered, and the war was over, so we weren't about to start shooting at each other again.