

July 4, 1997

Dear Mr. Martin:

Happy Independence Day! I enjoyed talking with you very much. Thank you for your time.

Enclosed are three copies of the narrative I mentioned (two copies for the albums and one for the U.S. Army Military History Institute). This narrative describes what happened on the night patrol when Staff Sergeant Weisloff died saving my father's life and the lives of the other two men on that patrol.

Also enclosed is the information on Dick Stannard's book (Infantry) and the other books we talked about. I called CTB Media and learned what report after,

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action is available again (through CIB
and directly from the Battery Press). I
wanted you to have this information to
pass on to anyone who might be interested.

Please let me know if you have
any questions.

Your Friend,
Jim Beblavi

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Fateful Night - The Death of Sergeant Weiskopf

On November 25, 1944, Company E was moving up a trail through the rugged terrain of the Vosges Mountains near Ville, France. It was raining hard and a heavy fog made it difficult to see. The rain did have a benefit, though; it dampened the fallen leaves so there was little noise as the men advanced. At sunset, it was decided that the company should stop and rest for the night. It was now too dark to see and no one knew what might be ahead. Most of the men sat on their helmets and leaned against trees to rest. It was raining too hard to lay on the ground.

When they started to move again early the next morning, the 1st Platoon was in the lead. The rain had let up but there was still a heavy fog. As they neared the top, the men moved off to either side of the trail. This precaution was well-advised; the Germans had located a machine gun position near the summit, covering the trail. Now the fog worked to the advantage of the Americans. It concealed them from view as the Germans looked down from the summit, but as the Americans looked up through the fog, they could see two German soldiers silhouetted against the lighter sky. John V. Jackson shot and killed one of the Germans. As the other Germans from the machine gun position fled, Jackson and another soldier threw two hand grenades but without effect.

By now the fog was beginning to burn off and when they reached the summit, the men could see that the Germans had followed the middle trail (of three trails) down the other side and run into a farmhouse below. Machine guns and an 81-mm mortar were brought up from the Weapons Platoon. The gunner on the mortar was very accurate. As he bracketed the target, the first round fell short and the second round was long. The third round went right down the stone chimney of the farmhouse. The explosion created a great cloud of dust and drove the surviving Germans out of the farmhouse and into the line of fire of the American machine guns. Company G, located to the right of Company E's position, was then ordered to move down and secure the farmhouse and surrounding area.

A tank had been assigned to Company E to provide heavier firepower for the rifle company. Later that morning, the tank made its way to the summit using the same trail the men had followed. Only one of the trails

leading down the other side was wide enough for the tank, however; the middle trail to the farmhouse and the trail to the right were too narrow. The 1st Platoon, with the rest of Company E following, then led the tank down the left-hand trail, checking for mines (none were found) and making sure that the trail was passable. As they moved down from the summit, they found at least a dozen fallen trees (10 to 12 inches in diameter) blocking the trail at intervals. Two German soldiers had been cutting the trees and frantically continued to do so, even during the fighting at the machine gun position and the farmhouse. They ran off when they realized that an entire company and a tank were closing in on them. The 1st Platoon fired at the Germans but apparently neither soldier was hit. Company E and the tank continued down the trail. Then, while the tank stayed back to provide artillery-type support with its cannon if and when needed, the men moved up another trail.

By that night, November 26, 1944, Company E was in position on the wooded summit of another mountain, "Hill 680." Battalion Headquarters (2nd Battalion, 410th Infantry) ordered a special patrol to find an accessible way for the battalion to move off the mountains to the plain below. A narrow, well-worn trail leading down from Hill 680 was one possibility. At the bottom, this trail ended at a hard-surfaced road, forming a T-shaped junction near the village of Breitenau. The FFI (Free French Interior, as the French Resistance called themselves) had reported German activity near this junction and around a house, which was about 100 yards from the trail on the other side of the road. They had also reported the possibility of a machine gun position in this area. The patrol was to confirm the safety of the trail and determine whether it would be a good route for the battalion to follow. They were also to investigate the nature and extent of any enemy activity near the junction.

Staff Sergeant Marion F. Weiskopf was ordered to lead the patrol. "Pappy" Weiskopf, as he was affectionately called by his men, was the Platoon Guide of the 1st Platoon. Weiskopf chose three other men for the patrol (all from the 1st Squad of the 1st Platoon): Cpl John V. Jackson, Pfc William G. Lininger, and Pfc Carl P. Beblavi. The patrol set out at 1900 hours (7:00 PM). Their objective was about half a mile south of the Company's position. None of the men knew the extent of the danger that lay waiting.

At first they followed the trail down toward the road but as the trees thinned out, they left the trail and worked their way down by a less visible

route off to the side. As they had confirmed that morning, the Germans had most of the roads and trails in this area covered by machine gun positions, and the moon that night made any movement all the more dangerous.

After some time, they reached the low area beside the road where the trail ended. An embankment eight or ten feet high sloped up toward the surface of the road. The path up the embankment was steep and fairly narrow, with underbrush on either side. As yet, there had been no contact with the enemy and everything seemed quiet. Weiskopf told the other three men to stay back while he checked out the road himself. He worked his way up the embankment and when he was high enough to see over the road, he scanned the road in both directions and looked toward the house. Everything was still quiet. Then, just as Weiskopf was about to step onto the shoulder of the road, a German yelled "Bosche?" as a challenge. (This word is what the French called the German soldiers.) A moment later, there was a burst of machine gun fire as Weiskopf yelled to his men to take cover. He fell onto the embankment, with his upper body and rifle laying across the shoulder of the road. Weiskopf fired several shots with his rifle and yelled "I'm hit." Then he yelled to his men to get out. They could tell by his voice that he was badly wounded; the blood in his throat made a gurgling sound.

The other men had begun working their way up the embankment when Weiskopf was hit. Cpl Jackson, who was the closest to Weiskopf, actually had several machine gun bullets ricochet off his helmet. They quickly climbed the embankment toward Weiskopf, but could see that he was no longer moving. Knowing there was nothing that could be done, they got out as he had told them to.

Staff Sergeant Weiskopf's decision to have the others wait while he checked out the road himself kept his men from harm. Their infantry training had taught them never to bunch up. But even if they had spread out and approached the road together, one sweep of the machine gun from its concealed position opposite the trail would have cut down all four men. Though it will never be known, it is possible that Weiskopf wounded the German machine gunner since no more shots were fired. Cpl Jackson remembers that there was activity between the house and the machine gun position as the patrol was withdrawing. Undoubtedly, other Germans had run out of the house after hearing the shouts and gun shots. In any case, the

shots that Weiskopf was able to fire before he died delayed any attempt by the Germans to pursue the patrol, and allowed the other three men to escape.

The quickest way back to their position would have been to follow the trail, but they dared not do this because of the moonlight and the machine gun. In the low area beside the road they had been protected by the embankment, but as the trail climbed upwards they would have been exposed to the machine gun's line of fire. Instead, they worked their way back up the mountain through the scattered brush on each side of the trail, using whatever concealment they could find. Several times they had to lay flat on the ground and crawl across open areas to avoid being seen. Higher up, they were able to move from shadow to shadow among the trees. It took the three survivors until 2345 hours (11:45) that night to reach Company E's position. They reported heavy enemy resistance in Breitenau and the machine gun position across the road from the trail. They also reported that Staff Sergeant Weiskopf was dead. Because a soldier was never listed as killed until the death could be confirmed, Weiskopf was listed as missing in action until December 1, 1944, the day his body was recovered. When it was known for certain that he had died, the records were changed to "killed in action" and his next of kin were notified. Staff Sergeant Weiskopf was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star medal for heroism. He was also awarded the Purple Heart.

When he died that night (the Sunday after Thanksgiving), Staff Sergeant Weiskopf was 10 days from his 35th birthday. He and his wife Lillian had been married for just over two years. Their two daughters were only 15 months and 7 weeks old when he was killed. After the war in Europe ended, his body was returned to the United States. He is buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis, Missouri.

This account is based primarily on the recollections of John V. Jackson, who remembers the patrol as if it were yesterday, and the information found at the National Archives (Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland). Written by James C. Beblavi, grateful son of one of the survivors.