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My Remembrances of World War II

This account is mostly about my military service—mainly vignettes from my World War II combat experience in Europe. Some parts are about major events, but as I participated in them at the small-unit level. I trained, shipped overseas, and went on line with the 409th Infantry, 103d Division. In January 1945, I was transferred to the 157th Infantry, 45th Division when it lost five line companies in the German “North Wind” offensive. In combat, I experienced an amazing array of close calls and little episodes that seem too many to just chalk it up to luck.

For different reasons, most returning World War II veterans shared little or nothing about what we experienced. As we have reached late life and our numbers have sharply fallen off, desire to preserve the legacy of our units has for some of us become our mission. I have recorded what I saw and went through in World War II to further that mission.

Initially intended to mainly chronicle my combat experiences during World War II, this account grew in scope. It also describes my early years leading up to World War II and how my World War II military service—in particular, my six months serving in infantry line units in Europe—shaped my postwar choices and values and continues to reverberate through my life today.

Growing Up in Old Florida

My mother, Laura Robinson, was born and raised in Orlando, Florida. A traveling salesman for an office supply firm, my father, Raymund Rogers, met my mother when he was on the road in Florida. After marrying, they moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where I was born on February 10, 1925.

My maternal grandfather, Tom Robinson, was a portrait photographer who operated one of the early developing and printing businesses in Florida. My grandmother, May Robinson, hand-colored the photographs—the easiest way to produce color photographs until the mid-twentieth century. In 1925, his business was booming. At one point, my grandfather had seventeen women working in his studio.

When I was less than a year old, we moved to Orlando so my father could help my grandfather with his photography business. We all lived in the same house, which my grandfather had built and paid for during the boom period. No question that my younger brother and I had a very idyllic childhood right through high school. My mother had a busy social life. My parents always had a Black maid even though my mother didn't work.

When the boom bubble burst, the winter vacation business dried up and my grandfather's business with it. He owned the house and photography studio outright and made enough to feed us all, but not much else.

The business was able to support my father only until 1934. With my father out of work for a couple of years, my mother saved the day! In the aftermath of the 1935 hurricane that killed more than four hundred people in the Florida Keys, my mother became the Red Cross Home Service secretary for Dade County, with the responsibility of preparing disaster plans for South Florida. Being in an executive director role, she didn't prepare the plans herself. I don't know how she got the job, but it was a great opportunity for a young woman in the mid-1930s when the country was in the grip of the Great Depression.

When it came time for my parents to move to Miami for her to start this job, they gave me a choice to go with them or to stay with my grandparents. Entering seventh grade, I elected

to stay because I wanted to play football. I thought I would have a better chance of playing football at Orlando High School, with a thousand students, than at Miami High, with four thousand students. I was also involved in school basketball.

My brother, on the other hand, wasn't interested in sports and wanted to go with my parents. While we had entirely different likes and dislikes, we generally got along. Staying wasn't just for my benefit, however. Weighing in the choice of my staying was also that I could keep my grandparents company and help them out. During the six years I lived with my grandparents, I spent my summers and two weeks at Christmas with my parents. I didn't particularly like it down there. It was hotter and the landscape was different from Orlando, which had many trees and lakes.

I did well academically in my first two years of high school, making the honor roll and the National Honor Society and winning the American Legion award for the outstanding boy. I became increasingly wrapped up in athletics, however. I received letters for playing basketball and track in my junior year. In keeping with my self-image as an athlete, I didn't apply myself academically in my junior and senior years.

At Orlando High School, I went out for football as a sophomore, but ended up not playing at all because I was too small. Still too small the next year, I became head manager of the team, with four or five assistant managers. I also picked up the responsibility for the football game-day programs. I had to contact and confirm the sponsors, find new advertisers, and to do whatever else was necessary to produce the program for each game. It wasn't as difficult as it had looked. These kinds of experiences gave me the confidence to take on new responsibilities once I was in the military.

I had a serious talk with my coach at the end of my junior year. What did I have to do to get to play? Instead of going to Miami that summer, I went to a football camp in North Carolina, mainly to gain weight and hopefully grow a few inches. Thankfully, I did both! I made the first team and played well, though we had a losing season. At the end of the season, I made all-state second team in the halfback position.

While I did get a football scholarship to the University of Georgia, it didn't occur to me then that I was too small to play college football. That realization happened later. Beyond wanting to play football, I dreamed of eventually becoming a football coach.

My grandparents were devout Episcopalians. I sang in the church boys' choir—or sang along. I get accused of not showing emotion or displaying affection. My grandmother—my mother's mother—was very stiff. In fact, she wore one of those old-fashioned tight-laced corsets. She was the most emotionless person you could imagine—very strict, not very loving, not very affectionate.

Even though my grandparents' photography business wasn't exactly thriving, they did well enough. I helped my grandfather when he would take group photos of military units at the Orlando Army Air base. Mechanical and inventive, he was a skilled carpenter and jack of all trades. He designed and constructed his own set of bleachers, which fit on a trailer he built from a car chassis. At the army base, he would set up the bleachers to pose up to three hundred men on three rows of elevation.

I joined the Boy Scouts and got to go to Scout camp for two weeks every summer. I loved being part of this uniformed, quasi-military type of organization. Though nothing like the real military, the Boy Scouts more than anything else helped prepare me for my army service. I learned basic map-and-compass skills and a familiarity with being in the woods. Knowing how to read a map gave me a leg up in basic training. Many trainees were city boys who had never been in the woods and got lost just going round a tree.

Being comfortable in natural settings and knowing how to orient myself was especially helpful in the first period of combat in the heavily forested Vosges Mountains. Even the lieutenant came to me, knowing I was proficient in reading maps. He had been trained to read a map, but didn't have enough experience to be really skilled. You had to have a lot of confidence that you were reading it right—that was where I contributed. The lieutenant had a good idea of where he was; he was really looking for somebody to confirm he was reading it correctly because the penalty in a combat situation was too severe to get it wrong.

With its merit badge system, the Boy Scouts presented an opportunity, with my go-getter mentality, to rapidly advance in rank. Earning merit badges exposed me to interesting

issues and opportunities to learn valuable skills and knowledge. My grandparents encouraged this pursuit. My grandfather would take me target shooting out in the woods. Five miles outside of town, he would set me up with a target—tacked onto an orange crate full of wood blocks—fifty feet away. While I advanced in the Scouts all the way up to expert marksman with a .22 rifle, it was my grandfather who taught me to shoot.

Army Training

June 1943—March 1944

Though I turned eighteen before I finished high school and, therefore, had to register for the draft, you were given a deferment until you completed high school as long as you finished before you turned nineteen. If you left while in your senior year, you could still get credit for finishing. Graduating from high school was a goal for me, however, and I figured that the war would last beyond 1945.

By the end of 1942, a lot of the boys were enlisting because you could choose your branch of service before you turned eighteen. I didn't want to be in the Navy. I tried the Air Force because I wanted to be a pilot, but flunked the eye test. Very disheartened, I decided to just wait to be drafted.

After turning eighteen in February 1943, I took the Army General Classification test—still several months before I was inducted—and qualified for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) after infantry basic. The ASTP was a full college program to produce engineers, doctors, dentists, personnel psychologists, interpreters, and other specialists for the war. I chose engineering. To me, the program seemed like a great opportunity—not realizing how quickly it would end.

I graduated in June and the routine was for all the social clubs at the high school to go to Daytona Beach for a week. While the girls were chaperoned, it was just one big drunk for the

boys. Of thirty-three boys in the house I was in, only two of us didn't drink. The two of us became nurse maids, including retrieving a guy passed out in a tree.

A couple of weeks after high school graduation, I went up to Camp Blanding, near Starke, Florida, where I was sworn in, completed all the paperwork, and then came back two weeks later for actual induction. I completed thirteen weeks of infantry basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama in a whole battalion that was ASTP bound.

I had prided myself in having been a high school athlete and having stayed in good physical condition. Coming in from the twenty-five-mile, all-day marches we took in basic and advanced training, those of us in good condition could in the last mile dog-trot double-time in and get in the shower first. With only eight showerheads and a latrine for two hundred men, the others had to wait in line.

My extensive Scouting background prepared me well for basic training, with the one exception of marching. I remember having to spend a couple of hours with an NCO¹ who hadn't finished grade school teaching me to march. He didn't know how to put a sentence together without using the f-word sixteen times.

After basic training, I was sent to Texas A&M as a freshman civil engineering student in October 1943. The program seemed too good to be true, and sure enough it was. The Army had greatly underestimated the need for replacements for the casualties occurring in the line elements of the committed divisions.

In early 1944, ASTP was virtually eliminated to meet the need for more infantrymen for the planned invasion of Europe and casualties anticipated in the drive through France and Germany. The ASTP offered a pool of young, ready-trained men. In February 1944, I was among the over a hundred thousand ASTP trainees informed that we would be transferred to combat units. We were distributed among the infantry divisions still stateside in advanced training. For the most part, we had only basic training and were replacing men in the divisions who had had advanced training and been stripped out to be sent to Europe as replacements.

The ex-ASTPers were mostly parceled out to line infantry units to fill line infantry MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] positions. On March 20, 1944, I was transferred to Company

¹ Non-commissioned officer; corporals and all ranks of sergeant were termed NCOs.

G, a rifle company in 409th Infantry, 103d Division. While we had received three to four weeks' notice, the transfer from the brick dormitories at College Station, Texas to the tarpaper shacks of the 103d Infantry Division at Camp Howze, near Gainesville, Texas, took only one day. The change of scenery was dramatic.

When the ASTP program was cut, some of my contemporaries felt being reassigned to the infantry was beneath them. I felt all along that I was just lucky I was smart enough to be accepted into ASTP, but didn't feel that I was being used or abused when I was put in the infantry. To me, it never made sense to create a college program and take young men with leadership potential away from combat positions where they were urgently needed.

It may have been immature of me, but, like many of my buddies, I was actually happy we were going into a combat unit. Where we were at war, I was gung-ho enough to think I should be fighting, not realizing how uncertain it was to survive. I didn't know that the infantry in line positions in line units would essentially turn over every six months. You didn't find that out until you got there and it happened.

College Campus to Camp Howze

March—September 1944

On June 6, 1944—coinciding with the Normandy landings—the 103d sent out to the replacement pool five thousand men who had completed advanced training, including fifty-seven men from my company alone. They were replaced by men from deactivated anti-aircraft, coastal artillery, and air force ground units.

The first commander of the 103d Infantry Division, Major General Charles C. Haffner, Jr. should be recognized for his great accomplishments in activating from scratch, training, and leading into combat fifteen thousand young American men, virtually all of whom had been green civilians less than two years prior to deploying overseas in Europe. He was a stickler for

discipline. The discipline in the division was absolute in the "Patton fashion" and, as I learned firsthand, essential to performing well in combat.

So when his daughter Clarissa Chandler later asked me about him, I told her that he did an outstanding job in preparing the 103d for combat. She related an incident that happened in Gainesville when we were training. One Sunday afternoon when she was riding in the back seat of her father's car, he stopped the car, got out, and went over to reprimand two soldiers for not wearing neckties while in town. As a teenage girl roughly their age, she had been mortified. I explained to her that having excellent discipline made the 103d a great fighting unit because discipline was essential to performing well in combat.

On the other hand, Army training, it seemed to me, tried to instill rote reaction to any situation. They would smother you with repetition so that what to do became ingrained in you. My combat experience proved to me that while we had to know the fundamentals of what an infantry soldier had to do, we also had to be able to react flexibly and take initiative at the lowest level based on our understanding of often rapidly changing situations. Where the educational level of a large share of the 103d was high, we would improvise if something happened in the field.

We spent about six months in advanced training and were scheduled to leave for overseas by late September. Now in the Army for fifteen months, I may as well have been in the Boy Scouts as far as vices were concerned. I didn't like hanging around Gainesville on weekends because all the old Army guys would do was drink, while I didn't drink. Although I would go to Texas State College for Women in Denton on the weekends during the summer of '44 and met two girls who were interesting, they weren't interested in anything serious.

Given two-day passes to wherever, I along with five friends chose Dallas for our last fling. They each bought a fifth of whisky or whatever. All but me! While they drank their booze, we all had a good time doing nothing. At a restaurant for dinner Sunday, they poured their drinks. After some urging and mild threats, I drank the remaining liquor on ice even though I didn't care for the taste. By the time we got back to camp, I was loaded. When I made a commotion, the first sergeant berated me for being such an ass, told me to get in bed, and if he heard one word from me, he would have me on detail until the boat pulled away from the dock.

Camp Shanks, New York

September 24—October 5, 1944

On September 21, 1944, the 103d Division left Texas by train for Camp Shanks, where many units passed through going overseas. Thirty miles up the Hudson River from New York City, we got passes to the city. A lawyer with Bethlehem Steel, the father of one of my buddies had arranged for five of us to have dinner and drinks on him at the Waldorf Astoria, New York City's grandest hotel. We then went to one of the well-known nightclubs in Manhattan. Everybody was buying us drinks. Between performances, the chorus girls from the floor show came and sat with us.

To get back to camp by the midnight deadline, we had to leave by ten thirty. Well, that was just the shank of the evening, and at that point I was saying to myself, "What are they going to do to us? We're going overseas into combat. Now they're surely not going to take us out just because we come back late." While the four other guys left to get back on time, I stayed on. I arrived at the unlit barracks at two in the morning to find a craps game in play under blankets. In the bed check, the CQ [charge of quarters] had missed me, figuring that the men whose bunks were empty were back shooting craps.

I got into that craps game and, in a lucky streak, cleaned up, winning every bit of spare money that the guys had. Now I had won four hundred dollars—almost a year's net pay—my four friends and I could go back into town again. Most guys had to stay back because they didn't have any money. This time we all stayed an extra hour drinking our last in the USA. While all five of us would survive, two would be badly wounded.

Atlantic Crossing

October 6—20, 1944

We left New York on October 6, 1944. I was on the *Monticello*, a former Italian luxury liner. With ten thousand out of the fifteen thousand men in the division on the ship, our quarters, with five-high bunks, were hardly luxurious. Our ship crossed the Atlantic in a fourteen-ship convoy, with troop carriers and supply ships at the center and destroyers and other escorts on our flanks. The convoy sailed in zigzag patterns to be less vulnerable to submarine attacks.

Passing through a hurricane, our ship heaved and rolled for a couple of days. While I just adapted to the motion and wasn't seasick even once, at least a third of the men on the storm-tossed ship were seasick, with disastrous results. Vomit was all over the place. In such crowded conditions, they couldn't get to some place fast enough to not throw up on somebody else. It was in that context that I was bunked next to the guys in the 2d Platoon who I later found killed during our first attack.

With ten thousand men on one ship, you were able to go up on deck only twice a day for hour-long shifts to enjoy the fresh air and a break from being down in the hole (hold), everybody crowded together. So, some of us volunteered for paint-chipping detail to prep for repainting. From paint-chipping detail, we graduated to officer table waiter. In the table-waiter deal, you had the run of the ship, three meals a day and, of course, much better food. Though the officer's mess was always very crowded, they would go through a cafeteria-style line, sit at tables to eat, and be out of there within an hour and half.

In contrast, the troops went through the mess with trays and then had to go back to their bunk or wherever they were fortunate to find a spot to sit and eat. Where the officers had three meals a day, we had only two because it took five hours to serve one meal to us. You stood in line for maybe two hours before you got your food, but being soldiers and used to discipline you put up with it. Who were you going to complain to anyway?

During the hurricane, there was a lot of leftover food. I once took six or eight pies from the officer's mess down to the troop quarters. There weren't enough guys well enough, however, to eat all the pies.

It was a great relief when the storm abated and the weather became good. We didn't know where we were or where we were going. Of course, the higher-ranked people did. Seeing the Rock of Gibraltar gave us the first inkling of where we were going. We could have been going to India or some place in North Africa. We were pretty certain we were going to Europe, however. Two days after steaming past the Rock of Gibraltar and the North African coast, we arrived in Marseilles.

Marseilles

October 20—November 5, 1944

After fourteen days at sea, the *Monticello* docked on October 20, 1944. Late in the afternoon, we debarked with full field equipment and began what was supposed to be a two-and-a-half-mile road march to a bivouac area on the outer limits of the city. We marched what seemed all that first rain-soaked night. After about eight hours of stop-and-go marching, we bedded down lost. Daybreak found us only a few hundred yards from our destination. The division stayed in this staging area above and west of the city in neatly lined up pup tents for about two weeks.

We were trucked into Marseilles to help unload the ships and police supplies in preparation for moving up to the front. Since the badly-damaged port wasn't fully operative, it took ten days to off-load our equipment and vehicles, some of which had to be reassembled. Going into Marseilles on leave, I would belt down a few drinks and generally act like a stereotypical inexperienced nineteen-year-old.

I went overseas as a private first class. No rank had been available while we were in the ASTP program. A consequence of filling out the division with a lot of castoff people from the air force and coastal artillery and anti-aircraft units was there was hardly any chance for us ASTP

guys to get any rank. A big problem was that the air force cadets were all corporals. Reassigned to the infantry, they could keep their rank as long as they proved themselves. A few of the guys who had been transferred from antiaircraft units also came in with rank. So very few of us had a chance to move up into leadership until after NCOs got killed or wounded.

Thirty-Inch Snowfall and Fourteen-Hour Nights

November 5—15, 1944

On November 5th, we left Marseilles in trucks and by train to become part of the Seventh Army, which was then fighting in the Vosges Mountains in northeastern France, near the German border. From Dijon on, the motor march north was made under tactical conditions, with maybe a hundred-yard interval between each vehicle, since the German air force was still a threat. At the end of the day, the vehicles would close up and stop, and people would pitch a tent or just lay on the ground. Even though it rained hard for two days, I don't recall pitching a tent. We just slept on the ground, got up, and moved out.

After a three-day motor march of over five hundred miles, we arrived at the rear assembly area where we were to go on line. It was pouring rain when we got to our final bivouac, where we were allowed to build fires to dry out our clothing and equipment. We had to shed our overcoats, strip down our packs to carry only combat gear, and stow all our other stuff in our duffle bag that we left behind. When the war ended, those duffle bags were brought down to Austria where all the men left in the division could reclaim them. I never got mine back because I was transferred to another division. I wished I had asked for my duffle bag when I visited my 103d company near Innsbruck after the war ended. I would have liked to get my personal stuff back, but, in the end, it didn't make much difference.

We were issued live ammunition. This was it! In the driving rain, we started moving up on foot. It was all uphill and by the time we got to the top of Haut Jacques, the rain had turned to snow. Having grown up in Florida and trained in Texas, I hadn't seen snow before. We went

from rolling hills like very southern New Hampshire to more mountainous terrain. These heavily forested hills had an ominous quality as I considered how difficult it would be to see the enemy in dense, shadowed woods like that. As we moved up the winding road, things became more eerie as we contemplated what we would be faced with. It snowed all night—some thirty inches. I had no idea how long we walked to get to the top of that hill to the Haut Jacques pass. When I drove up the road many years later, the odometer read seven miles from the turnoff to Rambervillers to the top.

We went on line southwest of Saint-Dié in the Vosges Mountains on November 9th. Relieving the 3d Division, we were in a defensive situation for a week. A building at the top of Haut Jacques served as battalion headquarters. We were the reserve company and that snowy night three of us were outposted in the woods there—only fifty yards from where the 3d Division monument now stands—overlooking the Taintrux Valley. We couldn't figure out what we were doing there. The second night we stayed in about the same place, which again didn't seem to be any specific preparation for what we were going to do.

With one guy on duty for an hour and two guys sleeping so that you were on duty every third hour, we kept track of the hours of darkness. When we worked out the next morning that it had been dark for fourteen hours, we argued somebody must have cheated. Further north than the northernmost point in Maine, none of us realized the night could be fourteen hours long.

After two nights, an officer took another guy in the platoon and me down toward the bottom of the hill, near where two or three farmhouses sat off to one side, to establish an outpost for battalion headquarters. Just saying find a place to dig in, the lieutenant wasn't very helpful. We chose a gully because it was easy digging, not realizing that put us in the path of snowmelt coming down the hill. Soon we were pretty wet. But these are all things we would learn as time went by. They brought us down a telephone to call back up to battalion headquarters on top of the hill should the Germans come up. We were posted down there for maybe five days. From our dug-in position, it seemed the Germans could have driven right up the road. When we jumped off in our first attack, I learned that the actual front was three hundred yards further down in a little village.

First Attack

November 16, 1944

At full strength, an infantry line company had 187 enlisted men and six officers. But once you went into combat, you had casualties and were chronically understrength. You probably never had higher than ninety percent of your strength at any time, and much of the time you were probably down around seventy percent because the rate of replacements coming in always lagged behind the casualty rate. In six months of combat, the company I went overseas with had forty-two men killed—one in four of the entire strength of the company. The company had one hundred twenty men wounded. So, over a hundred percent of the strength of the actual fighting element of the line company was killed or wounded.

The toll that casualties took on different units had a lot to do with luck. While Company G/409 had forty-two killed, Company I, another line company in the same regiment, had eight killed. They just didn't encounter a lot of bad situations.

So, I was very lucky not only to have survived, but also to have come out without being seriously wounded. What helped make it possible to keep going was that at no time did we believe we were "cannon fodder." I don't remember hearing that term applied to us until fifty years later. We simply believed then that someone else would get hit.

As soon as I got on line, I volunteered and was assigned to what they called a battle patrol that my platoon commander was going to lead. Where it was attached to battalion headquarters for scouting, I didn't report to my company officers after the first week. The battalion recon officer would send us out on reconnaissance and other special assignments. A gung-ho young soldier, I had volunteered for something I didn't even grasp. I eventually learned that I was better off not blithely volunteering.

But in this case, volunteering for the battle patrol kept me out of something in which I might have been killed or wounded, especially where what we ended up doing was not very intense at all. So, when we jumped off in the attack on November 16th, I didn't actually attack with my platoon, but was in this ten-man squad on another mission. Near the little town of

Taintrux, my lieutenant sent me across a field and creek beyond to make contact with one of our platoon commanders who had gotten up on top of the hill—part of the high ground that was the objective for that day. I was supposed to see him, get a message and take it back to my company commander. I didn't know that I was being sent out in an area over which the leading elements of my company had advanced.

As I started running across the open field, I saw what appeared to be dark lumps on the ground off to my right. As I drew closer, I saw they were Americans in uniform lying still on the ground. Eight men from a squad in 2d Platoon lay dead. I didn't know how they got caught out in the open, why they had been advancing across an open field when they could have gone around through the woods. Nonetheless, they were eight men in my company who I had been with going over on the boat. I had known them, bunked with them, and now I found them all dead in the field. It shook me up. I went on—there wasn't anything I could do. It was a shock. During our first eight days in defense, we had only a little shelling and no contact with the enemy—and now the first day of offensive combat to see eight men dead I had known well.

I continued across the field to the creek, where there was a pretty good-sized house right next to it. I called it a creek; it took me maybe three or four steps to get across it and up the other side. A kid from Florida, I hadn't thought before jumping in that the water would be ice-cold with the snowmelt. I kept on going, eventually emptied the water out of my boots, and then just kept on moving around to keep warm.

With night coming on, the platoon commander sent me back on some pretext to the company CP [command post] in a farmhouse to give the CO [commanding officer] a report and to maybe sit in front of a fire to dry out. There was no way for me to get dry clothing. We wore the same clothes to December 24, with no shower or bath.

After I dried out, the first sergeant asked me about the men I had seen dead and told me to come into a room being used as an office. For someone to be reported dead or killed, their remains had to be recovered and positively identified. Until then, they were reported as MIA [missing in action]. So in that context, I was asked to identify who I had seen KIA [killed in action]. Having known them as friends, I began to cry as I recited their names. First Sergeant Edwards—I will always remember him—was the epitome of a huge tough guy, six feet three or

four inches, Texan with long arms. He said something to the effect that, Rogers, war is hell and you are going to have a tough time if don't get a hold of yourself. It was an admonishment to stop crying. As this was only the beginning, I agreed and made a commitment to myself not to cry again and that lasted for some thirty years.

Through the Vosges Mountains to Sélestat

November 17—December 4, 1944

From our initial attack on November 16th, we stayed in the attack mode until we hit the Siegfried Line on December 16th. Bypassing Saint-Dié, the first major objective of the 103d, we continued to advance east through the Vosges Mountains to the Alsatian plain. The Vosges Mountains were heavily forested and similar in terrain to central New Hampshire. Villages dotted the countryside—configured in the French and German system where the farmers had their houses with attached barns clustered in villages with their fields fanning out. From Saint-Dié to Sélestat, our advance was a series of movements and minor engagements through these villages and little towns. We dug in and spent the night in a foxhole maybe one out of every three or four nights; most of the time we would stay in a barn or house in a village.

We would push into a town. The Germans might leave abruptly. There were a lot of scattered firefights, scouting, patrolling, staying in farmhouses and just moving forward. Since we didn't encounter any heavy fighting, only a few people were killed or wounded. Toward the end of November, battalion disbanded the battle patrol and we were assimilated back into the company.

We advanced out of the Vosges Mountain foothills onto the flat Rhine plain toward our next major objective—Sélestat. For about twenty-four hours, the fighting to take Sélestat was very intense. B Company of the 409th took a little section of the town, but the Germans came back with tanks at three in the morning and captured most of the company. I entered the town in a place where the Germans didn't counterattack.

During combat in Europe, each line unit had its own sequence of episodes of intense fighting, but the intense combat was never continuous for any great length of time. Continuous combat over several days happened to me only twice in the entire six months I was in combat—up in the Siegfried Line with the 103d and then later with the 45th in taking Aschaffenburg, Germany. The rest of the time, there were isolated firefights, movement and incidents, but no intense, sustained fighting. Things to remember and talk about, but nothing concentrated or significant.

You weren't on line every minute. The division had twenty-seven rifle companies, with three rifle companies per battalion and three line battalions per regiment, and one of those units was always in reserve. Two regiments on line, one in reserve. A regiment on line had two battalions on line, one in reserve. A battalion on line had two rifle companies on line, one in reserve. That was the basic system. So a lot of the time your company, battalion, or regiment was in reserve.

I went on line as squad BAR man, but couldn't get rid of it fast enough. You were always looking around for the two assistant BAR men carrying ammunition for you. It wasn't a reliable system—you couldn't count on where your backup ammunition was in the heat of a firefight when the two ammo bearers were more concerned about taking cover than sticking near you.

Sélestat to the Siegfried Line

December 4—16, 1944

After taking Sélestat on December 3, we had a couple of days' rest. We then turned due north parallel to the Rhine River and advanced all the way up to Wissembourg, a large French town on the German border. A lot of the Alsatians we encountered spoke a local Germanic dialect—reflecting how Alsace had changed hands. It became German after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and then reverted to France after World War I. After France was defeated in 1940, the area

went back to Germany. The Alsatians told us that many of their young men had been conscripted into the German army. Most were sent to the Russian front and never heard of again.

From Sélestat to the 16th of December when we went into the Siegfried Line, it was, once again, all little episodes, no real heavy action. Part of the time we were in reserve and rode on trucks. It was after we got north of Strasbourg that we started encountering resistance in each town. But we kept moving.

On December 15, 1944, we were moving along a road, with isolated farmhouses along the uphill side, that wound around a ridge to the town of Oberhoffen, our objective. We were in two files, one on each side of the road, with men about five yards apart—so if anybody shot at us or mortars came in, we could readily scatter.

Captain Craddock, our company commander, pulled me out of the ranks to take a patrol with a radio to the top of the ridge and tell him where the Germans were and what they were doing on the other side, where the town lay. I was still a Pfc. and not even an acting NCO. I turned to ask my platoon sergeant if our radioman could go. Overhearing this exchange, our company commo [communications] sergeant offered to go—even though, carrying a pack radio on his back, he generally stayed close to the company commander to have communication with battalion as well as the other platoons in the company. So I got two other guys and we started up toward the top of the ridge. A triangular-shaped, wooded draw fanned out from about half way up the hill down to flat, open farmland. In the draw was a streambed that drained the hillside.

Having climbed about half way up the ridge, we were paralleling the draw dropping off steeply to our right when we heard the distinctive sound of a mortar being fired from the top of the ridge. I yelled to take cover in the draw. In the lead with the pack radio on his back, Sergeant Attebery sat down, with his feet downslope. Even though they must have been a couple of hundred yards away, the Germans dropped that mortar round in just a few yards from where Attebery was seated—to be so accurate with the first round! While the other men went straight down, I went up to check Attebery. The blast had blown off his helmet and caught the top of his head, killing him. Twenty-four years old, Attebery was older than most combat

infantrymen and had a two-year-old son. Notable is that he was killed in a situation where he had volunteered to go up there.

We went back down the hill because the Germans had obviously seen us coming up. They must have had lookouts on top of the ridge watching and keeping track of our movements. So the Germans were well aware of where we were and let us know it.

My Worst Days of the War

December 18—22, 1944

On December 17th, we advanced across the German border northwest of Wissembourg, France and into the Siegfried Line. The section of the fortified defensive line we attacked was on a heavily forested ridgeline, a hundred fifty to two hundred feet higher than the base. From the trail and stream on the south that ran along the base of the ridge, the slope rose steeply—at least a twenty-five-degree grade—to the ridgeline. In 2005, I drove this trail in a Mercedes rental car to recon the area, but the only way I was going to find the exact location of where we had been was to climb up the ridge. It was one of the few places I never returned to after the war. Unsure I would find the exact place, I didn't see any sense at eighty years old in trying to climb up and down that ridge, just to say I had been back there. I remembered "Pill Box Hill," as it was called in the company morning reports, well enough.

When our company had already passed Wissembourg and was going up in the mountains, a call went out for volunteers to carry flamethrowers to attack the pillboxes. Being a gung-ho kid too dumb to be scared, I volunteered to go back in a six-man detail—two men per platoon, one as gunner and the other as assistant—to a garage on the outskirts of Wissembourg to get the flamethrowers, while the company kept on going in the attack. Going back with the detail to get flamethrowers may have saved our lives because we didn't take part in the initial assault.

The corporal in charge of the detail was one of the third-grade educated, Depression-era NCOs who had come into the Army before the war started. In basic training, we were full of lower-ranked NCOs who had very little education that showed in how they handled themselves. If you understood it, you took it in stride. While some had no problem with those of us from ASTP, others like this one resented us because we were college kids who, in their minds, put too much thought into what we were going to do when, in fact, most of us just did what we were told to do.

The flamethrowers were there, but the captain in the S-4 [Supply] section told us they weren't operable. He had only one component of the fuel, where you needed two. Late afternoon we started back without the flamethrowers to rejoin our unit. As we moved through the woods—a small detail of GIs, nobody else around—all of a sudden, a couple of artillery rounds came in near us. We thought the Germans were firing at us, though it probably had nothing to do with us.

The NCO reacted by turning around to go back to the town for the night. I wasn't going to do any different. I couldn't have gone on myself because I had no idea where our men were. So, we all went back and spent the night in the little garage at the edge of town where the flamethrowers were stored.

The next day we found the company trying to establish itself in the Siegfried Line. By then, they had captured two pillboxes and a deep ring of connecting trenches on top of the ridge. Imagine a circle with the twelve o'clock position facing north to the enemy, the captured pillboxes at the ten and four o'clock positions, and our rear at the six o'clock position. My platoon sergeant, Tech Sergeant Willard Springborn, was now leading the platoon. He received the Silver Star for almost single-handedly capturing the key pillbox at the ten o'clock position, while the other one surrendered.

When I showed up the next day, my platoon sergeant was livid. He saw my not coming back the night before as malingering. Then and there, he said go down this trench—the eight o'clock connecting trench—and find out where the Germans were. I entered the trench with my M-1 ready. Just around the first bend, I came face to face with a German soldier, also with his rifle ready. I stepped back, he stepped back, and we both fired and missed. As soon as we fired,

we each quickly moved back. Ducking back around the corner, I quickly took my grenades, and receiving more from my buddies, tossed five or six grenades immediately down the trench as well as thirty feet or so beyond. Silence, no perceptible activity—we figured I must have got him. After waiting about fifteen to twenty minutes, I advanced. About twenty feet down the trench, we found three dead Germans. Whether they had been killed by the grenades I had thrown, I didn't know. We established a guard post with two men at all times to keep the Germans from coming through the trench system from that location. But we weren't bothered by the enemy from that position again.

We hung on for four days and nights fighting off constant counterattacks and shelling as the Germans did not want us to have a toehold in their defensive line. It was my worst combat experience of the war for its intensity and being virtually nonstop. During those four days and nights, we had eleven men killed and fourteen wounded—the equivalent of one platoon—our highest casualties in any short period of time. We rotated positions on the firing line between the ten and two o'clock positions—on two hours and four off—and we frequently had to reinforce those positions during heavy attacks. I remember hearing a bullet go by my ear—that is how close it came. That happened to me two times in combat.

While on the firing line, one of my buddies stood up in the trench peering out. Just as I was warning him to keep his head down, he was hit by a bullet in the face. The bullet hit his two front teeth and while it broke them off, it was totally deflected and didn't otherwise hurt him. The bullet that hit him must have been underpowered, or perhaps it first went through a tree or ricocheted off the ground. Initially, he bled profusely, but the bleeding quickly stopped, and an hour later, he was able to walk out to the aid station about a mile to the rear. It was a million-dollar wound—the loss of two front teeth, but a ticket out of that hell.

We had to be supplied every day by six or seven pack mules carrying rations, water, and ammunition. Saying it wasn't their job, the mule skimmers wouldn't bring them to the top of the ridge. So, we, the grunts fighting, had to go down to the bottom of the ridge and skin those mules up to the top for unloading. The hill was so steep you had to walk down at an angle. We were given only rudimentary instructions on how to skin a mule. It wasn't easy, but we learned quickly.

A terribly excruciating part of that time in the Siegfried Line was having to load our dead comrades on the mules. We had to drape them over the mule like a bedroll, tie their hands to their feet on the other side so they wouldn't slide off, and take them back down to the bottom of the ridge. It was one of the most demoralizing and thankless duties I faced during the entire war—an experience I would always remember, and all the more emotional when you had known them personally.

Convoy to Counter the Bulge

December 23, 1944

On December 22, we were relieved by a company of the 179th Infantry of the 45th Division. Unbeknownst to the men in foxholes, the day after the Seventh Army had crossed into Germany, the Germans launched their major offensive in the heavily forested Ardennes region in Belgium, France and Luxembourg that would become known as the Battle of the Bulge. The whole Seventh Army had to cease its push into Germany, withdraw to more defensible terrain, and cover for Third Army troops pulled out and rushed north to hold and then counterattack against the German flank. We were part of General Eisenhower's historic shuffle of eighteen entire divisions on the battlefield to successfully stall and turn back the German penetration. In this shift of troops, the 103d Division was being sent west to cover the Third Army's right flank sector, while the 45th Division had been assigned a wider portion—what had previously been a two-division sector—of the Seventh Army's right flank.

Coming down off that hill in the Siegfried Line, we boarded trucks and rode seventy-five miles at night on treacherous two-lane roads with only blackout lights, averaging about fifteen miles per hour, northwest to the vicinity of Guenviller in Lorraine. Fortunately for the 103d Division, the sector we took over remained quiet for the two weeks we were there. Now spread thin over a wider stretch of the line, the Seventh Army stayed in a defensive holding pattern after the German attack had been stopped and the "bulge" eliminated. One of the

reasons for that was the Battle of the Bulge sucked up all the gasoline, ammunition, everything and all our supplies had to be hauled several hundred miles to the front. In part because we had to build up supplies, the Seventh Army didn't go back into Germany until mid-March.

After the war, some 103d veterans have claimed they were in the Battle of the Bulge. The German "Bulge" offensive had a reverberating effect all of the way through the Seventh Army to close up, and we had an important mission in supporting its containment. But we were nowhere near the "Bulge." The problem was that at the time, few of us knew where we were or the larger picture of what was going on.

Defensive Positions

December 24, 1944—January 13, 1945

On December 24, we had our first showers since leaving Marseilles and going on the line. My company commander and I were the last ones in the shower. Craddock said, I'll scrub your back if you scrub mine. (It would be February before we had a shower again.)

After showering and changing into clean clothes and underwear, we were out in what I called the company street of where we were quartered when Craddock called me over and asked me about my absence during our initial assault of the Siegfried Line. Springborn, my platoon sergeant, must have complained to him. My explanation that I had volunteered to get a flamethrower to carry in combat and it wasn't up to me to tell the corporal what we should be doing seemed good enough for him.

In the course of my answering one of his questions, Craddock posed another question. I immediately shifted to answering his second question. The second time I launched right into my response without saying "sir," he bellowed, "Rogers, don't you know you are supposed to say 'sir' when you address an officer?" I thought the world of him and understood that he treated me that way as part of good discipline and so didn't take offense. I have always felt

Captain Craddock was a great company commander in the Army. He knew his business. He was strict, but that was the essence of infantry, and he was fair.

In the Army Reserve after the war, I modeled my military demeanor after Craddock's. When I became commander of an Army Reserve engineer battalion, I insisted on strict discipline even though we were Reserve troops. Most reservists called each other—even officers—by their first name. In my unit, however, you addressed NCOs by their rank only and officers by their rank and last names only. Whatever you did afterward in the bar was okay. The fundamental discipline I employed in my Army Reserve career paid off. We were efficient and effective because I had everybody working.

After cleaning up, we departed by truck for Guenviller (Lorraine), where we spent Christmas. A beautiful and peaceful day!

Rearguard Action

January 21, 1945

After the Bulge was contained, the Germans cranked up their last major offensive on the Western Front—called Operation North Wind (*Nordwind*). On December 31, 1944, the Germans attacked the thinly stretched line of the Seventh Army. Fighting on three sides and running short of men and supplies, the Seventh Army was forced to withdraw to defensive positions further down in Alsace—down near Haguenau and Pfaffenhoffen—in a strategic “straightening of the line.”

My regiment was one of the last to withdraw from up along the German border. Charged with protecting the nighttime withdrawal of the battalion, Company G had to spread itself across the whole battalion sector to assure that our withdrawal went undetected by the enemy. For those of us who had to remain in place while all the other elements of the battalion pulled back, that night lasted a lifetime.

Along the seventeen-mile march route from Lembach, engineers were positioned at each bridge, which they blew after the covering force crossed to delay the advancing German forces. It wasn't long before the size of the engineer detachment equaled the covering force. A tank slid off the road into a ditch and had to be destroyed.

Carrying our weapons, ammo, and packs, we had to walk the entire distance in bitter cold, ice, and snow. Spent to begin with, the men slipped, slid, and fell down on the icy, hilly roads. After the engineers had blown several bridges between the Germans and us, we would stop for a few minutes before we moved on.

I was a squad leader, having just made buck sergeant the 1st of January. Near the end of the march route, some of the men said they had gone as far as they could go and were going to fall out. Only the prospect of being captured by the Germans kept them going. I ended up carrying three rifles for exhausted soldiers who said they would leave them behind. Physically spent, the best they could do was to get themselves out.

Transfer to the 45th Division

January 23, 1945

After being allowed to rest for a few hours, we got the order to dig defensive positions in a field with Pfaffenhoffen about a half-mile in back of us. As we were digging in, somebody yelled, "Rogers, get your gear and come to the CP!" Bill Hamm, a great friend of mine in 4th Platoon, and I were being sent someplace else. Both newly made sergeants, he was a machine gun squad leader, while I was a rifle squad leader.

In the farmhouse command post, they didn't know where we were going. Maybe you're going to train antiaircraft or artillery men to be infantrymen. It was all with encouragement that this was a good deal— that we might be through with combat.

No one suggested we were simply going to another unit on line. In a three-quarter ton truck with a half dozen men, we moved from battalion to regiment, then to another regimental

headquarters and finally down to a company. All we had done was move laterally from one regiment to another—from the 409th Infantry, 103d Division to the 157th Infantry of the 45th Division (the well-known Thunderbirds, cartoonist Bill Mauldin's unit)—a few miles away. While the German North Wind attack didn't succeed, the Seventh Army suffered heavy casualties in repulsing it. The 157th was being reconstituted with cadre from the 103d and other divisions. Every line company in the corps was assessed two NCOs. Four of us from the 103d were assigned to 3d Platoon, Company G.

It was about ten o'clock at night when we ended up in a farmhouse that served as company CP. The first sergeant and an officer lined the four of us up in a bedroom. I was the only NCO with a documented promotion date. When I went to sleep, I had been designated platoon sergeant and the other three had been made squad leaders. Late that night, however, a staff sergeant named Kirby arrived from the 3d Division and, outranking me, became the platoon sergeant, while I would serve as the platoon guide.

For many years, I have wondered when a unit is tasked to send men from here to there, right out of the line, what do they do? Would you as a company commander give up your best men for an unknown cause? It turned out that the 3d Division sent a screw-up and malingerer to get rid of him.

I know that Bill Hamm, the other NCO Craddock sent, was well respected and I thought I was too. Whether he was sending me because of that episode in the Siegfried Line or simply because I was a newly minted sergeant, I will never know. When I asked Craddock forty-five years later, he assured me he thought he was doing us a favor—but how could he tell me otherwise? And it doesn't really matter because I got sent and performed well over in the 45th.

Patrol and Outpost Duty

February 8—16, 1945

We spent about eight days in field training in three-foot-deep snow with green replacements to allow the newly assigned officers, NCOs, and men to get acquainted with each other. We then went back on line as the new 157th Infantry, now operating at full strength.

On February 7, we moved to the vicinity of Rothbach to well-defined defensive positions with us on one ridge about fifty feet above a little valley with a stream running through it and the Germans across the valley back in the woods. The 157th had relieved the 36th Engineer Combat Regiment, which had done a great job of digging in prepared positions and covering them with logs and earth, many large enough for four men.

I volunteered to take out a recon patrol on February 9th to find out where the Germans were and what they were doing. Eight of us crossed the valley and entered the woods, walking cautiously and stopping to listen. About three or four hundred yards into the woods, we observed four or five enemy soldiers on outpost maybe a hundred yards from where we were. Since we were told to only observe and report, we didn't go for prisoners. Our reward for volunteering was a one-day pass the following day to Luneville.

So, on my twentieth birthday, I went into Luneville with a friend who had gone on the patrol with me. That day 2d Battalion S-2 [Intelligence] sent out another Company G patrol that was ambushed only a hundred yards into the woods and the patrol leader killed. Again, I caught a lucky break. For the next week, our sector remained quiet.

Preparing for the Final Push

February 17—March 13, 1945

On February 17th, the 45th Division was taken off line and placed in Army reserve to prepare for the final offensive campaign to end the war. Company G/157 was trucked about seventy miles to Vallois, where we stayed until March 13. During this time, the troops rested, cleaned up, and practiced attack against fortified positions and river crossings in preparation for crossing the Rhine in assault boats.

On March 5th, three thousand men—the entire regiment—assembled on a hillside to observe a live-fire demonstration assault of a simulated pillbox on an adjacent hill put on by my platoon. We had been selected because our platoon commander, Lieutenant Jarvis Allen, had just graduated from OCS at Fort Benning in mid-January and so had the latest doctrine. He orchestrated the demonstration, while I led the demonstrating squad. I took the best men out of the platoon to make up a squad of twelve men, with me as squad leader, to stage the demonstration. Allen had Kirby, the platoon sergeant, do the narration with a microphone. Using virtually every weapon known to the infantry, including a bazooka, flamethrower, Bangalore Torpedoes, and beehive charges, the demonstration was so realistic and went so well that the regimental commander recommended a battlefield commission for Kirby, even though his only involvement had been narrating the exercise on the microphone!

While we were off line, there was plenty of opportunity to drink. Most soldiers in combat wouldn't touch the stuff if there was any chance of getting involved with the enemy. While some found enough wine to drink every night we were off line, I drank only at the regimental party to "celebrate" going back to combat. I slept it off on the steel bed of a "deuce and a half" [2-1/2 ton U.S. Army cargo truck] all the way back to our billets thirty-five bumpy miles away. No more alcohol for me until the war ended.

As we had been three weeks in Army reserve, we knew the situation was about to change. We would have three bad episodes of fighting before it all ended: the initial attack, breaching the Siegfried Line, and taking Aschaffenburg.

Fight on the Hill

March 15, 1945

On March 15, 1945 near the French-German border, the entire Seventh Army jumped off in a pre-dawn attack to breach the vaunted Siegfried Line and close to the Rhine River. The 45th Division was now on the left flank of the Seventh Army, with our left flank on the right flank of the Third Army.

The 2d Battalion attacked with companies E and F on line. Company G, the battalion reserve company, set out about a half hour behind the two lead companies. In single file, the men were at tactical interval, three-five yards apart—close enough to easily see the man ahead—in a column of platoons with the company commander leading the way. The platoons were in numerical order—1st, 2d, 3d, and 4th—followed by company headquarters personnel. Lieutenant Allen was at the head of our platoon, while I as platoon guide was at the end of the platoon, with the 4th Platoon—the weapons platoon—behind me. We were moving up a dirt road that roughly followed a contour line around a bald hill and across a little shrub- and tree-lined draw.

Suddenly, the line stopped. I walked up from the end of the 3d Platoon to find out what was holding the column up. When I got to the head of the 3d Platoon, I found Lieutenant Allen and Second Lieutenant Henry R. Dorobek, the 4th platoon commander, in a full-blown argument with an unarmed German soldier about ten yards uphill from our line of march. A German American fluent in German, Lieutenant Dorobek had come up and was acting as interpreter. They were buddies from OCS [Officer Candidate School] who came over on the same ship.

Now the German was captured, arguing with the two American lieutenants in German that he felt honor-bound to fight and they should release him and allow him to return to his foxhole. I started to get into the heated discussion, but thought better of it. Allen and Dorobek both outranked me so if they had a different view they would prevail. There was just enough

twilight to see the top of the hill was bald, but I didn't know where this German had come from. Where he walked in without his weapon, he had to have come from someplace close by.

I decided I better go back to my position at the end of my platoon because this could be a real problem. I turned around and went back along the line of men. Before I got back, however, the whole hilltop seemed to erupt with Germans firing at us. Apparently awakened by the heated conversation, they were firing at the point of the loud voices.

Presumably because the attack was initiated at night, without artillery preparation, the leading companies, E and F, and the reserve Company G lead platoons, 1st and 2d, along with the command section, had unknowingly walked right past the sleeping enemy on to the battalion's objective without firing a shot or knowing what had happened to the balance of the company when the column broke. I keep asking myself why that German soldier who had gotten up to relieve himself had come down fifty yards from his foxhole. I would have walked ten, twenty feet away from my foxhole and urinated right there.

Many times I have reflected about this serpentine line of men advancing in early morning darkness encountering this German soldier who was fifty yards from his position and hadn't brought his weapon with him—disappointed that the two lieutenants fell into arguing with the German. What happened on that hill that early morning was all because some German soldier had to go relieve himself and felt that he had the right to fight "honorably." What could you have done if you realized what was going on—what would you have done to quiet him? Just shoved a gun in his stomach and told him to shut up? Shooting him would have woken up more Germans. If I had a bayonet, I could have stuck it in him or maybe hit him over the head with a rifle. But thinking about it many times after the fact doesn't count because in that instance I just turned around and went back.

All hell broke loose around 3d Platoon. The Germans were very close—most only fifty to seventy yards away—and were dug in to good defensive positions. In the dark, we could see the muzzle blasts from their weapons. When the Germans started firing, I yelled instructions for everybody to take up positions along the road and fire back at the enemy. Take some kind of cover, behind something, don't just stand up exposed and fire. Fortunately, the road running

laterally around the hill was cut into the hillside and so the uphill side acted as a revetment as we fired back. I only had one platoon—still that was almost forty men.

Early on Lieutenant Allen got shot in the stomach. I got the medic, Pfc. Pablo S. Diaz to see to him. Leaving him lying off the road with a medic, I continued to organize our people to return fire. It was still dark. I checked to see how the lieutenant was doing and the medic told me. He would have easily survived if we had gotten him to the aid station. Yet, the other lieutenant kept hovering over him, not seeming interested in doing anything except seeing how his buddy was. In spite of his rank and training, he took no part in the overall tactical issue. I don't know what he thought he could do to help Lieutenant Allen live.

As the medic and Lieutenant Dorobek tended to my lieutenant, a Panzerfaust rocket² dropped in within ten, fifteen feet of where they were grouped. The blast caught and killed them all. It was chance—I presume the Germans had fired it at us like a mortar.

Having gotten my men in position, I went looking for the executive officer of the company headquarters section, which was primarily the runners and the commo section—the part of headquarters that moves with the company in a tactical situation. I found him in a German dugout about fifty yards down the hill from us. Here we had two platoons without platoon commanders. Where he was a lieutenant and the ranking officer, I asked him whether he was going to take charge. He responded “I'm an administrative officer, not a fighting officer”—meaning he wasn't going to get involved with the firefight. Well, I didn't question him at all. A history professor from the University of North Carolina, he was a typical professor, more of a learned than an action kind of guy. While he should have taken over, I wasn't going to argue about it. As both Allen and Dorobek had been killed and I had been advised that company headquarters was “not organized to fight,” someone had to step up and fill in the gap—and quite frankly, I felt I could handle it. All I needed was his kiss-off that he wasn't going to get involved.

I just turned around and headed back up to continue to organize and direct the defense by 3d Platoon and the weapons platoon's machine gun section. I then located the mortar section

² A hand-held, single-shot World War II German infantry antitank weapon designed for direct fire.

leader and told him to take the mortars down the hill as far as necessary to lob 60-mm rounds in on top of the hill.

We continued to exchange fire with the Germans. As I continued to direct the men, I fired a few shots myself, mainly to figure out what was going on up there. I kept reminding myself that my job wasn't to get in the firefight myself, but to lead and make sure the men fought effectively. Initially, we couldn't see the Germans firing from their dug-in positions—we just fired at the location of the flash of their weapons fire. As early morning first light silhouetted them, however, our fire became more effective. They were spread out, maybe thirty of them. With the sun rising behind them, we could easily pick them off. Suddenly there was no more firing from the hilltop. The surviving enemy had taken off, leaving six or eight dead behind.

Having chased them off, we were ready to resume our forward movement. I spoke with 2d Battalion headquarters on a field telephone in the custody of the company executive officer. I gave our location, but said I didn't know where to go—I had no map and hadn't been briefed as to the company objective or where anybody was. I felt the best course was to stay in place until they sent somebody up to lead us out. All hell was breaking loose around us—very little small-arms fire, but a lot of artillery. Later our sector became quiet, although in the distance you could hear sounds of skirmishes on both sides of our position.

After two or three hours of waiting, we saw a massed company of infantry moving toward our position from the valley behind us. I had never seen an entire company all massed together like that in a tactical situation. These guys were all bunched up like they were in a parade.

I took one of my men and went to meet the advancing column. About two hundred yards from our position, I reported to the commanding officer and saluted him. I could tell he was in charge because he was carrying a non-military shotgun, the barrel down with the stock up over his shoulder. He advised me that he was Lieutenant Colonel Sparks, commander of the 3d Battalion, 157th Infantry, and, as ordered by regimental headquarters, he was leading one of his companies in the search and support of the missing eighty plus men of Company G, 2d Battalion. He had earned a reputation for his frontline leadership. (I would get to know him

personally in 1980.) He instructed me to assemble my men and fall in behind his unit; he would lead us to the rest of Company G and the 2d Battalion objective.

At the 2d Battalion objective, I reported to the Company G commander, Captain Michael Rusnov. I wasn't asked and didn't volunteer what had happened. Why didn't I inquire about it, especially in Munich after the war ended and I had time on my hands? Why didn't I ask people I knew back in the States? Now I'm left with questions I never asked. After the war, I went back to that hillside up in Lorraine province, to within a few feet of where the lieutenants were killed by the Panzerfaust.

I didn't fully appreciate until much later in life what I had done in the fight on the hill—the two lieutenants having been killed, I had taken command of the two platoons and organized a quick defense in a situation that could have degenerated into a rout, where the men could have taken off. Instead, the two platoons prevailed, driving the Germans off. When the war ended, we went back to school and pursued careers. I didn't really think about what I did in World War II for another twenty years. Only in the last few years did it occur to me that I was never recognized or even thanked for rallying the two platoons.

I understand why—because two days later the company commander, Captain Rusnov, was killed. And the new company CO came in having no connection with that day.

Siegfried Line Breakthrough

March 19, 1945

The first day's casualties were four killed, including the two lieutenants and the medic, and nine wounded. The company continued in the attack for the next three days, meeting only fleeting resistance and covering twelve miles on foot. Our losses were four wounded, one who died after being evacuated. We moved into Germany about five miles through Seyweiler and Böckweiler to Hengstbach and closed to the Siegfried Line, about two miles north of the town on the morning of March 19. The Germans had dug a deep tank trap—fifteen feet deep and

thirty feet wide across the battalion's front that kept our tank destroyers from getting into position for direct fire on the pillboxes. A tank dozer was brought in to build a causeway across the trap that allowed the tank destroyers to move up.

Immediately to our front was a large grove of old oak trees, each with a limb spread of over a hundred feet. With the stand of trees providing good cover, the tank destroyers moved forward to the edge of the grove to fire on the pillboxes two-three hundred yards to the front. We foot soldiers moved forward as well. When the tank destroyers engaged the pillboxes, the Germans cut loose with an intense concentration of retaliatory artillery and mortar fire on the grove of trees. They were concentrating on the tank destroyers that were supporting us. But because we were comingled with them, we were getting the effects of the shelling. The trees that provided cover for the tank destroyers proved deadly for us. Many of these rounds exploded in the tree canopy, showering us with deadly steel fragments and splintered wood. The deep trenches that the Germans had dug in the oak grove would have protected us from the heavy shelling we were receiving had it not been for the tree bursts.

With all hell was breaking loose, I climbed out of the trench to advise the company commander to move the men out in the open away from the tree bursts and let the tank destroyers take care of the pillboxes. At this point, we were simply onlookers. We weren't doing anything. There was no tactical reason for us to be here suffering casualties from all the tree bursts. Move away from the grove of trees. Even just lying on the ground out in the open, we wouldn't take as many casualties.

Just as I got near to where Captain Rusnov was, only forty-fifty feet away, close enough for me to pick him out, there was a tree burst right over him. I stopped. Once that happened, there wasn't anything I could do.

With the company commander dead and not knowing who was going to take over the company, I went back to the trench where I had been—it seemed the safest place. Unable to find the man I had been next to, I suddenly realized that a shell had landed in the trench and blown him to bits. Sure enough, he was listed as killed that day.

With all the shelling going on, getting up out of the trench to see Captain Rusnov was a risky thing to do. On the other hand, if I had stayed where I was, I would have been killed by

that shell that obliterated the guy who had been next to me. So, it was another situation where I took a riskier option that happened to save my life. It certainly brought home that a large part of survival in combat was totally random. There was no rhyme or reason most of the time to who got hit.

Meanwhile, the 90-mm guns on the new M36 tank destroyers were pulverizing the pillboxes with one or two hits, even though they were made of six- to eight-foot thick reinforced concrete. Pretty soon the shelling stopped and another strange thing happened. The surviving occupants started emerging with white flags and running with their hands up all the way to our positions. When I realized what was happening, I brought a lot of the guys out to form a semicircle on the edge of the grove. When the Germans approached to within about twenty yards of us, several dropped to their knees, with raised hands clasped in prayer, pleading that we not kill them. That was unusual. We weren't going to kill anybody unless we had to. We later found out that this unit may have murdered American POWs during the Battle of the Bulge and may have feared we would kill them if we linked them to the massacre. Had I known then what they may have done to American prisoners, I don't think I would have done anything other than what I did—simply tell them to surrender and take their weapons. Once I took or was presented with a German prisoner, I didn't care what he had done. I was only too glad he had surrendered, send him to the rear, and let's go. I didn't treat him favorably or mistreat him.

Though our company had broken through the Siegfried Line, with the monumental assistance of the tank destroyers, the cost was dear. We spent that night in one of the eight pillboxes we had captured, with only sixteen of the thirty-nine men I had started out with that morning. We had suffered four killed, including the captain. Of the twenty-three wounded, most received first aid for slight wounds and returned to duty the next day. Pulling down my pants that night to find out what was the matter with my thigh, I was startled to find my leg covered with blood all the way down into my boot. That scared me—I didn't know what was going on. Cleaning it up myself, I found I had been slightly wounded by shrapnel in my thigh and was okay.

The following day, March 20, First Lieutenant Peter Doherty was assigned as the CO. We moved about ten miles to Kirrburg, where after a brief firefight, the town surrendered. The 2d Battalion took over two thousand prisoners without suffering any casualties.

After the Siegfried Line had been breached, several armored divisions led the drive to the Rhine and most of the infantry divisions just followed at a leisurely pace clearing towns of German soldiers. From Kirrburg, it took us three days to get to the Rhine River by shuttle marching, where a company of men alternately walked while another company rode. Without enough trucks to transport all the men at one time, shuttle marching was the most efficient technique to move the regiment as we played catch-up.

Two days after I had been wounded, I went to the aid station. They examined my wound and concluded it was "hot shrapnel" so there was no danger of infection. The doc told me they weren't going to operate to remove it. I probably still have it in me. When he said I qualified for a Purple Heart, I told him that I didn't want it because I didn't feel I had been wounded badly enough to have earned it. "I think you get points toward getting discharged from the Army. You better think about that," he advised. On that basis, I took it.

On March 26th, Company G moved to the Rhine River and crossed in assault boats without opposition. On the far bank, we moved out again on foot. We cleared several towns as we went and took numerous prisoners. We then started shuttle-marching. At Kleinzimmern, we liberated several thousand forced laborers and spent the night. The next morning we boarded trucks and drove to the banks of the Main River opposite Aschaffenburg, detrucked and crossed over the river on a railway bridge that had been decked over with timbers so that wheeled vehicles could use it.

The Battle of Aschaffenburg

March 28 – April 3, 1945

Having reached the outskirts of Aschaffenburg, what had been rather relaxed movement through the German homeland, without anyone getting hurt along the way, suddenly erupted into serious combat. After crossing the Main River, Company G was subjected to heavy mortar fire, sustaining three casualties, one of whom later died. We spent the night digging in between the town and the river. My platoon guarded the bridge and river.

What we didn't know was that this was the beginning of our involvement in the ten-day Battle of Aschaffenburg, a totally unnecessary effort resulting in great cost of lives on both sides and the virtual destruction of the city. Patton's Third Army had bypassed Aschaffenburg by decking over the railroad bridge and sending armored columns east and south to destroy the enemy's ability to fight. I don't understand why we didn't just surround the city and let them starve until they surrendered. In any case, the 157th Infantry Regiment was given the mission to capture the city.

Aschaffenburg was the second most intense fighting I experienced. It took the regiment, with the corps artillery and all the Seventh Army's air support, six days to finally subdue the fanatics defending the city. Much of it was house to house, hour by hour every day. In the fierce house-to-house combat, we used point-blank artillery fire to blast through buildings. The fighting was at close quarters, with GIs and Germans occupying houses close together, sometimes less than forty feet apart—yelling at each other, the GIs calling on the Germans to surrender and the Germans yelling back in defiance. In my sector, we negotiated for an hour with the German defenders to get one of our men who had been hit and was lying in the street. They finally let a medic go out and bring him in.

On March 30, Company G attacked into Schweinheim, a suburb of Aschaffenburg. Intense small-arms fire held our first day's gains to one city block. Under intense enemy fire of all kinds, we advanced only three blocks the next day. Continuing the attack on April 1st—Easter Sunday—we moved forward one city block before the attack was halted under orders in

mid-afternoon. When a surrender ultimatum sent to the German commander went unanswered, our artillery pounded the city and planes came in to dive bomb and strafe again and again.

On about the third day Company G was committed, the battalion commander came up to observe the movement of his men. In one of the houses on high ground, I took him up to an attic window that offered an unobstructed view of the lower city. As the major was surveying the city, I was standing next to him surveying the street below. I spied a German soldier coming out of a basement door. As he started down the street, I pushed the major aside and put my weapon up there and fired at the German. All I did was chase him off. In 2002, I went back to that house and even found the door the German had emerged from onto the street.

On April 2, we continued the attack into Aschaffenburg, making progress, but with the Germans resisting right down to a schoolhouse near the center of town. Not encountering any resistance, we moved directly down the street to the badly damaged schoolhouse. As I reflect back, the Germans holed up in there could have shot at us in our exposed position in the street. Having seen no enemy presence, our platoon attempted to clear the schoolhouse from the front. Running over a big pile of rubble to move in on the building, I tripped and fell flat on my face. My helmet came off and I dropped my rifle—stunned for a moment. Following me, Second Lieutenant Charles L. Banfield (who had replaced Lieutenant Allen) and his runner, Pvt. Theodore Lainweber, kept going. When they got down on the other side, they were cut down by a machine gun. The only reason I wasn't killed was I had stumbled trying to charge up the mound of shattered brick.

After the lieutenant and his runner were killed, I stopped everybody and we pulled back and waited. My company commander, Lieutenant Doherty, asked me to go find Kirby, the platoon sergeant. I sent people out and looked around myself. When Doherty came back in fifteen-twenty minutes, I reported we couldn't find him. He said, "All right, Rogers, you come. You're going to be the acting platoon sergeant." I followed him into the nave of a large church across the street from the German-occupied schoolhouse. Lo and behold, the chain of command was conferring. We stood in a tight circle, five of us, with the division commander, General Robert Frederick, on my left. Next to him was regimental commander Colonel Walter O'Brien, then battalion commander Major Gus H. Heilman, and company commander Peter Doherty,

just to the right of me. It was most unusual that the five echelon commanders from platoon to division were together in one place less than a hundred yards from the enemy, who had just killed two members of 3d Platoon.

The result of this meeting was, of course, one-sided: I was ordered to lead my platoon in a second attack of the schoolhouse as soon as possible. I asked if I could wait until the tanks arrived—presumably within ten minutes, for we could hear them. The answer was “No! We want you to go now.” They directed me to come through the church and attack the schoolhouse from the back side.

I sent one squad to the second floor of the school that was part of the church we were in, directly across the street from the German-occupied schoolhouse. From that position, the squad could cover the advance of the two other squads to the windows of what appeared to be a classroom in the basement facing our position. The street was about fifty feet wide, including sidewalks on both sides. From a three-foot-high retaining wall at the edge of the sidewalk to the schoolhouse windows was another fifty feet.

Once the covering squad was in place, the two other squads and I moved across the street and took up positions behind the retaining wall. I then accompanied Sergeant Eugene C. Yackel’s squad up to the school building itself and observed that the lower-level classroom was empty. I went through a ground-level window into the room and motioned Yackel’s squad to follow me. Then I signaled Siriani’s squad, behind the retaining wall, to come into the building, and Blackmon’s squad to move from the church to the retaining wall.

A couple of Yackel’s men and I quickly reconnoitered the upper floors and found them unoccupied. I figured the Germans must have been in another part of the basement from where we entered and were probably ready to surrender, since they hadn’t resisted our entry.

I moved down a hallway off the classroom. Upon reaching a T-intersection at the far end of the hall, I hollered into the dark for them to come out one at a time with their hands up and no weapons. To my surprise, back in there were over eighty German soldiers and twenty to thirty civilians, mostly women and children. The place smelled like they must have been holed up down there for some time. I directed them out through the room we had first entered. In the

classroom, my men checked for concealed weapons. As the prisoners filed out of the building, my men separated out the soldiers and collected them in a bomb crater.

As one soldier passed me, he said in perfect English, "I'm a sergeant major and the man behind me is a major, the commanding officer. He wants to talk to your commanding officer. He won't speak to you." Had I taken offense, I could have shot him on the spot. I simply took them both out and told three men to take them to Lieutenant Doherty.

Until 1985, I believed that the major we captured in the schoolhouse was Major Emil Lamberth, the combat commander who led the defense of Aschaffenburg. I learned that Lieutenant Colonel Sparks had accepted Lamberth's surrender and taken him to two remaining strongpoints to direct their surrender. Therefore, the major and staff we captured were nobody special—just so many German prisoners.

Rumor had it that instead of putting the major we captured in the prisoner pool, Lieutenant Doherty took him around the other side of the building and shot him. Even though we became good friends after the war, I never asked Pete about it because I didn't want to know.

After we captured the schoolhouse, there was a lull. Where we had been fighting for days to take the city, I let my guys wander—go "sightseeing," as I called it. In front of a wine shop in the center of town, Major Lamberth had hung a decorated infantry lieutenant for desertion. The officer's body was left hanging as a warning to others.³ One of my platoon members, Charles Kuecks, reached up with his knife and cut him down at the behest of several weeping women. Having wanted a picture of the lieutenant hanging, a *Time Magazine* photographer berated Charlie for his un-Timely act! When I returned to Aschaffenburg in 2005, they had just installed a commemorative plaque in the pavement at the site where the lieutenant was executed for desertion.

That day Company G captured five hundred prisoners in all. Finishing mopping up the next day, the company captured another hundred prisoners.

³ Quentin W. Schillare, "Battle of Aschaffenburg: an example of late World War II urban combat in Europe" (Master's thesis, Fort Leavenworth, KS : U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1989), 128, 144-145.

During my 2005 visit to Aschaffenburg, I looked around, but was unable to locate the schoolhouse where we captured all the people or the church where I reported to the general, colonel, and battalion commander. Their preoccupation with taking the schoolhouse was one of the strangest situations I encountered during the war. Did the general come to my location to personally direct the second attack of the schoolhouse because it was thought to house the last of the German garrison? Then, the major we captured wasn't the major in command of the city's defense, after all.

The German decision to defend Aschaffenburg to the end was a terrible waste, since the Third and Seventh armies were a hundred fifty miles further into Germany than we were by April 3, the day Major Lamberth surrendered his command to Sparks. That was how fast the front was moving. Seven days of artillery shelling and aerial bombardment reduced seventy percent of the city to rubble. German military casualties were estimated at 1,600 killed or wounded and 3,500 POWs. The estimated 3,500 civilians who had remained in the city during the battle also paid a terrible toll. Ordered to hold out to the last man, the city's defenders and civilians were sacrificed needlessly because the front had already passed them by.

The 157th suffered about two hundred casualties, with over fifty men killed. While Company G was not committed for the entire battle, six of our men were killed—including my platoon commander killed right in front of me—and fourteen wounded. It was the regiment's last major battle of the war.

Within a couple of weeks, I had lost two platoon commanders. Lieutenant Allen, who orchestrated the demonstration, was killed on the hill in our approach to the Siegfried Line. First he got a rifle bullet in his stomach and then a Panzerfaust dropped in close by and killed him, his buddy, and the medic treating him. The next platoon commander assigned, Lieutenant Banfield, was killed in attacking the schoolhouse in Aschaffenburg.

On April 4th, I was promoted to platoon sergeant of 3d Platoon, Company G. Though platoon sergeant was normally second-in-command to a lieutenant as platoon commander, I was also acting platoon commander of 3d Platoon for the rest of the war in Europe. Right after Aschaffenburg, I was recommended for a battlefield commission to second lieutenant, but was not given the promotion because SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force]

shut off all direct commissions, since there were too many lieutenants already in the pipeline to the ETO [European Theater of Operations].

Frightened *Fräulein* in the Hallway

April 14, 1945

After Aschaffenburg, we spent the next several days catching up to units moving south toward Nuremburg. There was no specific action on our part, no real combat or any casualties. In our push toward Nuremburg, we occupied and spent the night in a succession of German towns. We stayed three days in Bundorf, where we received showers and clean uniforms, the first of either since leaving Vallois a month earlier. The company left Bundorf, forded the Main River in “Ducks” [six-wheel-drive amphibious trucks], and moved to Lohr for the night.

In the final weeks of the war, we had incidents but they were all fleeting. For the first time since Aschaffenburg, Company G went into attack mode on April 13 and occupied Schammelsdorf that night, having taken several prisoners along the way. As we prepared to spend the night, Lieutenant Doherty instructed me to provide flank protection on the eastbound road at the town’s outskirts—a potential entry point if we were attacked at night. I sent Sergeant Eugene King’s squad. Feeling too secure, I guess, I failed to specify exactly where to go, as I typically would do.

The next morning when we were getting ready to leave, King’s squad hadn’t reported back to the platoon. With everybody bustling to get saddled up [Army term for getting on our packs, web belts, ammo, weapons, and helmets] and ready to go, I went looking for him—expecting to find him in the last house on the edge of town, where the road ran out into open countryside. Finding no trace of King or his squad, I walked out to a farmhouse about a hundred yards beyond the edge of town. At this time, an entire battalion was moving east on the road in tactical formation. I was carrying only a pistol, having left my rifle or carbine—whichever I was carrying at the time—and my pack. The farmhouse was about fifty yards from

the road. Without thinking twice, I just walked up and went in the front door. In the hallway, there were four doors, two on each side, with the first two about ten feet inside and two more about twenty feet inside. My sudden appearance startled a German girl standing in the hallway, and I could tell by the horror-struck expression on her face she had never seen an American GI before.

Reflexively, she glanced at the first door on my right. Realizing something was up, I pulled my pistol and quickly opened the door. A German, bare to the waist, was standing in front of a mirror shaving. Without a word, he put up his hands when he saw my pistol. But like the girl glancing at this door, he was now looking at the door to the next room. So I motioned him where to stand while I opened that door and, sure enough, here were two more German soldiers shaving and washing. They had no weapons, at least not obvious, and so I motioned them to come out. Now I had three German soldiers. Alone with only a pistol, I motioned for the girl and the three soldiers to come outside with me. Out in front of the house, I called to the troops moving up on the road to send a detail over to finish shaking down the house and take the POWs. Before I left, they found five more German soldiers in the house, who quickly surrendered. All armed, they had been getting up, without even realizing that we had troops moving up the road out in front. It was the only time I made use of a pistol.

When I got back to my platoon, King's squad had finally shown up. His explanation was that he believed setting up in the second house from the edge of town provided better protection. Misunderstandings and other communications problems were not unusual even at the small-unit level.

It was at Schammelsdorf that we learned of President Roosevelt's death. While the news was upsetting to us, we knew his death would have no effect on a war that was near its end—for we were only twenty miles from Nuremburg.

Fritz Kuhn's Daughter

April 15, 1945

The company resumed the attack southwest of Lauf on April 15. That day we moved into a town where a German horse-drawn artillery unit had been shot up on the main street. Dead horses lay everywhere, along with a few German soldiers. I found an English saddle I wanted to keep as a souvenir. I asked the company jeep driver, Nick Klop, if he would carry it for me for a couple of days until I could give it to the supply sergeant to keep for me. As we were tying the saddle on the quarter-ton trailer, an attractive German girl walked by. Nick and I bantered between ourselves about her being a "nice-looking girl." Just after passing us by, she turned her head and said, "And I speak good American"—and just kept on walking. She indeed spoke English with an American rather than British accent.

It turned out that my platoon was temporarily quartered in the house where she lived with her mother and mother's sister. After we acknowledged having just met in the street, she asked if I was the unit commander. When I replied yes, she said she had a problem with my men—they had taken all the silverware out of the dining room buffet. I looked in and, sure enough, it was bare. She said she hadn't thought American soldiers would loot like that and, if so, she would be very disappointed. I was surprised that this German girl was so well spoken and dispassionate in making her case.

After telling her to go in the kitchen with her mother, I simply announced to my men that whoever had taken the silverware to put it back in the drawer. I would leave the room. I didn't care who took it, but I wanted it returned. Ten minutes later it was all back and we started talking with her.

She made a guessing game of who she was. After half a dozen names were thrown out, one guy from New York guessed and she confirmed she was the daughter of Fritz Kuhn, head of the pro-Nazi German-American Bund in the late 1930s. After Germany and America went to war in December 1941, he was held as an enemy agent.

While expressing great respect for Americans and their soldiers, she was sure the Germans would counterattack from their National Redoubt in the Austrian Alps and throw us out! At this point, we were well over a hundred miles east of the Rhine River and closing in on Nuremburg, the unofficial capital of Nazi Germany,

Though we would be gone in a couple of hours, I foolishly made a few romantic overtures about how I would try to come back and see her—to which she seemed amenable. But it was idle to think that could happen. Understand it had been six months since we had talked to a woman in English.

Several days later *Stars and Stripes* came out with a front-page article crediting Captain So-and-so, Headquarters Company commander of the 2d Battalion of the 157th Infantry with capturing Fritz Kuhn's wife and twenty-one-year-old daughter Waldtraut. I never reported to anybody that I had met her and learned who she was. To me, there wasn't any honor in capturing them. I hadn't thought she was a military objective in any sense of the term and that her capture would mean any more than apprehending any ordinary German civilian.⁴

Fall of Nuremburg

April 16—20, 1945

The morning after the 3d Platoon had stumbled on Fritz Kuhn's daughter, the company moved by truck to Lauf and attacked the town, only to be greeted by thousands of cheering liberated eastern European forced laborers. We then moved east along the Autobahn to a point northeast of Nuremburg under a heavy artillery barrage.

At dusk, my platoon was attached to a platoon of tank destroyers and given the mission to set up a roadblock on the Autobahn running easterly from the center of Nuremburg—the likely escape route for Germans not wanting to fight. With half a dozen men riding on each tank

⁴ News media back home reported that, during the 45th Division's advance toward Nuremburg, Fritz Kuhn's wife and daughter had been arrested for further questioning. They had been living comfortably on funds from the Nazi Party, but, according to his wife, received no other special consideration.

destroyer, we drove south five miles to a grade-separated crossing where the east-west Autobahn passed over the north-south one—similar to the U.S. system of interstate highways, but twenty years before our system was built.

With the support of the tank destroyers, my platoon established a roadblock on the east-west road to stop all traffic from Nuremburg just before the bridge over the north-south road. It was pitch black by the time the tank destroyers and men with machine guns and bazookas were in position facing west toward the city center and just in time for our first quarry: a German staff car with two generals. From then until daylight, we stopped about forty vehicles and took over a hundred fifty POWs, mostly officers and higher ranked NCOs, trying to flee the city. As the infantry commander at the roadblock, daylight couldn't come soon enough because we were having trouble guarding all the prisoners in the dark. We kept them under the bridge until our relief came shortly after daybreak. While the situation had a high potential for a serious firefight, we ended up having to fire only a few warning shots. The ease with which we amassed so many prisoners lightened our mood and even instilled a sense of levity among the men.

While it took us three days to capture Nuremberg, we didn't apply a whole lot of pressure and the Germans didn't mount a determined defense. Both sides, I think, realized it was the end of the war and let's not lose too many people in the process. Nobody wanted to get hurt. My company didn't have any killed in Nuremberg, but suffered three wounded.

Encountering sporadic small-arms fire from small groups of Germans along the way, but little serious combat, we reached the center of Nuremberg the third day. Then it was all over. When the noise of battle stopped, everything went quiet, right in the middle of the day. About an hour after the lull set in, a cry went up announcing the find of a cold storage warehouse full of frozen food only a hundred yards from where we had been when the firing stopped. It was unbelievable that a six-story cold storage warehouse full of frozen foods—from ice cream to strawberries, to vegetables, to every conceivable kind of meat—had remained intact, with its freezer equipment still functioning, in the midst of a sea of totally and substantially destroyed buildings, with German civilians in this and other cities going hungry. We had had only Army field rations for six weeks, and with little food in the areas we had been

through, our opportunities to eat had been limited. We streamed in there and, like kids in a candy shop, started raiding the place. After I gorged myself on strawberries and ice cream, the regimental MPs appeared from nowhere and began chasing us out. On the way out, I grabbed two twenty-plus pound turkeys.

Now if I could only find someone to cook them. I gave one to my runner to carry. Our separate companies assembled and our company commander told us that we were going to move on foot a mile or so to an area that was relatively undamaged to spend the night. When we came upon a group of undamaged buildings, he told us to find a building to bunk in. For my platoon, I chose a five-story apartment building, with several units occupied by women and small children—but no men. So only five or six guys stayed in each apartment. As I climbed the stairs, I was looking for someone to prepare the turkeys for the next morning. I wasn't going to force anybody to do it. It was now late afternoon. The woman on the top floor agreed to cook one of the turkeys with meager trimmings, mostly potatoes and cabbage, to be ready at seven the next morning in exchange for the other turkey. She did a great job. Just as the whole platoon sat down to eat, the order came down to move out at seven fifteen. We saddled up and then assembled in the street carrying our food. It was an excellent meal, our first cooked meal in six weeks and the only turkey dinner I ever had for breakfast.

We left Nuremburg on the 21st, traveling by truck and occasionally attacking on foot, moving southerly through a series of towns against little opposition. We took numerous prisoners during this period and suffered no casualties. Covering fifty miles in five days, we reached the village of Rennertshofen, just north of the Danube River, on April 25th. At this point, we had to wait for assault boats to be brought up to cross the Danube, as there were no intact bridges in our sector.

While preparing to cross the Danube on the 26th, we witnessed a terrifying event—even for combat infantrymen! A squadron of B-17 Flying Fortresses was flying way overhead, probably going to Munich, and we were cheering them on when in an instant, a German Me-262 jet fighter came across the sky and in one pass shot down three of the B-17s! Two of them went into flat spins and no one escaped. The third one went down with smoke pouring out, but most of the crew managed to parachute to safety.

Crossing the Danube

April 26, 1945

Having transferred from the 103d, I witnessed a big difference in discipline between the 103d and the 45th, where, in my mind, the sharp, crisp discipline I had been schooled in paid off not just incident to incident but across the board. In the 103d, everybody seemed to be resolved to obeying orders, no matter how difficult or dangerous they might be—where the slack discipline in the 45th was a problem for me at times. Too much time on line, too many “battle-happy” people—my term for being very loose. Having taken part in beachhead invasions of Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, and southern France, the 45th Division had been on line longer than most American divisions. So, the actual fighting elements of the division had turned over several times.

Late in the war, I had to deal with kinds of people I had never encountered before. When we reached the Rhine, I had two guys assigned to my platoon who I assumed had been wounded and come back from the hospital—which frequently happened. The next thing I knew they had disappeared and I had to have men go out and find them. It turned out they hadn't been wounded and returned to duty, but had been in the stockade for desertion. I was upset that they would send two deserters to me without alerting me that they needed watching. They were mortally scared and couldn't fight. I had to turn them back over to the first sergeant because I couldn't handle them.

This kind of situation troubled me. On April 26, the company moved up to the bank of the Danube River. As I led my platoon to where we would board assault boats to cross the river, we could hear a lot of machine gun firing from the far shore, but nowhere near us and therefore not a concern for me. Moving parallel to the river, we had to cross a gap in the dike that contained the river from the farmlands around. First in line was a replacement who had been with me only a few days. Thinking the opening was exposed to machine gun fire and that he was going to be shot, he refused to cross. I was standing out in an exposed spot, signaling there wasn't any danger. I had to threaten to shoot him if he didn't cross. That was the only time I

ever had to resort to that means. I didn't have any other way that would make him go. He was the first of about twenty-five guys, and if he hadn't crossed, I wouldn't have been able to get the whole platoon to move from one side to the other.

One time I had to admonish some of my men for mistreating a prisoner. On another occasion, I stopped a man in the act of cutting the finger off a dead German to get a ring—not only because what he was doing violated the standards of conduct expected of American military, but also from a humanitarian perspective. So, when a video was recently posted showing some U.S. Marines urinating on dead Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, I wrote a letter to the *Boston Globe* and my local newspaper condemning their behavior. Where desecrating bodies was a crime under U.S. military law and the Geneva conventions, what the Marines did reflected a lack of discipline.

Liberation of Dachau

April 29, 1945

In the final days of the war in Europe, the primary objective of the 45th Infantry Division was Munich, one of Germany's largest cities. We were not briefed as to what to expect as we approached Dachau. At dusk on April 28th, my company commander, Peter Doherty, and three platoon commanders were on a hill looking south. We were deciding whether to sleep the night in the woods or to "take" the next village and sleep inside. He had been told there was a concentration camp in the town of Dachau, about fifteen miles away, but we would be east of the camp. I asked, "What's a concentration camp?" He naïvely replied, "Where they keep political prisoners and others who don't agree with Hitler." We wound up taking the next village just before nightfall.

When the lead elements of the 157th jumped off on the following morning, the Dachau concentration camp was not in any unit's sights. With companies K and L on tanks and trucks, the 3d Battalion was leading the regiment's thrust toward Munich. At ten thirty that morning,

3d Battalion commander Felix Sparks received by radio an order from 157th headquarters to move to the concentration camp near the town of Dachau to secure and control it. Sparks was with his reserve Company I, five or six miles north of the camp.

Much has been written about what happened inside the Dachau concentration camp during the liberation process, which involved the 3d Battalion and I Company, and later the same day, C Company in support of the 3d Battalion. Not present at the camp that first day of liberation, I can't shed personal light on all the ensuing contention about who liberated the camp first—the 42nd Division or the 45th—or the extent of Dachau liberation reprisals against German soldiers. I have, however, talked to many men of the 45th Division, including Sparks, who took part in liberating the camp. On the siding at the back gate, the GIs stumbled upon the infamous "Train from Hell," filled with dead bodies. An overpowering experience for the men of Company I, some lost their composure and started killing any German camp guard or German POW in sight. Now-liberated inmates also killed a number of captured German soldiers as well as *Kapo* prisoner-guards. Sparks wrote about the incident, including his intervention to stop the killing.

Recognizing that he needed help, Sparks contacted 157th Infantry headquarters for assistance. In hindsight, an entire battalion of six hundred men should have been given the mission of liberating Dachau rather than one company of one hundred and fifty men.



On April 29, the 2d Battalion, with Company G on the right, was assigned the sector east of the Dachau concentration camp. Several hundred yards away from the camp, my thirty-five-plus men in 3d Platoon were to clear an area where there were houses on one side of a street and a canal on the other side with a high wall along the canal. (Many years later I walked the area with Hugh Foster.) In a dark basement, I was startled by a man wearing a black-and-gray-striped prison uniform. He didn't speak English or respond to my German. But when I identified myself as an American soldier, he embraced and kissed me! My dismay quickly faded when I saw how gloriously happy he was to be liberated.

Of course, we were armed and they, now two men wearing strange prison garb, were not, and I relaxed when I gathered that they had been Dutch prisoners who had escaped from the concentration camp the night before and were hiding in the houses we were assigned to clear out. Prisoners of the Germans, I readily accepted them as friends and allies. I understood why he was overjoyed, euphoric. At long last, the war was over for them. He gave me his knife as a gift—the European equivalent of an American switchblade knife. I value that knife as one of my most prized World War II souvenirs.

I let them stay in the house. I had not been given any instructions as to disposition of escaped prisoners of the Germans that we might encounter. Though we didn't find any Germans, we encountered fifteen-twenty escaped inmates that day in otherwise unoccupied German homes. I certainly wasn't going to take them into custody. So I just left them where they were, without any attempt to give instructions, because we had no common language except the meaning of freedom.

We continued south to the east-west canal, where I had been told to wait for further orders. While I was looking around for houses for the thirty-five or so of us to find food and catch some sleep, Company G suffered its last combat casualty of the war. Staff Sergeant Harold Ellis and I were leisurely walking side by side, with him on the left—up the front walk of a house, looking for a place to rest, when a sniper from across the canal behind us fired a shot and hit Ellis in his upper right bicep—just six or so inches from my heart. The sniper could have killed either of us, but, fortunately, only gave one of us a flesh wound. On account of the bridges having been destroyed, we had no way to get across the canal to hunt the sniper down. It was the last shot fired at me in World War II.

Sergeant Ellis threw his helmet to the ground, took his pack off, put his rifle on it and said, "I'll see you later. I just got the million dollar wound!" Ellis was taken to the aid station and Company G spent the night in the general vicinity of that house.

The next day, April 30, Company G was in reserve and we just marched in tactical column on each side of the wide streets into center Munich without firing a shot. There was a lot of small-arms fire in the distance and the 157th took hundreds of POWs and liberated thousands of Allied ex-POWs that day.

We didn't know it then, but the war was basically over for us, as the city was cleared by nightfall amid only occasional small-arms firefights that didn't involve us. Furthermore, none of us realized the significance of the action the previous day by I and C companies of the 157th—the liberation of Dachau concentration camp.

Within a week of arriving in Munich (and before the war ended), many of the men in the regiment who were not on a duty assignment were trucked back to the Dachau concentration camp to observe the bodies of prisoners who had apparently died of starvation and tour the camp, including the crematorium. On the day of liberation of the camp, April 29th, only two companies of the regiment had gone into the camp. As we in Company G passed by the camp by on the 29th, we had no idea of what had gone on behind the tall walls. The majority of the regiment had not witnessed this manifestation of the horror of the Holocaust. I have always felt a debt of gratitude for the unnamed officer who made the decision that all members of the regiment would have that experience. It certainly put the capstone on the many reasons for fighting the war and provided compelling evidence that those who died had not done so in vain.

Where the Hell is Kirby?

Robert W. Kirby—sent by the 3d Division in late January to rebuild the 157th Infantry—had been assigned to the 3d Platoon of Company G/157 as platoon sergeant. When the going got rough, he always seemed to be missing. In the big jump-off, I never saw him that morning we were trapped up on the hill and Lieutenant Allen was killed. Though I had been only platoon guide, the second enlisted in command of 3d Platoon, I just automatically took charge in that situation. In the heat of battle, it never occurred to me where Kirby was. Nobody seemed to have missed him. Two days later he showed up. At Aschaffenburg, he vanished. When I was sent to get him, we couldn't find him.

After Kirby was recommended for a battlefield commission for his voice-over of our demonstration attack of a simulated pillbox, it took three or four weeks for it to materialize. The

day after Aschaffenburg, he had gone back to receive his commission. With the prospect of Kirby coming back as platoon commander, my three squad leaders said to me they weren't going to put up with it—that he was a malingerer. Eugene Yackel said if Kirby came back to our platoon, he was going to kill him. I could understand their anger and angst because he was an absolute malingerer who was never around when he was needed. I told them I wasn't going to relay the threat you're going to shoot him to the company commander. But you can ask him to not let Kirby come back to our platoon or company. So I arranged for the four of us to talk with Doherty. We were sitting out along a wall in front of the farmhouse in which the company was billeting when Lieutenant Doherty came out. Typical of the battle-happy discipline in the 45th, my squad leaders called our company commander by his first name, "Pete"—I never did. So they flatly told him they wouldn't have him back. As a result, Lieutenant Doherty made a request to the battalion adjutant that Kirby be transferred to another company. When he came back, he was reassigned to Company C.

I saw Kirby only once more—it was in Munich after the war in Europe had ended. I didn't say a word to him. I didn't want to confront him about his having vanished at Aschaffenburg. There was no point, since he somehow managed to get away with it.

Because he had received a commission, Kirby was held over in Europe for another year. Many years later I found out he wrote himself up for a Silver Star, claiming as platoon sergeant he had done exactly what I did in the firefight that erupted on the hill shortly after our March 15 jump-off. Getting a buddy lieutenant to certify that his account was true, he was awarded a Silver Star in April 1946.

It had never occurred to me that a guy could be such a coward and yet so shamelessly deliberate. I could accept the fact that he could be a coward and not show up. But I couldn't imagine him then going as far as lying to get a Silver Star.

Munich: Staying in Place

May 1—June 13, 1945

In taking Munich, whatever fighting was done by others. We had bedded down in a building I had chosen when we were told to fall out and get down to the city center because of a fire. By the time we arrived, however, we weren't needed. So, we just bunked down in a building in center Munich.

On May 1, the day after we entered Munich, the 2d Battalion/157 moved about two miles north of center Munich to a residential area of mainly three- to six-story apartment buildings. We simply commandeered the buildings to serve as barracks, giving residents three hours to remove any personal items (but not furniture), along with notice they couldn't come back to retrieve anything until we released the buildings.

My platoon of forty men moved into a three-story building that, with two five- or six-room apartments on each floor, gave us plenty of room. The company CP and orderly room were located in another apartment building and most company kitchens and mess halls were located in ground-floor stores. Meals were served by the traditional army field kitchen mess line and, in our case, we ate at tables set up on the sidewalk. We stayed in these quarters for six weeks—until June 12th.

On May 2, we were told that we would stay in place until the war in Europe ended! In less than a week, Germany unconditionally surrendered. Staying in place until June 13, we performed a myriad of guard details. We also rotated by platoons within the battalion to assist the MPs. On these twenty-four-hour details, our biggest headache was policing Russian ex-POWs who had been freed from German prison camps. When the Americans advanced through Germany, all imprisoned in German POW camps were simply released. American POWs, of course, were anxious to be repatriated. Supposed to have fought to the death, the Russian POWs weren't eager to go back home, where they expected to face harsh treatment. They thought they could remain in Germany and "live off the land" and, in the process, exact

revenge on any Germans they encountered—move into a German house and throw all the occupants out, rape German women, and pillage.

The guard details came down the command chain from the 2d Battalion duty officer through the company duty officer to me as acting platoon commander. Typically, my platoon had to furnish three to five guard details at one time, with a jeep bringing chow to them. This dispersed deployment of combat troops in platoons, squads, and details even smaller than squads to guard this and guard that invited discipline problems.⁵

One of the guard details parceled out to my platoon was an operating German air force hospital just north of Munich. We were supposed to make sure the hospital ran smoothly, confine hospital personnel to the hospital grounds at all times, and transfer discharged patients to the POW compound. I assigned Staff Sergeant King's squad to this guard detail. Unbeknownst to me, Sergeant King moved his men into the nurses' quarters with the announcement that any nurse could leave or stay. When I got wind of this arrangement, I replaced King's squad with Staff Sergeant Siriani's squad, which I quartered in an unused ward.

Being unrealistic and unenforceable, the SHAEF order that troops were not permitted to fraternize with Germans also undercut discipline. All of us were supposed to observe it, but few did—including high-ranking officers.

The day we went into Munich I met a French girl who was married to a German but didn't know his whereabouts or whether he was even alive. After meeting her and talking with her sister, I looked for her. A week later I found her by chance. In a built-up part of the city, she owned a substantial house fronted by a courtyard and a four- or five-bay garage with a car in each bay. At least one GI was in every bay trying without success to make off with a car. A flash of recognition between us and she straightaway approached me. In her hand, she held the rotor to the distributor for every car. I was impressed.

Probably in her early thirties, she had a seven-year-old daughter. Over the next three weeks, we became very close friends. Then, all of a sudden, she started complaining about the difficulty of getting food. At that point, the food supply in the big cities was inadequate. I gave

⁵ Cf. Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the occupation of Germany, 1944-1946* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1975), 320-321.

her food from our kitchen, sufficient for meals here and there—not because she asked for it, but seeing how she had become distraught that food wasn't available. A couple of times she grouched it was better when the Nazis were in power. That set me off, and in a fit of youthful temper, I said, "Fine, I'll see you later." Running off peaked like that was somewhat immature. In retrospect, it was my first serious relationship with a woman as opposed to the young ladies my age I had known.

On June 7th, the 45th and 42d divisions took part in a parade and ceremony to hand over a drum of the 5th/7th Gordon Highlanders of the Scottish 51st Highland Division that had been lost in 1940 and liberated in Munich by the 45th Division. Held on Munich's historical square Königplatz, the ceremony was carried out in grand style, considering that most of the men hadn't been involved in a formal military parade in over a year.

A track meet was held to help keep the troops occupied. Having lettered in track in my junior year of high school three years earlier and being in good physical condition, I expected to do well. Disappointed to come in fourth in the 100-yard and third in the 200-yard dash, I think, in retrospect, I did well enough considering I hadn't practiced and was competing against guys who had been on college track teams.

In mid-May, I found out that my former unit, the 103d Division, had in the final days of the war reached Austria, with elements of the 411th linking up at Brenner Pass with the Fifth Army driving north through Italy. My old outfit, the 409th Infantry, was in Innsbruck, only eighty miles from Munich. When I told my company commander I would like to look up friends in the 103d I had gone overseas with, he offered me one of the company jeeps for four days. Two others who had transferred from the 103d came along. One was Clarence Blackmon, who had become my platoon guide. It was an easy drive on the Autobahn to Innsbruck, where we quickly learned the locations of our former companies. After dropping the other two off, I drove ten miles east of Innsbruck to the small farming village where my old Company G/409 was billeted. I visited for a couple of days and found my buddies in good shape. Actually, my old company had after my transfer had an easier time than Company G/157—again, a matter of luck.

Since Innsbruck was only thirty miles from the Italian border at Brenner Pass, I decided to take a quick side trip to Italy! When I got there, I was advised I couldn't go into Italy because I had no orders authorizing me to be in the Fifth Army sector. Finding out the mess hall of the company (B/411) stationed at Brenner Pass was just inside Italy, I say (said) yes when they offered me noon chow. After I finished eating, I simply walked out the back door of the mess hall and bummed a ride in a jeep going further into Italy just to say I'd been there. After riding about twenty minutes, I got out and waited for a ride back to Brenner. So, I ended up going to five countries while I was in Europe!

I then drove back to spend the night with my buddies in Company G/409. The next day I took a ski lift to the top of a mountain north of Innsbruck. That afternoon I picked up the other two and drove back to Munich. What a great experience!

London Furlough

June 12—July 2, 1945

By the end of May, the furlough program was in high gear. Putting me high on the list was that among NCOs assigned to Company G in late January, I had the longest time on line since I had been only slightly wounded and lost no time from duty. Around the first of June, I was given the choice of seven days' furlough either on the French Riviera or in London. I chose London because it amounted to almost three weeks away—a week going, a week there, and a week coming back—and included Paris both ways. On June 12, the same day the 157th was moved out of Munich, I left on furlough to England.

On route, we stayed for two days in a resort hotel in the Normandy coastal town of Etretat, where we were staged for our trip to England. We were given new uniforms and a briefing on currency exchange and the dos and don'ts of travel. We crossed the Channel on a ferry boat to Southampton and took a train to London, where I took in many of the city's famous historic sites and attractions. While in London, I dropped by an information

clearinghouse where you could obtain the current address of any member of the U.S. Armed Forces in the ETO. I looked up my cousin, George C. Rogers, who was an Army Air Force captain and weather forecaster in London. We spent an afternoon sightseeing together. I also located a high school classmate, who I knew had been seriously wounded as an infantryman in one of the First Army divisions. He was in a general hospital in Lincolnshire, about a hundred fifty miles north of London. I took a train and taxi to the hospital and found Ted in his hospital ward and we had a pleasant visit.

In high school, Ted Staton and I had been opposites. Where I was shy with girls, didn't drink, and played sports, he was my social advisor, didn't play sports, and typically wore a jacket and tie to school. The few times I dated were when I double-dated with him. Though he seemed the antithesis of a combat infantryman, he ended up in an infantry line unit and was shot in the closing days of the war. Wounded in the lower abdomen, he would be hospitalized for two years and have to carry a colostomy bag for the rest of his life. It was something you couldn't tell looking at him—not like somebody who lost a leg, arm, or eye—but he had a wound that would be forever with him. Yet, he finished medical school, became a very successful doctor, and raised a family. I had the chance to catch up with him at our fiftieth high school reunion in 1993. A great guy! Most of the wounded recovered sufficiently to lead normal lives; some like Ted had to live a lifetime with their sacrifice for our freedom.

Around the fourth day, I met a girl at the American Red Cross Club in center London. We hit it off very well, and I more or less lived with her during my remaining time in London. Where I expected to be stationed in Germany serving in the Army of Occupation, we agreed we would live together there to see how it worked out. You could do this with a girl in England or Germany, but not at home.

Out in the Woods

July 2—18, 1945

When I left on furlough to London, the lower ranked men and officers weren't privy to the scheme of troop deployment now that the war in Europe had ended. By the end of June, a big shuffle would begin whereby the high-point men (who had a score of eighty-five points) would be returned home for discharge; medium-point men were to remain in Europe as part of the Army of Occupation; and the low-point men would be transferred to divisions to be redeployed to the Pacific. Points were earned for months in service, months in service overseas, combat medals, and dependent children under eighteen years old. With a score of fifty-two, I was a low-point man, only two points shy of being a medium-point person.

While I didn't have enough points for discharge, I had expected I was going to stay in Europe in the Army of Occupation—never thinking we would have to go to Japan. In hindsight, I was better off not knowing until I had returned from my furlough! When I came back and learned we were slated to be deployed to the Pacific, I was really upset. Since we had fought the war in Europe, I figured others would be called upon to fight and finish off the war against Japan. Where General Frederick was such an aggressive, gung-ho commander, we just assumed he had volunteered to take the 45th Division to the Pacific.

U.S. Army divisions slated for the Pacific or to go home for deactivation weren't considered part of the Army of Occupation. So, the whole 45th Division was moved out into the woods, as I called it. My company was billeted in a small farming village of about twenty houses with attached barns set in an expanse of farmland. We took over the lower floors of the houses, except the kitchens, with the Germans, in most cases, having the upper floors for themselves.

Arriving back from furlough around two o'clock in the morning, I woke up the CQ, who told me that I might become the first sergeant of the company if I wanted the job because the two platoon sergeants who outranked me weren't interested. Twenty and a half years old, I became one of the youngest first sergeants of a World War II infantry company. Though I knew

what the command functions were, I didn't know anything about the administrative duties of first sergeant, which took most of their time. Fortunately, the mortar section leader, Ray Bean, stepped up to give me help with the administrative side. I didn't know it back then, but we both had come from the 103d—he had come out of the mortar section of Company K/409. In the 45th, he had been mortar section leader when, closing to the Siegfried Line, the 3d Platoon and the weapons platoon had been caught on the hillside in a firefight with German troops. He knew morning reports, while I didn't know anything about them other than the first sergeant had to complete or at least manage them. So, he helped me shuffle people around.

With all the high-point men of the division being culled out and sent back to the States, a lot of 103d men came into the 45th. Our regiment—the 157th—got the 410th people. The 411th men were transferred to the 180th, while the 409th went to the 179th.

We had lost all of the company's support personnel, since most of them had deployed overseas with the 45th two years earlier and were high pointers. Naturally, several of the line NCOs were anxious to take such non-combat positions as supply sergeant, mess steward, and communications sergeant. One staff sergeant opted for a reduction in rank to first cook. Besides getting in a lot of new personnel to replace our high and medium pointers, the organization of the infantry line company had changed to add forty-five men in a recoilless antitank rocket launcher section to the weapons platoon. This created a seventy-man weapons platoon, which was unwieldy in company formations and had to be split in two—in essence, resulting in five platoons plus company headquarters.

I came back on July 2 from my three-week, booze-free furlough to a whole lot of drinking going on. While I had plenty to do learning and performing the duties of first sergeant, the men in the infantry company were getting restless with make-work during the day and no place to go at night. About forty miles away, Munich was off limits to all 45th Division personnel. There wasn't even sports equipment available. In this isolated situation, waiting, knowing we were going to be redeployed to the Pacific, morale and discipline continued to slip.

With orders for our departure home on July 18, we began packing up for the States. One of the lieutenants suggested we have a party to "celebrate." He'd get some medical alcohol, while I provided the mixer and ice from the kitchen. On the night of the 17th after everything,

including personal gear, had been packed and was ready to go, the Headquarters section plus a few others started drinking the medical alcohol mixed with grapefruit juice. As the men got juiced up, someone suggested taking a jeep over to where a beautiful German girl lived in the next village. In making a pass at her, I had learned she was engaged to a German army officer, though she didn't know if he had survived the war. She didn't want to have anything to do with any of us.

She lived in a third-floor apartment in a farmhouse. When the guys found she wasn't home, they started throwing her clothes out the window. When I arrived, I told everybody to get downstairs and bring everything back up to the apartment. About the time they had retrieved everything, she walked in the door. The same guy who had cut the hung German down in Aschaffenburg—a big heavysset guy—grabbed her in a bear hug, threw her on the couch, and started pulling off her clothes. The lieutenant was right there too, not taking charge of the situation.

As first sergeant, I would have been held responsible. I didn't want to spend the first ten years of peace in Europe in jail. I wanted to go home. So when Charlie threw her on the couch, I stepped in, ordered him to get off the couch and for everyone to get the hell out and back to our billets. Fortunately, they all complied, including the lieutenant.

My apology didn't appease her. Understandably outraged, she wanted to file a complaint. I told her she would have to come over to the company command post and report it to the company commander. I didn't tell her we were leaving the following day to go back to the States. Next morning I had just finished calling the roster off to make sure every man was accounted for, got them on a truck, and was about to move out with the unit when she showed up. Having a separate vehicle, the officers were going to depart last.

I had been able to brief the CO about what happened and what action I had taken. When she complained to him about the rape attempt, he told her she had to go to the battalion adjutant at the 2d Battalion headquarters in the town of Mering, about four miles down the road. As we pulled out, she started walking toward Mering to file her complaint. We didn't hear anything more about it.

The Road Home

In Friedburg, we boarded forty-and-eights [boxcars] to ride two days to Camp St. Louis, a huge tent camp about ten miles southeast of Reims, France. We were going home early because, after being given a furlough, we had to be trained in beachhead landings in preparation for invading Japan. Everyone figured it would end like it did in Germany—that we would have to go into Japan and completely subjugate them by fighting through the homeland islands. So, we all anticipated that there would be at least a year of fighting through Japan, the same way we fought through France to take Germany.

It was over, however, before we even left France. Still in Camp St. Louis when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, we were ecstatic—convinced the bombings would force Japan to surrender. We wouldn't have to die in a bloody invasion of Japan after all. When we received word that Japan had unconditionally surrendered, a wave of cheering and singing swept through the sprawling tent city. I was lucky I had been scheduled for a pass to Paris on what would unfold as V-J Day. I spent that day and part of the next celebrating. The war was over, we were going home, and no Japan!

While Camp St. Louis was supposed to be only a temporary stopover on our way to the Pacific, we remained there a month. After a man from Company G went AWOL, I was notified through the command chain he had got drunk in Reims, been arrested by the MPs, and I had to go sign for him at the jail in Reims. One of the lieutenants wanted to go along, providing we went by the Reims Army Air Force airport to check the possibility of his getting stick time in an artillery spotter plane. While at the airport, I learned there were daily flights to an airfield sixty miles from London. I was told all you needed was an army uniform and a pass. I got my CO's approval to cover my absence with three three-day passes since I didn't know when I would get back.

Slated to go home instead of staying on in Germany, I got a flight from the Reims airfield to England to call it off with the woman I had met there and just say good-bye. I was candid: Instead of staying in Europe in the Army of Occupation, I'm going back to the States

and I don't have any money, I have to go to college, I'm not ready to get married, so see you later.

Since we were so far along in processing to return home, they sent us back anyway. With World War II over, now we were going home for good. In that process, I came back six or eight months earlier than I would have. So, in the final analysis, I made out well. Many 103d men with the same number of points I had stayed in Europe until the spring of 1946.

On September 2, the 157th Regiment left Le Havre, France on the *SS Sea Owl*, a Liberty ship with only 3,500 GIs bound for Boston. I shared a room with four other senior NCOs. A quantum difference from the trip over in October '44. The trip to Europe had taken fourteen days because we had zigzagged to evade submarine attacks and had crossed the Atlantic at its widest point. Where we had sailed through a hurricane on the way over, the voyage back was uneventful and took only seven days to reach outer Boston Harbor.

The pier we docked at—today a cruise ship terminal—was part of the Boston Army Base, where my Army Reserve units would drill for sixteen years. Boarding a train at the dockside, we received a warm welcome from several hundred First Naval District employees in a nearby eight-story building. It was a sight I will never forget, with several people in each window waving to us and the women blowing kisses! The First Naval district headquarters occupied that same building for thirty years and housed an officers' club that I would later frequent.

The train took us to Camp Myles Standish, near Taunton. Then the fun began! The entire regiment had to be assigned to reception centers near home or wherever each man was planning to spend his forty-five-day furlough. After an evening meal, everybody hit the telephones to tell their loved ones they were back. The clerical personnel and first sergeants spent the entire night cutting rosters for the trains to depart the next morning for each reception center. My train left at nine in the morning with everybody going to the East Coast states. Two days later I arrived in northern Florida at Camp Blanding, where my mother and father picked me up and drove me home.

After a few days drinking and partying with ex-high school buddies, I decided to make the most of my furlough by taking a sightseeing trip up to New York and back—mostly by

train, but also hitchhiking part of the way. I was so taken by the sights of New York City I extended my stay there. Having never been to Washington, DC, I stopped there for two days to take in all the national monuments. I also stopped in Charleston to see my cousins.

I reported back to the 45th at Camp Bowie, Texas, where I was supposed to help the sergeant major of the battalion to deactivate the unit. When he managed to not report back to Bowie, they pulled me over to battalion to help them deactivate. Since we were home, they decided to discharge us early. Even though we were low-point men, most—though not all—of us were discharged before the end of the year. On November 26, 1945, I joined the Army Reserve as a first sergeant on discharge from active duty, as I didn't want to fight the Russians as an infantryman. So much for World War II!

Back to School

1946—1951

Having done well in my senior year playing high school football, I enrolled in January 1946 at the University of Georgia to play there. With two hundred men packed into a football dorm meant for eighty, I lived in the attic. When practice started, the number in the dorm steadily declined. I took up smoking there and went on to smoke for twenty-two years.

In my youthful eagerness, what I thought was a football scholarship turned out to be only a trial. When spring practice ended, I figured I was a shoo-in, not realizing that I was too small to play Georgia's bruising, run-up-the-middle, run-into-them- and-knock-'em-down style of football. The freshman coach told me I didn't have it. Being light and fast, I should have tried out at Georgia Tech, which played a razzle-dazzle kind of football that maybe would have accommodated my size and ability.

After this false start, I moved to Charleston to enroll at The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina, where my father and his brothers had gone. Even though The Citadel was a military college, it allowed veterans to attend as civilian students without having to join the

Corps of Cadets. I joined the football team. After three weeks of practice, I was told that, having transferred from one football program to another, I had to complete an academic year at The Citadel before I would be eligible to compete. While I could have continued practicing with the team, I quickly decided I wasn't going to practice if I couldn't play.

As my future in football seemed ever elusive, I shifted my attention to civil engineering as my career goal—without really knowing what a civil engineer did. Though I hadn't finished even two full quarters in civil engineering at Texas A&M, I chose to study in that field because of my initial exposure through ASTP. My aptitude in math also attracted me to the field.

I had already received credit for freshman English from Texas A&M. At The Citadel, I did very poorly the summer semester—failing the sophomore English literature course and getting mediocre grades in my other courses. Living in a dormitory for veteran students, my two roommates and I were out virtually every night checking out the gin mills in Charleston. I did practically no studying, ignoring the obvious—that carousing wasn't the way to get ahead.

In early August, I received an unexpected phone call from the woman I had met on furlough in England that she was here in Louisville, Kentucky. She had come over to support her sister, who had married a GI she killed with a butcher knife in a fight in their kitchen. The grand jury had determined she had acted in self-defense.

That being over, she said she'd like to visit me before going back to England. Did I want to see her? We had had no contact, not even by mail. I said okay. Though she was willing to live with me without our getting married, I wasn't prepared to live together as an unmarried couple in Charleston, where two of my father's brothers were high school principals. So, we ended up getting married. I returned to school, we rented an off-campus apartment, and she got a job. With her grasp of English literature, I passed the course and began a three-year stint of concentrated study that elevated me to fifth in a class of three hundred fifty.

The Citadel Department of Military Science and Tactics (PMS&T) staff looked up my wartime record and learned that I had been recommended for a battlefield commission after the Battle of Aschaffenburg, Germany. Direct commissions had been shut off by April 1945, however, because they had too many lieutenants in the pipeline from the States. Where I had been nominated for a direct commission late in the war, The Citadel staff asked me in my junior

year did I want it now? I said, well, yes. So, without officer training, I received a direct promotion in the Army Reserve to second lieutenant in February 1948. I promptly transferred to the Corps of Engineers because I was already two-thirds of the way through engineering school and wanted to serve in a Reserve engineering unit. I also didn't want to fight another war as an infantryman.

In June 1949, I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in civil engineering (BSCE) and enough momentum to be accepted at MIT to specialize in structural engineering. Coincidentally, my classmate at The Citadel who suggested we both go to MIT for our Master's degree had been a platoon commander in Company B/411, which had been stationed at Brenner Pass when I passed through on my brief jaunt into Italy. After spending the summer in Orlando, my wife and I took a Greyhound bus to Boston. Continuing to struggle with writing at MIT, I was fortunate to be mentored by the man who headed the project I was working on. Calling on me to write specifications, descriptions of the work we were doing, and so on, he taught me how to write well and feel comfortable writing.

I was originally on track to graduate with my Master of Science degree in civil engineering in May 1950. I didn't graduate until the following year, however, because I started working part-time on the original Boston Central Artery.

My Civilian Career

When the Army put me in the ASTP program to study civil engineering, little did I know that would be the starting-point of my career path. While enrolled in the Master's program at MIT, I began in January 1950 working part-time on the design of the original Central Artery and full-time that June. But widespread objections that the elevated sections of the new highway towered over and divided neighborhoods halted the project.

When the project shut down, John Wilbur, head of the MIT civil engineering department, invited me to join a MIT-U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study led by Robert

Hansen to design structures that could withstand nuclear attack. In Hiroshima, the atomic bomb blast leveled almost everything up to a mile away, except for a small number of heavily reinforced concrete buildings—most of which had their interiors totally gutted. The research objective to design a multistory building to withstand nuclear blasts seemed unobtainable, hopeless in my view. Below-ground structures seemed the only viable option.

My job was to manually design above-ground bomb-resistant structures. My longhand designs were then transferred from paper to computer-aided design. What took me weeks to complete using manual calculation methods could be accomplished by a computer today in a couple of hours. I became increasingly discouraged. I felt like a cog in this large-scale research project, largely unrecognized and far removed from leadership and project management.

Moreover, perhaps because I had seen countless war-devastated towns and cities in Europe, the project didn't seem to me to have a positive objective. On the project for about a year and a half, I was eager to get back to the real world and the civil engineer's job to design bridges, roads, tunnels, and other construction that had immediate, tangible uses.

Not happy being on that structural dynamics team, I kept calling my boss about when they were going to resume the Central Artery project. He brought me back early to design a major bridge in Providence, Rhode Island to connect highways on both sides of the Providence River.

I then headed up a team to study alternative routes for the final section of the Central Artery. As we considered alternatives, Commissioner John Volpe of the state highway department asked me if we had thought about putting it underground. Not wanting to repeat the mistakes of the initial elevated sections, he wanted to resolve the impasse by putting the rest underground. I initially gave him a back-of-the-envelope estimated price; then because it seemed feasible, we completed a formal preliminary design of an underground highway.

That became the alternative route. I was the chief structural engineer for what would become known as the Dewey Square Tunnel, the first section of any interstate highway put underground in an urban setting in the U.S. It was a 2,400-foot-long six-lane tunnel, three lanes in each direction, with widenings for closely spaced access ramps to accommodate the city street pattern between the portals. Built between 1956 and 1959, it was the widest vehicular

tunnel in the world at the time. That evolved into the whole throughway being put underground. In the massive Big Dig project, the Dewey Square Tunnel is the only remaining section of the original Central Artery still in use.

I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. With my military background of individual frontline decision-making on how to get things done, I had no inhibitions about trying something new. At the same time, I learned from my longtime boss that when you get an assignment to design something, you should consider similar design projects. I used to say, “We got to have a go-by” — *go by* what others had previously done to solve the same or a similar problem. So, we started with the concept used to construct subway/railroad-type tunnels, which were typically very narrow, and expanded on that to design a six-lane highway tunnel. We still had steel frames spaced five feet apart—the same design for subway frames.

This was the beginning of my fifty-three-year career as a civil-structural-transportation engineer working for private-sector consulting engineering firms in designing public-sector transportation facilities—primarily interstate highways, bridges, and rail transit systems. I knew early on that I didn’t want to get involved in managing a company because you move out of engineering to become simply a manager of people. While I didn’t fully appreciate how much pay differential there was between senior managers and project managers, I chose to stay in the engineering end of the business because I enjoyed being involved in innovative designs and construction methods, including managing the first-time use of design-construction processes in the U.S.

While I sought challenging projects, I also got handed problems after the fact—for example, when Combustion Engineering manufactured a nuclear reactor in Chattanooga, Tennessee for a plant site fifty miles west of Phoenix, Arizona without figuring out how to move it there. I was brought in when rail routes from San Francisco and Los Angeles to the site were being considered and eliminated as options.

My involvement in the door-to-door transportation of a nuclear reactor to northwest of Charlotte, North Carolina proved invaluable in finding a solution to the problem at hand. In that planning process, we had surveyed the rail route, identified “choke points” where an

accommodation had to be made, and budgeted for reconstruction such as raising, moving, or replacing bridges that didn't provide enough clearance.

I proposed to the Combustion Engineering people to transport the reactor by barge from Chattanooga to the head of the Gulf of California in Mexico, offload it, and move it overland one hundred seventy miles from there. I tapped one of my lieutenants in the Army Reserve who also worked for me in the civilian sector to fly to Phoenix, drive a rental car down into Mexico to the Gulf of California shoreline, and recon the route. After spending three days out there, he reported that it could be done even though the land transport route crossed roadless areas. It was the first long-distance overland movement of a nuclear reactor to a plant site in the U.S. While we had to transport a special road carrier out there, the total cost fell within what had been allocated. But that was largely by luck. While I list it among my accomplishments, I had to react to the problem rather than plan for it.

A high point in my career was being involved in the largest and most complex section of Boston's "Big Dig" project. The section I designed and directed required construction of three highway tunnels at a slight depth under a network of operating railroad tracks in the worst of soil conditions. The original plan was to use the conventional cut-and-cover method, which would have entailed taking one active railroad track at a time out of service, digging and building a cut-and-cover tunnel under it, replacing the track, then moving on to the next track and repeating a process that would have seriously disrupted rail service. I proposed and managed the design of jacked tunnels. It involved building full-size highway tunnels, or "tunnel boxes," inside huge concrete "jacking pits" dug next to the railway and then using massive hydraulic jacks to push the tunnel boxes into place beneath the busy rail tracks. The jacked tunnels were over ten times the size of any jacked tunnels attempted before in the U.S.

I have appreciated the professional recognition that has come my way. After nearly flunking out my first year at The Citadel, I was named in 2007 a distinguished Citadel alumnus for having achieved national prominence as a civil engineer. The following year I was elected a distinguished member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) on the basis of my transportation design work, coupled with my leadership of Army Engineer Reserve units and

my involvement in ASCE.⁶ This award meant all the more to me because it has been usually bestowed on educators and researchers rather than those who have made their names as practicing engineers.

My Army Reserve Career

Like my civilian career, my thirty-four-plus years serving in the Army Reserve also proved professionally interesting and personally rewarding. My Reserve assignments included platoon, company, and battalion commands as well as five years as battalion operations officer. As a newly minted officer, I felt that I should maintain discipline even in an engineering unit. It was tough. We were the only unit in the armory that had Saturday morning weapons inspection. In other Army Reserve units, they would be playing stickball during drill period.

Observing how poorly they performed at summer camp, I took command of the 483d Engineer Battalion (stationed at Fort Rodman in New Bedford, Massachusetts) with some trepidation. Nine in the morning and no one would even have arrived at the training site. Lacking discipline, the unit was pathetic.

In my eight years commanding the 483d Engineer Battalion, I employed the same approach to discipline that I had known in the 103d—infantry-type discipline, I called it. Recognizing that you need to be able to depend upon people to do their part to accomplish anything, I enforced discipline so that everybody did their job. From having no discipline at all, the battalion evolved into a highly disciplined, cohesive, well-trained unit. During the war in Vietnam, our unit could have deployed there. If I had been lax leading up to deployment, I wouldn't have been able to inject discipline after we were called to duty. No, you had to practice it at all times.

⁶ See attached press release. Founded in 1852, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) represents more than 140,000 civil engineers worldwide and is America's oldest national engineering society.

I saw our involvement in civic action as a win-win situation: it was an effective training vehicle, it improved morale and boosted motivation, and the results benefited the community. On account of excellent discipline and morale, we completed numerous civic work projects, including repairing New Bedford's hurricane barrier, planning and constructing athletic fields and playgrounds, cleaning streams and clearing nature trails, building animal enclosures in the New Bedford zoo, and assigning reservists as instructors in a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) employment training program.

In 1972, the office of the Chief of Army Reserve selected the 483d Engineer Battalion as the outstanding civic action unit for performing more civic work than any other unit in the country. We were able to complete such a high volume of civic action projects because I had qualified men who did civilian work similar to their Army Reserve training. Some of the platoon sergeants were homebuilders and brought their work trucks to training until we procured the military vehicles we needed. Completing useful work promoted camaraderie, encouraged bottom-up leadership, and strengthened unit cohesion. In a gung-ho command climate, it turned out a lot of guys wanted to soldier. The Army Reserve chief also cited us for having the highest reenlistment rate of any Reserve unit in the First U.S. Army, whose area of responsibility covered the mid-Atlantic and New England states.

Promoted to full colonel, I was assigned to command the 329th Engineer Group, which included all Army Reserve engineer units in New England. Where I had encouraged continued growth in my subordinates' military careers, a good number from the 483d Engineer Battalion moved up with me to group headquarters. In this last position, I proposed a military construction project. The U.S. Army's training railroad at Fort Eustis, Virginia had not been maintained and was literally falling apart. As planned and supervised by my group headquarters, two reserve engineer battalions on an integrated mission completely refurbished the training railroad in May 1974 during a four-week annual training period. We loaded up equipment from the New Hampshire units and one company from northern Vermont and drove it to the Coast Guard base in Salem, Massachusetts, where it was loaded on a roll-on/roll-off ship and shipped to Fort Eustis. When the project was completed, the equipment was shipped back up to Salem and convoyed back to northern New England. For this

accomplishment, I became the only army reservist to receive the Wheeler Award of The Society of Military Engineers.

Retiring as an Army Reserve colonel in 1978, I reflect back on my long military career and how I went overseas as a nineteen-year-old private in a combat infantry unit to fight in eastern France so many years ago.

Rah-rah Speeches

When I was a lower-ranked person, I was always thirsting for information on what was going on and where we were. I would ask. So, when I had rank and had some of the answers myself, I was already inclined to tell people what I knew. In the process, I would try to find out something more than I knew to be able to disseminate that as well.

That's where it started. Knowing nothing is very demoralizing, especially when you thought you were going to be fighting until the last German gave up or was killed. Even snippets of good information can boost morale. They dumped you off someplace in France and told you the war wasn't going to end until you reach the objective of Berlin—Berlin was always used. What the hell is going to happen in between? So, it was along that thought process I wanted to be able to tell my guys something to encourage them. I would explain where we were and what positive developments were happening in relation to what we were doing—and give them some tangible hope that, ultimately, this war was going to end.

After the war, the importance of disseminating objectives stayed with me. When I went to summer camp in the Reserves, I used to start off with all seven hundred men in my battalion sitting down around me and explain in general what we were going to be doing for two weeks. Even in my project offices, every four to six weeks I would call everybody together in the drafting room and give what I called "rah-rah speeches." I felt it was all part of being a leader—updating people on what progress had been made and urging them to keep going until we get to the objective—keeping them excited and engaged in whatever project we were doing. In the same way, I have tried in 103d association reunions and newsletters to convey the importance

of our work in preserving the legacy of our unit, including digitizing the morning reports and scanning unit narratives, photos, and other documents—all of which we have loaded into our database on the Internet.

Giving rah-rah speeches to my people in the office or my Reserve unit—bringing them up to date on what’s happening. I’m also urging them to work hard, do their best, and do the right thing. All that stemmed from my being acting platoon commander in the last five weeks of the war. It started there, my talking to my men every night.

Staying Connected

Holding annual reunions since 1965, the 103d Infantry Division Association remained until 1982 a family-type run operation that did little outreach to former members of the 103d Division. Not knowing about the reunions for years, I missed out on the camaraderie with many of the 103d veterans I had known. Some of the key people who I was in combat with I’ve never seen or I saw only briefly.

From the start, I traveled around the country on my own to see guys I had fought with. When I was discharged at Camp Bowie, I stopped at four places on the way home just to visit with “foxhole buddies.” Travelling on business and as a national officer of the American Society of Civil Engineers, I made a point of trying to find and stay connected with people I served with. When we had an ASCE board meeting in Milwaukee, I rented a car and drove ninety miles to Two Rivers, Wisconsin to spend three hours in the kitchen of F.M. Rogers—the other Rogers in Company G/409—drinking and talking. Late that night I drove back to Milwaukee. Much younger and able to handle it, I got up the next day at eight and went all day. In Minneapolis, I visited one of my squad leaders, Eugene Yackel, one night. It was the only time I saw him after the war, as he never came to any reunions.

A dirt farmer from Texas, Clarence Blackmon (“Blackie”) had also been one of my squad leaders. I had been chasing Blackie off and on, but hadn’t been able to locate his town, Waelder,

on a map because it was so small. Having moved to Texas in 1981, my family drove over to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio when it came time for me to retire as a reservist. We had dinner with my Company G/409 commander and his wife, who lived in San Antonio.

Driving back to Houston that night, my wife and all the children asleep, I spotted a sign with the name of the little town where Blackie lived. At an open diner near the interchange, I asked the waitress if she knew Blackmon. She replied, "Oh, everybody knows him." I got his phone number and called him the next day. We visited back and forth a few times. Out on his farm, my children would go out and play at the cattle watering pond.

Passing on Memory of the Holocaust

Part of the first Allied unit to enter Dachau concentration camp, I still have photos of the thousands of emaciated corpses my unit found on a train on a railway spur leading into the camp. Felix Sparks, who led the 3d Battalion of the 157th Infantry in liberating Dachau, later spoke out against the Holocaust deniers, issuing the challenge "Tell us who were there that it never happened."

I got to know Sparks when I started attending reunions of the 157th. I became very active in the regimental association in part because I had more combat as a small-unit leader while serving in the 157th. When Sparks said the 1999 reunion was going to be the last he would manage, I ran it the following year. I then served as the 157th association president for two years. When Sparks died in 2007, I flew out to Denver to attend his funeral. His example galvanized me into speaking and writing about the liberation of Dachau from the firsthand perspective "We were there" —yes, we witnessed what seemed unbelievable.

When I learned about Susie Davidson's project to gather testimony of Boston-area Holocaust survivors and liberators, I readily agreed to write about my own experience. Introducing me to other GIs who had been part of liberating the camps, she asked me to identify others. When her book *I Refused to Die* came out in 2005, I joined Susie in maybe thirty

book readings—mainly to Jewish groups at synagogues on Sundays. Through these book presentations, I met a lot of survivors who contributed their stories to Susie's book. I was impressed by how many had rebuilt their lives and pursued successful careers after having lived through such horrific, memory-searing experiences.

Representing the 45th Division association, I went back to Dachau in 2005 for the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation. Thousands of survivors returned and generously thanked us for liberating them. They were very emotional, but it was upbeat emotion. The women hugged and kissed us, and naturally it made you feel good, underlining you had participated in something momentous. It also reminded me how lucky I had been to have made it through myself.

In June 2012, I returned to Dachau as part of a college tour. The College of the Ozarks invited me to participate as a liberator in its Holocaust Memorial Tour, one of several trips sponsored by the college to honor World War II veterans and educate young people about the war and what we did. On our trip, seventeen students were accompanied by three Holocaust survivors as well as four veterans who helped liberate Nazi concentration camps. Visiting the sites of three former camps—Auschwitz, Mauthausen, and Dachau—took us all back seventy years in history. The former camp at Dachau, where more than 30,000 prisoners died, is now a museum and memorial, though few of the original buildings had been preserved.

Part of leadership was turning the legacy over to the students. In evening discussions during the ten-day trip, I stressed the importance of what the students were learning, and look around, we're all in our late eighties—or, in the case of the survivors, in their late seventies—and we can only turn this evidence over to you that the Holocaust did occur. The deniers are widespread. In particular, a lot of young Germans are denying that the Holocaust happened. Hearing survivors' and liberators' accounts and seeing the camps yourselves, you will be able to perpetuate the memory that it did happen.

Passing on to these students what we lived through was a crucial step. I challenged them to pick up the living memory of the Holocaust and carry it on, because we will all be gone in a few years. I told them it was their responsibility to sustain the legacy so that it will never die and counter any attempt to hide the actuality or magnitude of the Holocaust.

Personal Legacy of the War

In 1968, I married Francine Yancowsky, with whom I had eight children. While I enjoyed a successful career and won recognition in my field of work, I feel now that my lack of emotion had a detrimental effect on my marriage and family life. Over the years, I was very much an emotionless person, a condition brought on by the war. Not just that first day in the Taintrux Valley. That first day was almost child's play compared to some of the things that happened later and how a lot of my buddies and two lieutenants were killed right in front of me. You had been talking to them and a few minutes later they were dead.

I also spent my working life in what was largely a man's world. Men tend to hide their emotions. I also believe my upbringing taught me to stuff my feelings. The fact that my grandmother who was my acting mother through junior high and high school wasn't outwardly caring probably led me to hold back my own feelings.

That said, my emotions have certainly returned in full regalia, so to speak. I don't know what to attribute it to except growing old. As I look back, I feel somewhat guilty that I wasn't more emotional in dealing with my family at times, but you can't go back and do things over. I am more sensitive now, particularly with some of the things happening to my wife. I feel that age brought my emotions back in a big gush because I now have feelings that I never experienced before.

103d Infantry Division Rifle Company Battle Casualty Statistics

This table presents the battle casualty statistics of the 103d Infantry Division's 27 rifle companies—the “spear points” of the division. Rifle company authorized strength was 187 enlisted men and six officers. Most of an infantry division's battle casualties were in the rifle companies. Exposed to rain, snow, and bitter cold for extended periods, they also suffered the highest rates of non-battle casualties. The rosters of many of the 103d's rifle companies largely turned over in six months of combat.

The doctrine for deployment of the line elements of platoons, companies, battalions, and regiments of the triangular divisions of the World War II era called for two units forward (on line) and one in reserve for each echelon in the deployed division at company level and above. In theory, and typically rigorously followed, the rotation of the units was intended to ensure equal time on line for all units at each echelon level and unit commanders at each level made every effort to ensure an even share of intense combat commitments. Since combat was totally random and unpredictable as to degree of intensity, however, the relative casualty impacts were random, as the matrix suggests. That randomness worked against Company G, 409th Infantry (shaded row), which suffered the highest number of men killed in action and fourth highest number of battle casualties among the 103d's 27 rifle companies.

—Cranston R. “Chan” Rogers

(Co G/409, transferred to
45th Infantry Division, January 26, 1945)

		Casualties			
Regiment	Company	Total	KIA	POW	WIA
409th	A	149	24	2	123
	B	257	24	109	124
	C	208	28	48	132
	E	149	23	25	101
	F	95	15	1	79
	G	185	42	8	135
	I	76	8	1	67
	K	135	11	2	122
	L	54	12	0	42
	Total	1308	187	196	925
	Average	145	21	22	103
410th	A	137	26	11	100
	B	128	38	11	79
	C	108	24	12	72
	E	87	16	27	44
	F	107	18	0	89
	G	116	29	17	70
	I	58	12	2	44
	K	45	11	1	33
	L	89	18	2	69
	Total	875	192	83	600
	Average	97	21	9	67
411th	A	138	33	1	104
	B	147	26	6	115
	C	163	33	2	128
	E	163	21	10	132
	F	166	28	12	126
	G	275	36	10	229
	I	170	36	14	120
	K	183	36	2	145
	L	169	22	38	109
	Total	1574	271	95	1208
	Average	175	30	11	134
All Rifle Companies	Total	3757	650	374	2733
	Average	139	24	14	101

Note: KIA includes DOW (Died of Wounds), FOD (Finding of Death—used when someone was missing and presumed killed in action), DNB (Died Non-Battle). All MIAs were accounted for.

Press Release by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE)

**Retired U.S. Army Reserve Colonel Named Distinguished Member
of National Civil Engineering Society**

June 16, 2008

Reston, VA—Cranston R. “Chan” Rogers, P.E., Dist.M. ASCE, a U.S. Army Engineer Reserve colonel, was recently named a Distinguished Member of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). Formerly known as honorary membership, distinguished membership is the Society’s highest accolade and recognizes those who have achieved eminence in a branch of engineering. The active roster of distinguished members is comprised of only 193 of the Society’s more than 140,000 members worldwide. Rogers—who is being honored for his distinguished career in the design of some of the most challenging transportation projects of our time, coupled with outstanding management of U.S. Army Engineer Reserve units and contributions to ASCE—will be formally inducted on Thursday, November 6, 2008, at ASCE’s Annual Civil Engineering Conference in Pittsburgh.

Rogers began his career as a structural engineer working on the design of steel viaduct structures on the original Boston Central Artery in 1950. He later managed the design of the first underground highway to meet interstate standards in the United States, including ramps between portals; the first use of shear studs, reinforced earth, pipe piles as foundations and pier columns; and closed highway drainage with filter beds to prevent winter salt intrusion in the water supply. Rogers also planned the first long-distance overland movement (170 miles) of a nuclear reactor to a plant site in the United States, managed the design of the first jacked highway tunnel boxes under railroad tracks and proposed the first use of Japanese soil mix for foundation support in the United States. The jacked tunnels received the British Construction Industry’s 2002 International Award, the Civil Engineering Forum for Innovation’s 2003 Charles Pankow Award for Innovation and the Construction Innovation Forum’s 2004 NOVA Award. In addition, Rogers managed the use of U.S. Army Engineer Reserve units to rehabilitate the Army’s training railroad at Fort Eustis, Va. In 1979, this effort was awarded the Society of American Military Engineers’ (SAME) Wheeler Medal.

Rogers has served on numerous ASCE national committees, including Professional Activities, Standards of Practice, Manual 45, Headquarters Relocation, and Society Objectives, Policies and Organization, and he served as ASCE’s representative to the Council on Federal Procurement of Architectural and Engineering Services. Rogers served as vice president and director of ASCE national, as well as president of ASCE’s former Massachusetts Section. He also engineered the merger of ASCE and the Boston Society of Civil Engineers (BSCES). Rogers was named a BSCES honorary member in 1990 and received its Herzog Award; he also received SAME’s Volpe Award. In 2007, Rogers was named a “Notable Alumnus” by The Citadel.

Rogers received his bachelor’s degree in civil engineering from The Citadel and his master’s degree in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is also a graduate of the Army War College.

Upon his graduation from Orlando High School in June 1943, Rogers entered the Army as a private and was assigned to a combat infantry unit which deployed to eastern France. Rogers advanced to platoon sergeant when he entered Munich in May 1945. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart and due to meritorious service in combat, he received a direct commission of second lieutenant in February 1948.

Rogers is a resident of Medway, MA, where he serves on the Medway Planning Board, the Southwest Area Planning Council (SWAP) and the Regional Transportation Advisory Council (RTAC), the latter a key state transportation planning group.

Acknowledgements

This memoir draws from transcripts of interviews conducted by Robert French and Francine Veilleux over the course of several years (2008-2013) as well as earlier published and unpublished accounts I have written about my personal experiences and the line companies I served in during World War II, including my section in Susie Davidson's *I refused to die: stories of Boston area Holocaust survivors and soldiers who liberated the concentration camps of World War II* (Somerville, MA: Ibbetson Street Press, 2005). I extend a special thank-you to Hugh F. Foster III for his helpful criticism, comments and suggestions and his invaluable compilation of excerpts from the morning reports of the two rifle companies I served in as well as his summary of activities of the 2d Battalion, 157th Infantry (October 1, 1944—May 6, 1945). I am also indebted to my fellow World War II and Army Reserve veterans whose remembrances helped activate, confirm, and sustain my own recollections. Finally, I thank my wife, Francine, for her persistence and conviction in urging me to write about my World War II service and other major happenings, events, and developments in my life, which has been rich in experience if not financial wealth.