IN FRONT OF THE FRONT-LINE

WWII stories written by a Scout from the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized

Cpl. Raymond J. Leone

The author after basic training 1943, age 20

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A Cavalry Reconnaissance Scout

Many people have asked, *"**What was the job of a Reconnaissance Scout?"***

The primary job of a Cavalry Reconnaissance *(Recon)* Scout was to locate the enemy, and attempt to determine their strength in men and weapons. This information was then radioed back to headquarters for strategic planning. To obtain this information required numerous patrols into *no man's land (unoccupied area of land between enemy lines usually heavily defended by both parties),* sometimes at considerable distances. If the enemy was routed and retreating, the Recon Scouting Unit would pursue them as quickly as possible to keep the enemy from reorganizing their defenses. The enemy in turn, would do their best to stop or slow down the advancing Recon Unit by leaving smaller groups of soldiers behind with a tank and weapons, often including land mines. Many of these smaller enemy groups were simply sacrificed in order to protect the main retreating troops. After destroying the delaying party, the fast mobility *(recon units could move quickly because they were mobilized)* of the scouts often enabled them to catch up to the main enemy forces. If resistance proved to be greater than the scouting unit could handle, they would pull back and radio for artillery fire.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The idea of writing about my personal experiences and recollections while serving as a Cavalry Reconnaissance Scout during WWII started with my youngest son. A few years ago I gave him a *Radom 9mm Pistol (on the front cover),* which I had *"liberated"* from a German officer, whom I had captured. My son asked a friend of his if he could research the history behind that pistol. His friend, who is an avid gun collector and teacher, then asked me to write a more detailed account of how the pistol came into my possession. After I had written the story, they asked me if I would be willing to write more stories about my wartime experiences. I had eventually written enough stories to produce this book, and have also included a few photographs taken with a camera that I had with me at the time. From Normandy to Czechoslovakia, these stories chronicle my eleven months of combat either on the front-line or in front of the front-line in the European Theater.

As a non-commissioned soldier, higher-level command information was not available to me. I would like to acknowledge Executive Officer, Major Charles E. Rousek Jr., of Headquarters and Service Troop, and my Troop *A* Captain, Captain *(later Major)* William J. Buenzle. Major Rousek, with contributions of relevant information from the Troop Commanders, wrote a detailed history about our squadrons combat efforts that helped in the eventual defeat of the Nazi Regime of Germany. Together they produced a forty-three-page booklet written during the summer and fall of 1945, at the time of our occupation near the city of Prestice, Czechoslovakia. To my knowledge this booklet was distributed only to soldiers who were members of the *38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Mechanized Squadron*. Captain William J. Buenzle published several

short stories in the magazine, "*The Saturday Evening Post*," and the armed forces newspaper, "*The Stars and Stripes."* These resources helped me with the organization of dates of various encounters, provided me with the correct names of towns and places, and ultimately reminded me of the course of action my squadron had taken in Europe during WWII.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, who have read preliminary copies of these stories and have made suggestions. To Nicholas Horning, my grandson, I am truly grateful for all the time you spent in front of your computer word processing and editing these stories. A special thank you to my daughter, Denise Leone, who helped me finish the final draft.—*RJL*

PREFACE

The following stories of my experiences in World War II, the European Theater, are true to the best of my memory after sixty-six years. Many of the non-life threatening events are forgotten and, probably unimportant—I'm sure any front-line soldier can relate. Nobody can forget a situation where death might come at any moment. Hence, recalling and writing these memories after so many years is still quite traumatic and depressing.

For more than five or six years after the war, I could not talk about it without getting the shakes or even becoming very emotional, to the point of shedding tears. In World War I, it was called, *shell shock*. In World War II, it was called, *battle fatigue*. Today, it is called, *posttraumatic stress syndrome.* While recalling some of my experiences, the same emotions resurfaced again, but with less mental impact. At times, I wanted to quit writing and put it all behind me once and for all. Perhaps I was, and may have been more emotional than other combat soldiers; I don't know. I do not consider myself a hero, and hope; I haven't conveyed that message to you the reader. I did my job as a reconnaissance scout and soldier.

My sympathy and respect goes out to those who landed on Normandy's, Omaha Beach, in the first wave, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and faced almost certain death. Granted, my subsequent scouting duties were very dangerous at times, but perhaps nothing compared to what they faced.

In combat one cannot become complacent—it requires constant vigilance and alertness. Mistakes were made. Many soldiers died by their own hand or someone else's mistakes. One of our soldiers either forgot the password for the day or didn't hear the

challenge. Another soldier had a habit of looting that cost him his life and so on. I wasn't perfect. I also made mistakes, but recognized my dilemma before any serious harm occurred.

I have purposely left out names of buddies, because of concern that living siblings or relatives may desire more information on the death of a loved one, and may attempt to contact me. To receive a government death notice, at that time, must have been devastating enough. I would prefer not to have to go into detail of one's death, unless it would bring some closure or comfort to the person inquiring. Of the seventy-three men the 38th Cavalry lost, twenty-four were in my unit, Troop *A*. I knew most of them fairly well, however, I did not witness all of their deaths. The other forty-nine men I did not know; they were not in my Troop.

Lastly, battle planning and strategy are not part of this book that information usually remained with the commissioned officers. Since scouting always involved the possibility of becoming a *Prisoner of War* (*POW*), information that could be useful to the enemy was not divulged to the recon scouts unless it was absolutely necessary.

INTRODUCTION

I was second from the youngest of seven children born to my parents who immigrated to Minnesota from Boiano, Italy, in 1913. There were five boys and two girls. The older girl died in infancy before I was born. My father took a job with the Duluth Union Railroad. Over a period of time, he had advanced from a railroad car washer to a locomotive engineer and retired as such.

I was born on April 4th, 1923, and graduated from Duluth Central High School. During high school, I played drums in the school marching band and the school dance band. I also played drums for several dance bands around the city and earned enough money, at the time, to support myself. This relieved my parents from having to give me an allowance, which was appreciated by them.

After high school graduation, I decided to become a machinist, which would require at least four years of apprenticeship. This profession appealed to me because I was very mechanically inclined just like my father and brothers were. I took a job with a small machine shop that did work for a shipyard building Coast Guard ships. In December 1941, after the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, our workload picked up considerably.

By 1943, I had two years of my apprenticeship completed when I received a notice that I was being drafted for the Armed Forces. Two of my older brothers, Albert and George, had already entered the service in 1942. My oldest brother, Tony, was doing special engineering work on submarines in Philadelphia for the Navy as a civilian, so he was exempt. My youngest brother, Edward, was only 12 years old and too young for the service.

CHAPTER 1: BASIC AND CAVALRY TRAINING

On April 13th 1943, I was sent by bus to Fort Snelling, in St. Paul, Minnesota, for induction into the military service. I applied for pilot training, but failed the eye test when I had to line up two vertical sticks on strings some distance away. I never wore eyeglasses, because I could see close with my left eye and far away with my right eye, so I assumed I had good vision. I hadn't realized that I was born that way and that I had been automatically adjusting each eye all my life.

During my interview with the recruiting officer, I made the mistake of mentioning that one of my hobbies was motorcycle riding. Back in the early forties there weren't many people riding motorcycles, but the officer, apparently, had just received a request for motorcyclists. I was sent to Fort Riley, Kansas, site of the historic horse Cavalry Training Base that trained men and horses during the early Western days of fighting the Native Americans. Fort Riley still had a contingent of horses in 1943. Sometimes I stood guard on the horses, but never trained on them—my basic training would be for mechanized cavalry only.

Kansas was a new experience for me. One afternoon a vicious tornado hit the camp, destroying several barracks and other buildings. We had to take refuge out on a dike by the river to avoid getting caught in the storm. I remember what a scary experience that was—Northern Minnesota never saw tornados! Luckily, no one was killed and our barrack was one of the few left intact. After surviving the tornado, I managed to survive seven weeks of basic training which included: ten and twenty mile hikes, rifle training, marksmanship, calisthenics, and survival training amongst other disciplines.

Upon completion of basic training, I was sent south to Northern Texas to join a new unit that was being formed at *Camp Maxey (a new temporary camp.)* The new unit was the, *38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Mechanized Squadron*. Camp Maxey was located near the south side of the Red River not far from Hugo, Oklahoma, and north of Paris, Texas; it was miserably hot. Nighttime temperatures were only a few degrees lower then daytime temperatures. The barracks were not insulated and the heat inside was unbearable, especially on the second floor. Often, we would try to get some sleep outside on the crude boardwalks. It was late September before we began to get any relief in the evenings from the heat. One night while on guard duty, I remember hearing a flock of geese flying south, overhead. This reminded me of Minnesota; I wished I were there.

I was assigned to Troop *A*. We had jeeps, half-tracks, armored cars, motorcycles and trucks in our troop. Troop *F* had light tanks. We trained using these vehicles in the States and later in England. We also trained extensively in radio communications. My motorcycle assignment lasted only a few months as the motorcycles were replaced with combat jeeps. Despite all the training, many things would be learned later in combat. For example, we were not trained to shoot at *strafing aircraft (an attack by machine-gun fire from low flying planes).* In real combat, we wasted a lot of ammunition until we learned to shoot far ahead of the aircraft, instead of directly at it. The planes would then fly right into our line of fire; as a result, we used less ammo and became more successful.

When word came that the 38th Cavalry was going to England, the entire squadron was given a two-week *furlough (leave).* It was October, and I returned to Minnesota to be with my fiancée and family. Leaving them to go back to Texas was tough, knowing there was a possibility that I may not return home.

CHAPTER 2: ON TO ENGLAND

Sometime in early November 1943, the 38th Calvary left Texas, and traveled by train to New Jersey to board the *"Queen Mary"* passenger ship *(today, the Queen Mary is docked in Long Beach, California).* Although the *Queen Mary* was a luxury ship of English Registry, she was stripped inside to make room for soldier's bunks, and transformed into a troopship during the War. On November 15th, my squadron set sail from a New Jersey port for the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. There were over twelve thousand soldiers including the 38th Calvary of 850, and more than 900 crew members on board. As we went by the Statue of Liberty, I thought about my parents, who as new immigrants sailed through here many years prior. Our ship never had an escort, nor did we travel with a convoy—once we cleared New York Harbor we were on our own. It was well known that German submarines were very successful in sinking ships, however, the *Queen Mary's* speed was so fast no other ship or sub could presumably catch her. To make matters even more difficult for enemy detection, the *Queen Mary* constantly changed course, and traveled in a zigzag pattern all the way to Scotland. Although we did have one submarine alert, I think it was probably just a drill.

After the first day at sea, I discovered the ship would be serving us only two meals and no snacks in a twenty-four hour period. Since there wasn't much to do on board, I volunteered for *kitchen patrol* (*KP*), that way I could keep busy and eat whenever I was hungry.

On November 20th, 1943, after five days of peaceful sailing, the *Queen Mary* entered the Firth of Clyde, Scotland. From there my squadron entrained south to Exeter, England, in the region of Devonshire.

During our time in Exeter, we studied radio communications while waiting for our vehicles *(tanks, jeeps, half-tracks,)* to arrive. Also, we experienced a few air raid alerts when German planes on their way to drop bombs on Liverpool would fearlessly fly over Exeter and disrupt our evenings.

In our barracks yard there were the remains of a German Fighter plane that had been shot down during the, *"Battle of Britain" (German Air Force bombing campaign waged against England during the summer and fall of 1940).* When I graduated from high school, my parents gave me a beautiful wristwatch as a present. I broke the crystal that was not easy to replace because it had a slight curvature to it. I remember seeing pieces of broken Plexiglas from the canopy of the crashed German plane. After a bit of searching, I found a piece of Plexiglas that was just the right shape. I filed it to fit the watch and glued it in. My watch with the replaced crystal lasted for many years.

When radio school was over, the 38th Cavalry was sent north to Glastonbury, England. We spent our time there doing callisthenic exercises, and training extensively with rifles and cannons. Before long training had to be put on hold, as just about everyone in the squadron got sick with the flu accompanied by truly miserable sore throats *(the standard medication for curing sore throats back then was mercury throat swabbing).* I can't say the sore throats were all that surprising, because the winter weather was relentlessly cold and damp.

The winter months in rainy, chilly Glastonbury passed by, and like Exeter, air raid sirens occasionally rang out. One night during an air raid alert, a German plane was shot down near our area and an observer saw some of the crew bail out. We all had to go looking for them. The German pilot, on his own accord, walked into Glastonbury and

surrendered. I never heard what became of the other crewmembers, whether or not they had been captured, or perhaps died when they attempted to bail out.

We were still in Glastonbury on April 4th, which happened to be my 21st birthday. I don't remember having much of a celebration, as it wasn't really appropriate, considering we were all preparing to go to war. It wasn't long after my birthday that our five months in Glastonbury, would come to an end.

Early in May, my squadron was sent back south to Exeter. My older brother Al's outfit, the 735 Ordinance Company that was attached to the 35th Infantry Division, had arrived in England. He heard the 38th Cavalry was in Exeter, so he looked me up and came to visit. The date was around June 5th or 6th. I showed him our camp, introduced him to some of my buddies, and then we went for a stroll in downtown Exeter. We hadn't gone very far when the *Military Police (MP)* pulled up, recognized my shoulder patch, and told me to report back to camp immediately. I said my goodbyes to my brother, Al, and said, *"This is it (The Invasion)!"* I returned to camp and was told to get ready to move out. We would take part in the invasion of France, however, they didn't tell us where we were headed.

Our entire squadron left Exeter the following morning and traveled to the Port of Weymouth, England, where we would eventually be loaded onto a large flatbed looking ship, comparable to an ocean freighter. It wasn't until we got to Weymouth that we learned we would be landing in Normandy, on Omaha Beach. The date was June 8th, and the invasion had been going on for two days already. The port was very busy so we had to wait our turn to board. Large hospital ships could be seen coming in loaded with casualties. *(refer to map page 92)*

CHAPTER 3: THE NORMANDY BEACH LANDING, OMAHA BEACH

Four days after the initial invasion, the 38th Cavalry boarded a freighter-like ship; the date was June 10th. We sailed all night in a huge convoy of ships of every size. Many ships were returning to Weymouth for more troops and supplies. We reached Normandy sometime in the morning of June 11th, and anchored off shore about a mile from Omaha Beach *(the Allied code name given to that section of Normandy Beach).* There were two large battle ships off to our left side *(east)*, that were firing 16-inch shells far beyond the beach at targets that forward observers were spotting for them. Incoming German artillery was trying to hit the battle ships, but most of their shells were landing in the water—I never saw one shell hit the ships. Many large old ships had been purposely sunk in shallow water to serve as water breaks. We stayed where we were anchored all day and night and most of the next day until late in the evening. The shallow water near the beach was so cluttered with tank traps and partially sunken equipment that the cleared approaches were limited. Since supplies and infantry had precedence over us, we had to wait our turn to land on the beach.

The first night off the beach, German bombers came over after dark and dropped bombs randomly on our ships, hoping to hit something. The water was only about 30 feet deep so the bombs didn't explode until they hit the bottom and would then send up a geyser of colored water high into the air. I saw two bombs hit on the east side of our ship and one hit near the west side—others hit elsewhere. With thousands of our guns firing into the sky, it was quite a sight. Spent bullets were falling back on the steel deck like a bad hailstorm. The raid didn't last long and I didn't see any falling bombers, so we probably didn't shoot any down. Huge balloons on cables floated high above every ship

to keep the fighter planes from strafing. The bombers and fighters did not bother us in the daytime, because our planes controlled the skies.

On June 12th, late in the evening, my unit, Troop *A*, was the first to load onto a *Landing Craft Tank (LCT—an assault ship used to land tanks, other vehicles, and soldiers on beachheads*). Four of our armored cars were lowered by a crane, after which we climbed down on rope ladders. There was no German machine gun or mortar fire to face on the beach, because they had been destroyed or driven back inland, however; their artillery could still reach us. As we were going in, I saw a shell hole next to the LCT operator and asked him when that had happened. He said, he was hauling infantry onto the beach on D-Day and an armored-piercing shell had hit there.

Our LCT had to keep within a marked lane because of mines that had not been removed. As we neared the beach, the operator stopped in about three feet of water to let us off. My armored car had no problem maneuvering through the water, however, one of the other cars slipped into an underwater bomb crater and the crew had to bailout. The next day an attempt was made to retrieve the vehicle, but the salt water had already ruined it. When we reached the beach and saw all the destroyed equipment, I remember asking myself, *"What the hell am I doing here?"* We had landed on Omaha Beach at 9:30 p.m., and there was still daylight. This was the sixth day since D-Day, and the beachhead had been pushed back several miles in that time. Most of the American casualties had been picked up from the beach by now, but many of the dead German soldiers were still on the ground.

Once the entire 38th Cavalry had landed on the beach, we reorganized and headed inland. One of our platoons was strafed by our own fighter planes, which must have

mistaken us for Germans. One man was killed and became our first casualty. Since we all had fluorescent colored panels on our vehicles for identification, we wondered how this could have happened. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be the last time.

It was beginning to get dark, so we pulled into a field for the night. I tried to dig a foxhole, but the ground was so hard my little shovel wasn't adequate to do the job. This was our first night on French soil. I took a chance and slept on top of the ground, but didn't rest much. The night went by without any trouble.

In the morning, the squadron continued to travel inland to a village named Balleroy, where our Headquarters Troop had set up camp. Balleroy had been liberated several days before our arrival and was clear of Germans. The rest of us set up our camp around the inside perimeter of a nearby farmer's field *(the field appeared to be about forty-acres)* that had been cleared of mines.

Our field, and almost every field around us, was completely surrounded by raised dirt and rock with trees and shrubs growing on top. This type of boundary or barrier between the fields was known as a, *hedgerow*. The *hedgerows* could be as much as six feet wide and six to ten feet tall *(2 to 3 m)*, and they were incredibly strong. Hence the area was called, "*Hedgerow Country*." This camp was to be our home for the next five weeks as we alternately defended a section of the front-line a few miles south of Balleroy near the village of Caumont-l'Evente.

CHAPTER 4: NORMANDY FRONT-LINE DUTY

While the Allied Forces were building up troops and supplies for the planned breakout attack of the Normandy beachhead, the 38th Cavalry was in a holding situation. At the front-line, we guarded a small section between the British on our left, and the American 1st Infantry Division on our right. We rotated guard duty with other platoons, so we would spend a couple of weeks on the line and a week or so back at the camp near Balleroy, before returning to the front-line again. Patrolling was done at times to locate the German's front-line positions. We set up machine-gun outposts, and at night, listening posts a little further out into *no mans land*. The Germans were doing the same thing.

One night after darkness had settled in, I was lying in a foxhole that I had dug into the side of a hedge when I heard some German voices speaking softly. I knew it was a German patrol, but it was so dark it was impossible to see how large the group was, even as they passed by my foxhole, less than five feet away. Besides being scared, I was even more amazed they could not hear my heart pounding! I waited for their return—planning an ambush—but the patrol must have traveled back by a different route to their own line.

Our Troop *A* lost a few men to machine gun fire on our patrols, but that was to be expected. After our first couple of weeks at the front, we were relieved by another Troop, and returned to our camp near Balleroy. It was good to get back to hot food, instead of eating field rations. In the meantime, the Germans had learned the location of our camp. Several times their fighter planes *(Bf (Me) 109 Messerschmitt's and Fw 190 Focke-Wulf's)* would suddenly swoop down on our camp and strafe us. After this took place a couple of times, we set up some extra machine guns and waited for them. A few

days later they returned and we all fired. One plane was hit as he flashed by, not more than fifty feet *(15 m)* off the ground. He pulled straight up and stalled. At that point, we fired .50 caliber machine gun tracer bullets into him. The pilot never bailed out as the plane nosed over and came straight down. We didn't go over to the crash site. The other plane got away.

Artillery was another menace. Since German artillery wasn't that far away, it could easily reach our camp—and it did. Generally, they would shell us right around suppertime. Regular artillery uses bags of powder, and the gunner varies the powder charge for the distance he wants to shoot. Tanks and self-propelled guns use large fixed shells. They look like the small shells a deer hunting rifle uses, but much larger of course. The amount of powder in the shell is fixed. The guns shooting at our camp had to be from vehicles with fixed-shell guns. As a result, the sound of the gun being fired reached us before the actual exploding shell hit our camp. The close guns had to fire very high into the air for the shell to arc into our camp. Since we could hear the gunshots, we had time to take cover before the shells hit. We sustained some damage, but to my knowledge, no one was killed or injured from those guns.

German V-1 Buzz Bombs heading for England went over us daily; the launching sites must have been close. They would fly quite low and at constant speed. We might have been able to shoot some of them down, but we never did, for fear of them exploding over us. Early one morning I heard a Buzz Bomb coming, but it was going in the wrong direction. It was coming back instead of going to England. As it neared us, the jet engine quit and it began to descend; it flew past our camp and exploded in an adjacent field. Buzz Bombs are made of thin steel and carry about a ton of explosives. We felt

the ground shake when it hit, and a few seconds later heard the blast. I went over to the site with an officer to inspect it. It had hit an apple orchard where a farmer had been working with his horse. The horse was killed and the farmer was slightly injured from the shrapnel that hit his neck. Sometimes it was more peaceful up at the front-line than it was back at camp. After several days in camp, we went back to the front-line to relieve the platoon that was there.

Nothing much happened at the front in our absence. There was an abandoned farmhouse in the woods not far from our outpost. We suspected the Germans were using it at night for a listening post. We made a decision to get rid of the farmhouse, so the demolition crew blew it up. The farmhouse must have had many feather mattresses and pillows in it, because after the explosion feathers were floating everywhere.

Our outpost wasn't far from the village of Caumont-l'Evente, where a couple of German Panzer *(tank*) Divisions were known to be. One day when we were on our front-line outposts, a fairly large flight of British Lancaster Bombers made a low-level bombing attack on Caumont-l'Evente. The British Troops on our left couldn't take the town, because of the powerful German armor defending it. German gunners shot down most of the planes, because they were flying at such low levels. It was disaster for the British. From our viewpoint, we watched as bomber after bomber exploded or caught fire. Airmen were bailing out, some with their parachutes on fire. It was a horrible sight and there was nothing we could do about it. I don't remember if any of the bombers got through. Shortly after, we were pulled out of this area, and sent to another sector farther west where we would take part in the, *Normandy beachhead breakout attack*.

GERMAN V-1 BUZZ BOMB

The flying bomb had no pilot and was propelled by a pulsating jet engine *(the pulsating engine created a buzzing sound, hence, Buzz Bomb)* on the tail. It contained nearly a ton of explosives in the nose. Its speed is constant at about 390 miles per hour *(640 km/hr)*, and it flies between 2000 to 3000 feet *(600 to 900 m)* above the ground. The target distance can be as much as 150 miles *(250 km)*. Allied fighter planes were known to intercept some of them by inserting their wing under the Buzz Bomb's wing flipping them over to crash into the English Channel.

CHAPTER 5: NORMANDY BEACHHEAD BREAKOUT

By July 25th, enough men, equipment, and supplies had been brought to Normandy for an attempt to break through the German defenses. Our squadron was in a new area of the front-line near Saint Pierre-de-Semilly and the Saint Lo Highway. At daylight, American bombers appeared several miles west of us and began dropping bombs. Thousands of planes could be seen coming endlessly. All were dropping bombs it seemed, in the same area. Once the planes had dropped their bombs, they had been instructed to return to England for another load. The sight and noise were beyond description—it was just unbelievable! As we watched the bombardment, we were glad we weren't on the receiving end. The bombing was intended to open a gap through the German defenses for the American armor and infantry to burst through. Later we heard, those who went through the gap, found German survivors completely out of their minds. Their condition was caused by the absolute terror of the deafening noise coming from the seemingly endless bomb explosions, combined with the sheer number of bombs that had been dropped into one area, turning the landscape into a cratered ruin.

The following morning, July 26th, the 38th Cavalry moved into position near the 38th Infantry Division, on our right, to protect their left flank. There were hedgerows everywhere. We were told the German Troops in front of us, were the *Volksgrenadiers (Peoples Army—Infantry Divisions).* After a fairly heavy barrage of artillery, we attacked. Troop *A* was to give covering fire-support to those advancing toward the hedges directly to our front. My armored car was placed in a low spot so the turret was high enough to shoot the 37mm cannon at the next hedgerow across the field. The Germans were behind that hedge. As the light tanks and dismounted soldiers advanced,

the Germans began firing. I was on the 37mm cannon alone, and was looking for blue smoke coming from the German machine guns. Each time I spotted smoke, I fired an exploding shell in an attempt to knock out the machine gun. Sometimes I raised my head a bit higher for a better look, but this would inevitably bring a hail of bullets cracking *(breaking the sound barrier around my head)* in my direction.

Our tanks from Troop *F* were equipped with hedge cutters made from steel beams used by the Germans to make tank traps at the beach. They were sharpened sections of steel and welded close to the ground on the front of the tanks. The idea was to run the tank at full speed into the hedge, and hope the speed and weight of the tank would knock a hole through it so the troops didn't have to go over the top. It was a great idea when it worked, but most of the time the hedges proved to be too tough, and many of our tanks got stuck in the hedge and could not back out.

Before noon, the squadron had taken the German's hedgerow, but at a great price in men and tanks. The Volksgrenadiers, who we thought we were attacking, turned out to be a highly skilled German Paratrooper Battalion commanded by the distinguished Lt. Col. Von der Heydte *(well-known for his military efforts in Crete, Russia, and North Africa).* We had been misinformed about the strength of the enemy, and as a result, suffered many casualties and lost fourteen of our seventeen tanks. Bazookas hit some of the tanks, but most got stuck in the hedges and were later retrieved.

The crew of my armored car returned after the hedgerow was taken, and we were ordered to move up. I had just jumped out of the turret to help a wounded buddy when a counter-attack by German reinforcements and self-propelled guns began. In our weakened condition from casualties sustained earlier, we had no choice but to retreat.

The Germans did not pursue us, but only took back what they had lost.

Our casualties were taken to a field hospital several miles behind our line. One of our wounded soldiers, who had been treated there, returned to camp in the evening and told me he had been talking to my brother Al, at the hospital. My brother's unit was stationed across the road from the hospital and every time there was a lot of activity there, they would walk over to see what was happening up on the front-line—the date was July 26, the *Normandy Beachhead Breakout Attack*, and casualties were most certainly pouring into the hospital that day—Al recognized our wounded solider as one of the fellows he had met when he visited me in Exeter, England. Al asked the soldier where I was, and the wounded soldier said, "*Just wait here and he will be in.*" Luckily, I wasn't wounded and didn't get to see Al, but at least I knew he was still alive.

As we were retreating to regroup, I noticed the wristwatch that my parents had given me for high school graduation was missing. The first thing that came to mind was that it had come off when I jumped out of the turret at the hedgerow to help a wounded buddy. I thought some German soldier had it now. Three or four days later I was emptying spent shells from the bag on the back of the cannon I had been shooting. In the bottom of the bag was some water and mud. When I dumped it out, there was my watch and it was still running fine.

Later that evening I was sent to guard our vehicles. We had left some of them in a field to the rear. It was quite dark and we were being shelled by artillery. One of the shells set a jeep on fire. As it burned, I could hear a single plane flying around in the dark sky. All of a sudden, I could tell by the sound of the engine the plane was diving! He came in fast and strafed the burning jeep, only to make it burn faster. Next, I heard

him circle around for another pass. Behind the burning jeep was an armored car. I jumped into the turret and turned the .50 caliber machine gun toward the sound of his engine. As soon as he appeared in the light from the burning jeep, I aimed for his engine and was about to pull the trigger when he began shooting. I could see fire spurts coming from his guns in the wings. I shot at him, but failed to bring him down. He left the area. The plane was a *Bf 109 (Messerschmitt)* Fighter Plane. During that same night, more German planes flew over, and dropped a few more bombs. They did no damage, except to scare the heck out of us!

The next morning my squadron went back to the hedgerows expecting to fight again, but the German paratroopers were gone. The 38th Infantry on our right flank had broken through the German line and the paratroopers were in danger of being surrounded. They pulled out sometime in the night. When we moved into what was their front-line, we were surprised to see, lying on a stretcher, one of our wounded men. The paratroopers had bandaged him and left him behind. The real surprise was that our man was Jewish. The Germans would have known his religion, because it was stamped on his dog tags. This was an interesting contrast in enemy behavior, when compared to an opinionated, arrogant German officer whom we had captured during the previous day's battle. Despite that officer's attitude, some of their soldiers reminded us, by this act of kindness shown to our man, they too believed in compassion.

CHAPTER 6: PURSUIT TO PARIS

The fighting the 38th Cavalry did to break out of the Normandy beachhead was not really what Recon Scouts were trained for. Although a few days in a training course on battlefield attack helped, we took a terrible beating in men and equipment. Offensive combat was a job for the infantry. Now that the Germans were retreating, we would finally have a chance to prove our expertise in the field as cavalry reconnaissance scouts.

The infantry cannot advance without information of what lies in front of them. It was our job to move ahead and pursue the retreating enemy forces. Our communications, mobility, and speed were vital to determine that information. That information was then relayed to Headquarters, who passed it onto the infantry for their advancement.

When the enemy retreats, they may leave smaller groups behind to slow down or ambush their pursuer so their main forces can retreat in some order. Usually a tank or lethal guns capable of knocking out vehicles support these groups. Often they used roadblocks made of fallen trees or other debris or sometimes they would just set land mines. It was our job to locate and destroy these obstacles and the defenders if possible. If they were too strongly defended, we pulled back and radioed for artillery or tanks to assist us. Roadblocks were better to deal with then ambushes; we were at least alerted to the danger. With ambushes, there was no warning until the first shot was fired.

A jeep referred to as the, *Point Bantam*, or simply the *Point*, leads the reconnaissance team. The *Point Bantam* carries a driver, an observer, and a machine gunner, who stands up in the backseat. The gunner also serves as an observer and can shoot over the heads of those in the front seat. Since being designated, as *Point*, can be very stressful, this position is frequently alternated.

AMERICAN JEEP *(BANTAM)*

A typical American Jeep *(Bantam)* used for Reconnaissance Point, with a standard .50 Caliber Machine Gun. We normally carried three soldiers rather than four when on Point *(first vehicle in the column)*, for safety. If the Point Bantam hits a mine, or is hit by a cannon shell, three men are lost instead of four.

In our pursuit, my squadron knew the Germans we were chasing were the same paratroopers we had fought a few days ago in the hedgerows, and it was known they had tank support. As we progressed cautiously down the road, our Point rounded a curve and was shot at by a tank. The shot missed, and the jeep promptly backed up out of sight to report the tank's position. At the time, I was in the third vehicle from the Point with the platoon sergeant discussing our next move. All of a sudden, a British staff car pulled up from the rear and asked us about the situation.

There were three or four men in the staff car and we told them about the tank ahead. They said they would go have a look. Despite our warning, they rounded the bend. The tank fired, and they were all instantly killed. The tank gunner, likely, had made sight corrections after he missed his first shot at our jeep. We began encirclement of the tank on foot, but when we got to the tank's location, it had already moved out. As evening approached, we pulled into a field to spend the night.

Early the next morning, another soldier and I were standing with our lieutenant when a German tank fired a direct shell that exploded less than 20 feet *(6 m)* from the three of us. The lieutenant was facing the blast, I was standing broadside to it on my right, and the other soldier was broadside to his left. All three of us were knocked over by the explosion. When we got up, the right side of my face had tiny specks of blood, probably from sand, but no shrapnel wounds. The lieutenant was hit by a small piece of shrapnel on the inner side of his upper left thigh that narrowly missed his privates. The other soldier did not get hit. The field we had selected for the night must have been clearly visible to the camouflaged German tank crew. The tank that shot at us, no doubt, was the same one that had shot at our column and killed the Brits the day before.

As the 38th Cavalry continued south in pursuit, we encountered numerous roadblocks and were shot at many times, and sometimes shelled by mortars. But we were never endangered by German bombs or strafing as we had been before and during the breakout.

One late afternoon, the squadron pulled into a field to spend the night. As we began settling in, I could smell rotting flesh. Not wanting to smell it all night long, I decided to find the source before nightfall. Thinking it might be a dead cow or some other animal, I followed the odor and it took me across a sunken road to another small field. The field, as it turned out, contained the bodies of many dead soldiers, Germans and Americans, and a few civilians. Without question, there had been a terrible firefight and the dead had been placed there for, "*Graves Registration*" *(the military had special Companies of men, whose task was to retrieve, identify, and bury deceased personnel)*. Even though I was getting used to seeing the dead, this scene was extremely upsetting. One German soldier was lying there in two separate halves. Down the road, was an American armored car that had hit a mine. All that was left of the front end were a few vertical steel plates, while the horizontal plates had been completely blown out by the explosion. Up on the bank near the car was a boot with a foot still in it. Tragically, these are the realities of war.

The following day my Troop *A* was ordered to a town called, Truttemer-le-Grand, some fifty or sixty miles *(85 to 100 km)* south of Omaha Beach. As we neared the town, we began to run into more Germans. We were not that far from the town of Falaise, where several Panzer Divisions were now in danger of being trapped by encirclement. The Germans realizing the seriousness of their situation, were quickly becoming

disorganized as they tried to escape in any direction they thought might be clear of Allied Troops; but my Troop *A* and other Allied Troops were getting in their way, so the Panzer Divisions were forced to either fight or surrender. We entered Truttemer-le-Grand on August 14th, at night, under heavy shellfire by the Germans. The town was on fire, and the unrelenting shelling continued, even as we sped through the town on our way to another little town further down the road.

My Troop *A,* along with Troop *B,* had been ordered to proceed to the town of Tinchebray, which was only a few miles southeast of Truttemer-le-Grand, to basically challenge the Germans for occupation of the town. V Corps *(Fifth Corps of the U.S Army)* wanted to assume control in Tinchebray, but so far the Germans had held strong. About a mile from town, we made contact with the German troops, and attacked. Not long after, Troop *C* arrived, and joined the assault. Together, we forcibly managed to push the enemy out, and seize the town. Our efforts earned high praise from V Corps, and our Squadron was given the nickname, *"The Lucky 38th."*

From Tinchebray, we headed east to Paris, which was approximately 140 miles *(230 km)* away. We traveled fast on good roads ignoring the random bursts of gunfire as we left the Germans behind.

Finally my squadron was out of the dangerous, *"Hedgerow Country,"* of Normandy. What little resistance we met, didn't bother us much. Most of the German units were heading east to reach Germany. The enemy was everywhere; many were giving up and surrendering, however, the Panzer and *SS Units (Schutzstaffel—special protection force in Nazi Germany.)* continued to fight.

CHAPTER 7: THE LIBERATION OF PARIS, FRANCE

The 38th Cavalry reached the southern suburbs of Paris on the evening of August 24th, at Orly Airport. It was here, we ran into stubborn resistance. To our favor, the Free French Forces of the Interior *(FFI)* knew the Germans strength and locations. They were a big help, as they could tell us where the Germans were waiting in ambush. Having that information allowed us to attack from the rear. That way we were able to capture and kill many German soldiers, and save ourselves a lot of casualties. With long daylight hours, we could fight late into the day. After a short night's rest, we were off again at 5:30 a.m. The date was August 25th, and we headed north on a main street that would take us to our destination, the Cathedral Notre-Dame.

My squadron ran into many roadblocks constructed from cobblestones ripped up from the streets. The roadblocks had been made by the civilians to help slow down the retreating Germans. As we approached each roadblock, the civilians quickly tore them down to let us through. German snipers or possibly Nazi sympathizers often shot at us and at the civilians. One sniper shot at us from the top of a four-story building. He was standing behind a brick chimney for cover. We destroyed the chimney with .50 caliber machine gun fire to expose and eliminate him. A cannon shot would have done the same job, but our cannon barrels could not be elevated that high.

Before long, there were so many civilians on the street; our progression to the Cathedral Notre-Dame was slowed down to a crawl. There were thousands of Parisians bearing gifts such as bottles of wine, flowers, and food. Some civilians who could get through the crowds, just wanted to place their hands on our vehicles, as if we were the answer to all their hopes and prayers. It was a scene, of pure joy, I will never forget!

A reporter for the Armed Forces Newspaper, named Bud Kane, came forward and took a picture of my armored car and crew. The picture and story were published in, "*The Stars and Stripes,*" and in other newspapers *(see page 25 for the reprinted story).* Notice in the picture I am without my steel helmet, which is never done in combat. It had just been knocked off my head by a bottle of wine that had been thrown by a Parisian. I was unable to catch it. My helmet fell down inside the turret and so did the wine.

We eventually did reach the Cathedral Notre-Dame and pulled into the courtyard at 8:30 a.m., August 25th, 1944. The *38th Calvary Squadron Mechanized* was recognized as being the first complete American unit into Paris.

Small, isolated firefights on bridges and a railroad station continued on the rest of the day and evening. As darkness fell, the entire squadron was ordered to mount up and move out. The city was still in *blackout (no lights)*, so we drove slowly through the dark streets of Paris. Most of us were dog-tired and fell asleep while traveling, except for the drivers. Sometime later, we pulled off the road, but had no idea where we were, and frankly, didn't care. We were just so exhausted to the point, where we all tumbled out of our vehicles, and fell asleep on the grass. In the morning, we discovered we had slept on the lawn of the Petit Palais, on the Champs Elysees, the famous avenue of Paris.

Later in the day the 38th Cavalry received welcomed news! We were informed that the entire squadron had been ordered to stay in Paris to help clear out the remaining Germans and to guard some of the vital infrastructures: the telephone exchanges, bridges, and power plants just to name a few. The following night, German bombers came over the city and dropped bombs. Some civilians were killed, but damage was minimal.

In our free time, sightseeing was limited to how far one would want to walk, since

most of the Paris subways were damaged and not operating. Many of the prime tourist attractions such as the Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, and Place de la Concord, weren't far from our camp. We couldn't climb to the top of the Eiffel Tower, because the gate on the stairway was locked part way up.

One day while we were still in Paris, we took part in the Liberation of Paris Parade that started at the Arc de Triomphe, and ended at Place de la Concorde. A sniper on top of the Petit Palais fired a few shots disrupting the parade for a short time; we shot back, and the parade carried on. *(refer to map page 93)*

Men of Armor Recon Unit First Yanks to Reach Paris

A small detachment of American troops accompanied the French Second Armored Division into Paris yesterday morning to accomplish the liberation of the city, falsely reported two days before. Driving the fourth U.S. vehicle, a jeep, was a "*Stars and Stripes*" reporter, *Bud Kane*, the first U.S. correspondent to enter Paris. Here is the story of the entry into the city and the fighting that immediately preceded it. ***By: Bud Kane, "Stars and Stripes," Staff Writer***

PARIS, Aug. 25, 1944 At 7:40 o'clock this morning, the Second Armored Division drove through spasmodic sniper and mortar fire into the city of Paris. Their entry, ending four years of German occupation of the gayest city in the world, was heralded by cheers and hysterical shouts of thousands of Parisians who had waited tensely for weeks for the arrival of the Americans, French, and British armies pushing southward from their Normandy landing beaches. With the first elements of the French Division was an American Reconnaissance unit headed by Lt. Howard B. Tully, of Edmond, W. VA.

As the men and women lining the streets caught sight of the American uniforms, intermingled and side by side with their own French Forces of the Interior, wild shouts went up and girls leaped forward to throw flowers into the vehicles, to shake the hands of soldiers riding in them, and to kiss them on the hands and cheeks. It was a heart-rending spectacle. One old woman, in broken English, said with tears in her eyes, "*My stomach is empty, but my heart is full of happiness.*"

The occupation was not as easy as it might seem. Late yesterday afternoon, several attempts to enter the city were made on the Rue D'Orleans, but each time, heavy German fire held the forward units back. On one occasion, the fire was so great that gains of more than two miles were entirely erased. At dusk, Gen. LeClerc decided to postpone the entry until today.

Starting at 6:30 AM, forward units switched the attack from Porte D'Orleans to another gate to the city, and moved forward, mile after mile, more beset by the growing crowds, which lined the highways, than by any resistance the Germans offered. The people, bothered not at all by the mortar and cannon fire of the Germans, constantly blocked the highways as each vehicle marked with the names of French cities passed forward to attack.

At 7:35 AM, the first elements started into the city. On all sides, the wild and

hysterical cheers of the throngs lining the roads served as a stimulant for the French troops. Above the sound of the cheers was the noise of repeated gunfire from the isolated German resistance, but not even the threat of injury could dissuade the citizens from grasping the hands of the incoming troops.

At almost every corner, blockades placed there by the French had to be removed, stone by stone, to allow passage of the soldiers. Civilians worked feverishly to pull away and tear down these blockades, singing snatches of the "Marsiellaise" as they worked. Block by block, the vehicles advanced until ten o'clock; the first elements came down the Rue St. Germaine. Then the pandemonium broke loose.

Cheering civilians and free French reasonably constrained until now broke the boundaries guarded by drivers in jeeps, and converged upon the advancing column and showered the men with bouquets and hurrahs, grabbing frantically at each soldier, kissing them with fervor difficult to describe. Elderly men and women—and young ones too—wept unashamedly with joy and were on the verge of hysteria. The strains of the French National Anthem were heard suddenly. The crowds broke out in thunderous song. Hundreds wept.

Several times the column was halted by isolated sniper and machine gun fire, but these pockets, mostly Germans caught in buildings with no escape, were soon wiped out and the advance resumed.

Finally, the column reached the square at La Place de Hotel de Ville and the celebration for which the Parisians had waited many months was begun. Groups gathered around the Square, and again resounded the "Marseillaise" after which there was a wholesale resumption of bussing and dancing. *Paris, dear to the hearts of all Frenchmen and half the world, was free!*

(Re-typed from the article in the *"Duluth News Tribune,"* September, 1944)

Duluthian Shared Paris Welcome

The riotous welcome of a liberated Paris was shared by a Duluthian riding a top a reconnaissance vehicle of a U.S. mechanized cavalry unit. Cpl. Raymond Leone, 21, son of Mr. and Mrs. Phillip Leone, entered the city the morning of August 25, with forward elements of American forces accompanied by the Second French Armored Division.

In recent letters to his parents, Corporal Leone told of driving through the streets jammed with wildly acclaiming Parisians while sporadic sniper and mortar fire broke out from isolated groups of German resistance.

Girls leaped to the Americans vehicles, showering flowers and kisses upon the soldiers in a hysterical display of joy, Leone receiving an abundance of both, he wrote. Men and women alike wept unashamedly with joy. Above the massed cheering of civilians, the French National Anthem was heard. Hundreds broke out in song, with as many weeping openly.

The Duluthian said that several times, during the line of march, the column was halted by sniper and gunfire. The column finally reached the square at La Place de l'Hotel de Ville, where, Corporal Leone said, the civilian celebration broke out in a dinning bedlam to the tune of, "Marseillaise".

Corporal Leone went overseas a year ago, entering service in April 1943. Upon graduation from Duluth Central high school, he was employed as an apprentice at the Zenith Dredge Co. shipyards.

AUGUST 25, 1944, PARIS, FRANCE

The Liberation of Paris—The 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was recognized as the first American unit to enter Paris. The author is standing in the turret of the Armored Car, (without a steel helmet). Bud Kane, a reporter for "*The Stars & Stripes,"* newspaper took this photo as we approached the Cathedral Notre-Dame around 8:00 in the morning.

A FEW MEN FROM TROOP *A*

The author, bottom row right with buddies guarding a Telephone Exchange Building in Paris. The buddy kneeling on my right later died in Belgium.

CHAPTER 8: ON TO AND PURSUIT THROUGH BELGIUM

On September 1st, the 38th Cavalry was relieved of its Paris duty and ordered to go northeast to Belgium to intercept the retreating German Armored Units. It turned out, these were some of the same German Units that had escaped from the Falaise encirclement back in Normandy, and survived the vicious strafing from the Allied fighter planes during their retreat. Our mission was to locate those Units, and slow down their efforts to reach the Siegfried Line Defenses. By now most of their walking troops had been either captured or killed, but a sizable amount of German mobile units and equipment had reached Belgium by traveling at night and hiding by day.

Comment [NU1]: Don't know what you mean

It took us three days to reach the Meuse River near the France-Belgium border, where we found all the bridges destroyed. After a brief search, a *ford (a shallow place in a body of water)* was found downstream from one of the blown bridges. The squadron eliminated a few of the German defenders on the other side of the river, and with some difficulty, we were able to cross the river, despite the fast moving water. As we advanced on the town of Hargnies, France, we encountered a roadblock guarded by a German tank and some infantry. When we attacked, the tank and infantry retreated toward the town, but were inadvertently captured by another one of our platoons that had circled around behind them. Since an earlier reconnaissance mission had forewarned us that several German tanks and a large number of infantry heavily protected Hargnies; we delayed our assault and called for artillery bombardment.

As dusk approached, the Germans began to retreat out of town, but they were still within sight and range of our guns, so we were able to inflict many casualties on their troops. By nightfall, we moved in, only to find the town completely engulfed in flames.

Troop *A* was ordered to pursue the retreating German Armor—I was on Point. About a mile from town, the road entered a wooded area and then turned abruptly to the right. It was cut into the side of a steep hill. Somewhere down below on the left, was a creek that we could hear, but not see. As we moved forward, I stood up in the turret for a better look, but it had gotten quite dark by then. Staring into the darkness, I thought I could see a large dark object on the road not more than two or three hundred feet *(60 to 90 m)* ahead. I told the driver to pull over to the right and stop. I assumed it had to be one of the tanks that escaped from Hargnies.

As the platoon leader and I were discussing the situation, I suddenly heard a twig break very close to me on the right up-hill side of the road. I quickly pulled out my pistol and fired blindly into the brush where the sound had come from. My pistol was empty, so I grabbed a grenade and pulled the pin. At the same moment, I heard the word *"Comrade,"* yelled from the brush. I hadn't thrown the grenade yet, but the pin was gone and I had to get rid of it *(grenades do not explode until the handle is released).* German soldiers were coming out of the woods from both sides of the road, with their hands up. I threw the grenade as hard as I could into the woods on the downhill side of the road where it exploded—hopefully, it didn't hit anyone. Eighty-two German soldiers came out of the woods; two were officers. One of the officers spoke excellent English. When he saw how small our group was, he said he regretted surrendering. He thought we were the lead force of an armored division, not a reconnaissance platoon. We radioed back to headquarters in Hargnies, and they came and got our prisoners.

We stayed put for the night and were planning to attack the tank before daylight, but by early morning it was gone! The Germans somehow started the engines and moved

that huge tank without anybody hearing anything. What was more puzzling, the road ahead turned left, went down a steep hill, and crossed a creek on a wooden bridge, which was much too flimsy to support anything heavy—especially a tank. Cleverly, the Germans had figured out an alternate crossing. They crossed the creek below the bridge and climbed up a steep bank on the other side. When we inspected the tank tracks in the mud, we discovered we were chasing not one, but three tanks and one was a, "*Dreaded"* Tiger Tank *(see page 33)*.

We used the same crossing the Germans used and traveled about a mile *(2 km)*, when our lead scout spotted another roadblock up ahead. We pulled over to the right side of the road to await further orders. At that moment, one of our half-track vehicles hit a land mine that blew off one of its tracks *(see page 34)*. Several men were in the vehicle, some were slightly injured, but no one was killed. The roadblock was not defended, so we moved on. Another armored car followed our Point jeep as we slowly proceeded toward the village of Willerzie, Belgium. *(refer to map page 94)*

Approaching from the west, the road crossed a broad swampy area, and consequently, was raised on twenty feet of landfill. The Germans had hauled in some old farm wagons and used them to set-up a roadblock on the raised road about half way across the swamp. Since the previous roadblock had been undefended, the Point Scout must have assumed this one was as well. He drove up to clear the wagons off the road when a cannon shot came from the left front, about a half-mile away. One of the tanks we were pursuing had shot at the lead armored car, but the shot was low and hit the bank of the road. The tank was using armor-piercing shells, so there was no explosion.

THE *"DREADED"* GERMAN TIGER TANK

The word, *"Dreaded,"* was often used by the Allied Troops to describe this particular tank. The German Tiger Tank was extremely lethal and very heavily armored. The 88mm cannon could penetrate Allied Armor with ease at a tremendous distance. Note the size of the shell being loaded into the turret.

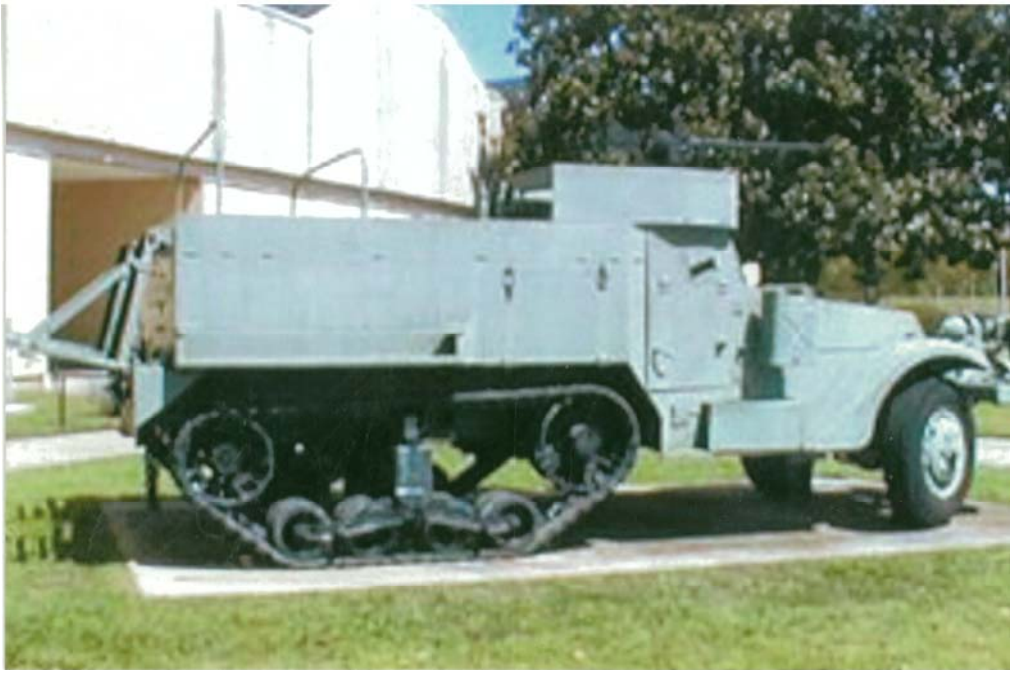
Weight: 63 tons

Frontal Armor Plate: approximately 4 inches or 100 mm

Cannon: 88mm

Cannon Velocity, Armor Piercing Shell:
Nearly 3250 feet/sec or about 0.6 mile/sec—990 meters/sec or about 1 km/sec

Effective Range: approximately 1.5 miles or 2500 meters



AMERICAN HALF-TRACK

These vehicles were used to haul ammunition, supplies, and personnel. Note the .50 caliber machine gun mounted over the cab.

Everyone jumped out of the car, except the gunner, and he should have! The gunner attempted to aim his small cannon at the tank, when a second and third shot hit the armored car and killed the gunner. His 37mm cannon was no match for the 76mm or 88mm cannons the German tanks had. Artillery was immediately called in, but the tanks had already moved out. As we were leaving, the civilians of Willerzie came out to place flowers, respectfully, on the knocked out armored car with the dead gunner still inside.

The road beyond Willerzie was straight for the next half-mile or so. It was lined on both sides with huge old trees, whose branches formed a tunnel-like cover over the road. For safety, our vehicles maintained a spacing of two to three hundred feet apart. The road climbed slightly as we progressed toward the spot where the tank had fired. The Sergeant and I were both standing up in the turret, which was elevated ten feet from the ground, when an extremely loud shot flew by our heads. Then a second shot rang out, and leaves from the overhanging tree branches floated down on us. The loud bangs were the tank shells breaking the sound barrier as they sped by. I hollered at the driver, *"Back up and pull off to the side!"* The tank was aiming at our first armored car. His initial shot was too high and missed. His second shot was too low; it glanced off the road in front of the lead armored car and went through the car's axles knocking the vehicle out. Nobody was injured, and no more shots were fired. We pursued the tanks for several more miles. The tanks, in time, ran out of fuel and had to be abandoned. The Germans disabled them by setting them on fire. By now, we had been chasing tanks and troops for the past ten days through Belgium, as they desperately tried to reach the safety of the Siegfried Line. Our speed and experience were so successful; we were indeed, *"The Lucky 38th Cavalry."*

CHAPTER 9: GERMANY, THE SIEGFRIED LINE

In our pursuit and fighting across Belgium, the 38th Cavalry lost two armored cars, a half-track, a light tank, and sadly, several soldiers. In turn, we destroyed many German vehicles, captured hundreds of prisoners, and wounded or killed an unknown number. Our 1944, summer offensive from Normandy to the German border was stopped by the, *"Siegfried Line Defensives," (a heavily fortified line of defense many miles long, constructed by the Germans).* The almost impenetrable defenses followed the high ground contours wherever the terrain was hilly. Anyone attacking was at a big disadvantage. Obstacles called, *"Dragon's Teeth,"* were the first barriers after the outposts were eliminated. These obstacles consisted of up-side down, pyramid-shaped concrete cones. They were spaced so no vehicle could drive through without getting high-centered. Behind the Dragons Teeth, were concrete bunkers for German personnel and large gun emplacements. Our bombs and artillery shells had little to no effect on them. Still as tough as those bunkers were made, attacks using infantry proved to be quite successful; but at a high cost in lives.

We reached the Siegfried Line at Krewinkle, Belgium. Krewinkle was roughly 100 yards *(90 m)* from the German Border. The Germans stubbornly defended this area, and it would take more equipment and personnel than we had to attack it.

We were not there very long. But while there, some of us stayed in an abandoned creamery that had actual living quarters. It was nice to sleep on spring mattresses for a change instead of the ground. The home also had a third floor with a dormer window facing the Siegfried Line. The Line was in plain sight up on a long hill and across a broad valley.

One day, there was a lot of activity and action coming from the Siegfried Line. I was curious and borrowed a spotting scope to see what was going on. I set up near the open third floor window and began scanning the area when, without warning, a shell exploded on the first floor. I had assumed the Germans were short of supplies and wouldn't waste firing a big shell at one person; I was wrong! Anyway, I gathered up the scope and made a hasty retreat down stairs.

During our short stay, the Germans continued to randomly fire shells in our direction, but not very often. By the middle of September, our squadron left Krewinkle and was sent north to defend a section of the front-line in the Monschau-Rockerath Forest. *(refer to map page 94)*

CHAPTER 10: GERMANY, THE MONSCHAU-ROCKERATH FOREST

The Monschau-Rockerath Forest terrain was made up of hills and valleys. The forest contained mixed hard woods and evergreen trees similar to the forests in northern Minnesota. It was almost October, and at that time of the year the forest was particularly beautiful, as the oak and maple trees were turning color. Like most densely wooded areas, distance visibility is generally limited, so one had to be constantly on alert for danger. This time the threat of danger was imminent, as we were approximately a mile away from the Siegfried Line that was situated somewhere out in those woods.

In front of our main line we set up forward outposts. Our job was to patrol the woods, locate the enemy outposts, and report any changes in activity. The Germans were doing the same thing. It wasn't uncommon for patrols to run into each other, then a quick decision whether to take flight or stand and fight had to be made. To make matters worse, our line was spread out very thin due to the number of casualties we had taken and the great distance we had to cover and defend. We could not use our vehicles in the forest; so all patrolling had to be done on foot. Guard duty on the outpost was usually two hours on, and two hours off, twenty-four hours a day. There were animals in the woods such as deer and squirrels that, at times, made noises in the darkness, so no one could ever completely relax.

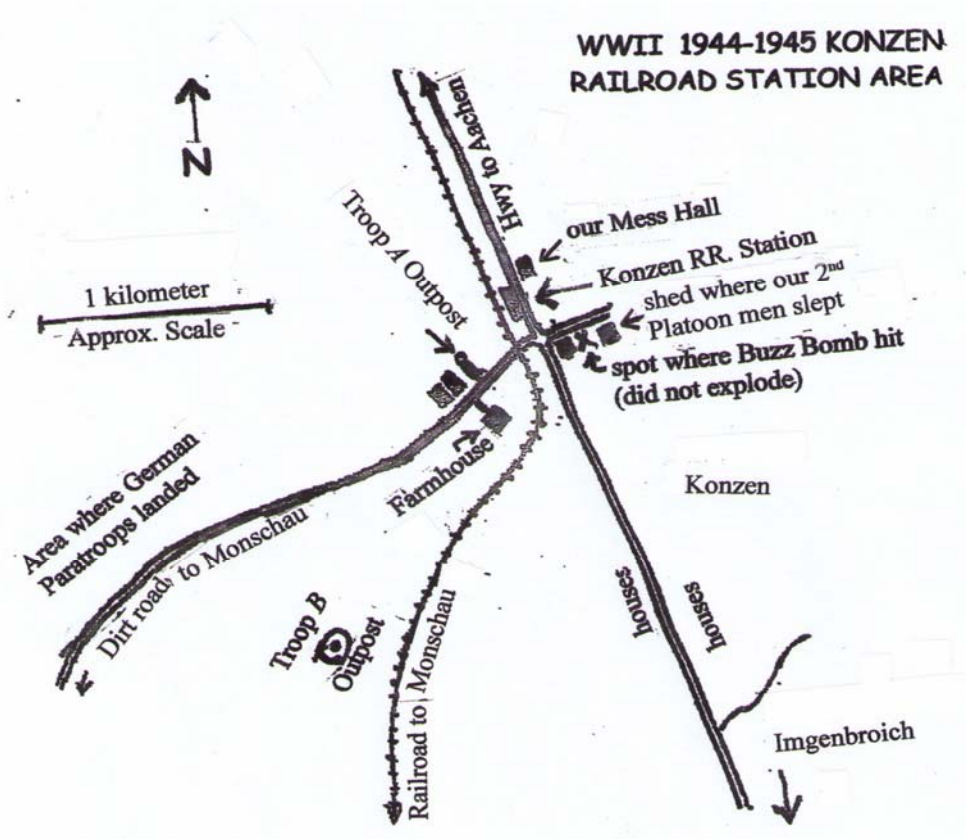
On one of my patrols with four other men, we were out about a half-mile from our line and hadn't heard or seen anything to that point. I was in the lead checking my map, when the soldier standing behind me unexpectedly dropped his Browning automatic rifle on my right shoulder and began firing straight ahead. Quickly looking forward, I saw a group of German soldiers go down about sixty feet away *(18 m).* I didn't know if they

had been hit or just diving for ground. Then I heard a noise in the tree above me that sounded like hobnailed boots on lumber. Startled, I looked up and saw a wooden platform similar to those used for deer hunting in Minnesota. I immediately realized that we had just walked into a trap. I swung my Thompson Machine Gun up and fired through the floor of the platform, expecting a hand grenade to be thrown at us. Three shots fired when the fourth shot jammed. I looked behind me and saw that my guys had taken off running; I was now alone. I had no choice, but to take off after them—deciding flight was the better option. Luckily, no other shots were fired, and we all made it safely back to our line.

On another patrol through the woods, I was in the lead when I spotted movement up ahead. I motioned for the guys to get down. It was a very large German patrol walking at an angle to us from our right. Since there were only five of us, we decided not to fight and simply let them pass by, as they hadn't yet seen us. Patrols that large were usually out to capture a prisoner, and none of us wanted to be one. Before long, we heard a lot of shooting to our left rear and knew that they had hit our front-line and would be returning. Not sure of our exact location or the amount of shooting going on, we decided to return to our line by circling to our left. That decision led us into another Troop's area that we were not familiar with. Suddenly, I heard a snap and knew right away that I had hit a mine trip wire. The mine hadn't exploded instantly, so I hollered at the guys behind me to hit the ground. We had four to five seconds to act before the mine *(a hand grenade)* exploded. The explosion came, but no one was hit because the grenade had been wired to the top of a fence post, and the shrapnel flew over our heads. Thankfully, the grenade was not rigged with an instantaneous fuse or this would probably be a

completely different story or none at all. The grenade explosion alerted a front-line guard who came out to challenge us. As luck would have it, he was one of our own Troops. We gave him the password and he led us safely through the minefield. On the other hand, the German Patrol that we had originally hidden from was not as fortunate. They had hit a strong section of our main line instead of an outpost. All twenty of the German Patrol were either captured or killed.

Eventually, the 38th Cavalry left the Monschau Forest and moved north to the town of Monschau. While most of our Troops stayed in Monschau, my Troop *A* was sent further north, to the Konzen Railroad Station. Our orders were to occupy and defend that entire area for the next few months.



CHAPTER 11: KONZEN STATION, GERMANY

Konzen Station was a railroad station for the villages of Konzen and Imgenbroich. The village of Konzen extended south from the train station for a mile or so on a good hard surfaced road. Imgenbroich was south beyond Konzen, about a mile, up near the top of a high ridge. The Siegfried Line Defenses also followed the same high ridge as Imgenbroich, but went behind the two villages. Because of the elevation of the ridge, the Germans were able to look down on the village of Konzen, and easily observe the area we were defending. Even though there were a few trees for cover, in daylight and clear weather, we had to limit our movements. Most of our defense work such as laying mines and barbed wire, had to be done at night, or on foggy days, or whenever visibility was obstructed. *(See map of Konzen Station page 40)*

The Konzen Railroad Station was located near an intersection of a narrow dirt road that crossed the main highway to Konzen and Imgenbroich. The dirt road also crossed the railroad tracks, went west then turned south to the town of Monschau which was 3.5 miles *(6 km)* southwest of Konzen Station. Monschau was where our Troops *B*, *C*, *E*, and *F* were deployed in defensive positions.

About 600 yards *(0.5 km)* west of Konzen Station we located three similar long storage sheds on the dirt road. The sheds were rectangular in shape, and positioned north to south, with the smaller side facing the road. They were made of studs and clapboard that offered some protection from the cold, but not from bullets or shrapnel. One of the sheds had a round walk-in brick vault at the north end where some electrical blueprints were found. That shed was to be our outpost and our housing. We set up a machine gun in a large door *(similar to a garage door)* on the south side of the shed, facing the dirt

road and the train tracks. The first night there, we tried sleeping in the vault for added protection, but it proved to be too damp and clammy. We took our chances and made sleeping quarters in the north end of the shed next to the vault.

My machine gun outpost was the only one on the right of our area defense line for Troop *A*. It was about two hundred yards *(180 m)* west of the railroad station and at least that far from the outpost on my left. The distance between my outpost and Troop *B* on my right must have been more than a mile. This undefended expanse bothered me, as we were clearly vulnerable to nighttime sneak attacks on that side. That area was also visible to the enemy, so they knew it was undefended. Something had to be done to fortify our exposed right side.

With my limited knowledge and experience in demolitions, I took it upon myself to surround our outpost with mines using grenades and other powder charges. I also put out several parachute flares. When these flares are set off, they shoot up into the air and float suspended from a small parachute, illuminating an area for about 10 minutes. Since 10 minutes wasn't long, I usually placed 3 or 4 flares on the same tree. If we needed to set off another flare, that option was available to us. At least now, we could be forewarned of any possible danger and be ready. Having solved one problem, I inadvertently created another problem. Many of the local farmers had left their animals in fenced fields when they fled the area. Sometimes the Germans would cut the fences or artillery shells would blow them open. Twice, cows and goats got into our minefields. Some of the animals were injured and some were killed. We had no choice, but to shoot the injured animals, and replace the exploded mines.

During the two months we occupied Konzen Station, several things happened,

some interesting and some tragic. There was a two-story farmhouse directly in front of our outpost about 250 yards *(225 m)* away. We sometimes used that house as a listening post at night. We would stand by an open second floor window, facing the Siegfried Line. One clear quiet night, it was my turn at the window. Flying bombs *(German V-1 Buzz Bombs)* were coming over the hill beyond Imgenbroich from somewhere, not far away. They passed overhead, at about a thousand feet, on their way to Eupen, Belgium, our 5th Corp. supply depot. As I was watching them, the jet engine in one of them quit, and a long tail of fire that made it look like a comet was streaming out from behind. It was arcing downward and looked like it was going to hit our farmhouse. I hollered at the guys who were resting on a spring bed behind me to take cover. We tumbled down the stairs and into a small dirt basement waiting for the explosion. We felt the ground shake, but did not hear an explosion. The next day, we saw that it had hit the ground alongside a farm shed in which our Troop *A*, 2nd Platoon men were sleeping. The crash site was about 600 feet *(185 m)* from our farmhouse. Fortunately for them, the bomb did not explode, as it would have killed every one of them with its one ton of explosives. The weight and speed of the bomb made a hole in the frozen ground nearly eight feet deep to bedrock and twenty feet across. There were solid chunks of white explosives and broken metal scattered everywhere. The Buzz Bomb likely had a faulty delayed trigger timer, and that saved the lives of our 2nd Platoon men.

One of us had to be on the machine gun at all times, day and night. Sometimes we had two, if there were enough men present, but most of the time it was one. Time on shift varied from two to three hours. Those off shift slept with their clothes on and always kept their personal weapons within reach. After many days and nights of this

routine, most of us were exhausted. Even during sleep, nobody could completely relax. One day during an inactive period, some of us were playing cards in a small room we had made for comfort from the cold and foggy weather. All of a sudden there was a loud, very close explosion and dust. No one was hit; we all took cover. When the dust finally settled, a six-foot diameter *(2 m)* hole could be seen in our roof. The hole was less than fifteen feet from where we had been sitting. I suspect a German patrol, under the cover of the fog, had slipped in close enough to fire a mortar round and then quickly retreated. That incident proved the Germans knew which of the three sheds we were living in.

Our *mess kitchen (place where we ate hot food)* was located in a farmhouse not far from the railroad station. Each day at noon, anyone not on guard duty would walk to the kitchen, carrying their mess kit, and eat. One clear cold day we were sitting inside the house enjoying our meal, when an unexpected volley of three or four artillery shells hit close by. Some of the guys that had finished eating were outside cleaning their mess kits, in hot water barrels provided for washing, when the shells hit. Those of us inside made a mad dash for the basement and waited for the dust to clear before we could assess the damage. Sadly, shrapnel hit and killed one of the men who happened to be outside. No other shells were fired that day. The shells were likely fired from the four self-propelled guns we found later disabled in Imgenbroich, after the 78th Division captured the town.

Clear days were rare at Konzen Station, but one clear day I was walking down the road to the farmhouse for lunch. As I crossed the main road, a shell exploded in the ditch right in front of me. Instinctively, I dove into the ditch for cover, expecting more shells, but none came. I remember climbing out of the ditch and seeing my left thumb covered in blood. A German observer may have seen me leave my outpost or a mortar crew had

moved in close without being seen. I wasn't far from our mess kitchen, so that could have been their intended target and I just happened to be near the missed hit. Based on the death of one of our men earlier, the shell that hit our outpost, and the shell that almost hit me, the Germans had our movements figured out and were watching us closely.

Sometime during the second week of December, there were rumors that a German Armored Division had moved into the Imgenbroich area behind the Siegfried Line. With a good highway from Imgenbroich through Konzen Station, it seemed like a logical route to expect an attack. Our captain gave us orders to put out additional tank mines. The mines came in boxes without the fuses and had to be assembled. I don't remember how many mines were in a box, probably eight or so. They were heavy, but could be carried on one's shoulder if he were strong. The fuses required a minimum of five hundred pounds *(225 kg)* of pressure to set one off, so they were considered safe to handle.

Normally, we would insert the fuses while inside an enclosure to get out of the cold weather, and then carry the mines out to the field where we would shallowly hide them under the soil. When set off, the resulting explosion was powerful enough to break a tank's steel track and stop it. Since I was only five feet six inches tall *(168 cm)* and weighed 128 pounds *(58 kg)*, I stayed in the barn to put fuses in the mines. I wasn't strong enough to carry a box full of mines out to the field. The weather was cold and foggy, so we could work without being observed by the Germans in the Siegfried Line. A group of guys and a platoon leader left the barn carrying their load of mines. A few minutes later there was an enormous explosion. Somehow the leader's box of mines had exploded, and he entirely disappeared. We don't know if he had tripped in the snow, or perhaps a sniper's bullet hit his box while he carried it on his shoulder. The men had

fortunately left enough space between each other during the walk outside. This proved to be a wise decision, as no one else received any serious injuries from the explosion.

On December 16th, 1944, early in the morning, our outpost guard awakened us. There was a tremendous barrage of artillery fire coming from the Imgenbroich area, aimed at Monschau. The Monschau area was where the rest of our squadron was in a defensive position. It was still dark, very cold, and heavily snowing outside. Those of us in the outpost had no idea what was happening, but assumed it was a German attack on Monschau. We wondered why they would attack there instead of in our area. Monschau was not suitable for armor or infantry; it had many steep hills and a valley. Konzen was flat and it was doubtful we could have stopped an armored unit. Everyone deployed into defensive positions and waited for daylight expecting an attack, but all attacks stayed concentrated on the Monschau area.

Eventually, an officer informed us that our Troops *B*, *C*, *E*, and *F*, in Monschau, were under attack mainly from German infantry supported by a few tanks. They could not radio for air support, because our planes had been grounded for the past several days, due to heavy fog and snowstorms around the area. Our troops, supported by an engineering combat battalion, managed to stop and destroy two infantry attacks the first day, December 16th, and four more attacks the next day.

Very early in the morning on December 17th, *(1:30 a.m. or 0130 hrs.)* several very low flying transport planes flew over our outpost. They were only about five hundred feet *(150 m)* above the ground. Although it was dark, I could see a paratrooper standing in an open door way and faint blue light behind him. Several planes had gone by before I realized they were German paratroopers. My first reaction was to shoot at

them, but then it occurred to me that there might be many on the ground already. They seemed to know where to jump, because many of them landed in the area west of our outpost that was undefended. Early the next morning, off in the distance and out of our gun range, we could see small groups of them attempting to return to their own lines. Their mission had failed because they had been too widely dispersed. Later, we learned they were members of Lt. Col. Von der Heydte's group. We had previously encountered this famous Lt. Colonel when we fought in the hedgerows of Normandy. A few days before Christmas, Lt. Colonel Von der Heydte, himself, surrendered in Monschau.

An atrocity happened near Malmedy, Belgium on December 17th that should be mentioned. A German Armored Division, commanded by Colonel Peiper, had overrun a retreating group of about ninety American artillerymen. They were taken prisoner, disarmed, and led to a field where they were machine gunned to death. A few of them faked death and escaped to spread the details. Word of this atrocity went down the American lines like wild fire and infuriated every front-line soldier. The unofficial order, I'm sorry to say was, *"Take no prisoners,"* and that unofficial order was observed for several more months. Some years later, the media reported that Colonel Peiper met his death when a group of Frenchmen firebombed his house. I never heard any follow-up.

The result of the 38th Cavalry's success in holding the American line at Monschau denied the Germans access to the vast supplies, such as fuel, stored in Eupen, Belgium, that was the 5th Corps Supply Depot. Also, the German defeat in the Konzen-Monschau area became the northern pivot point of the, *"Bulge,"* and helped to stop the Germans from reaching their major intended goal, Antwerp, Belgium.

(Re-typed from the *"Stars & Stripes,"*—Friday, Feb. 2, 1945)

38th Recon. Cavalry Stops Four Attacks

WITH THE V CORPS-----When German prisoners of war taken in this sector referred with grim admiration to the American "Panzer Grenadiers," who stopped them cold at Monschau, they were speaking of the 38th Cav. Recon. Sqd, interviewers report. Turned infantry in defense of this vital point, the troopers met and repulsed four attacks on their front despite the pressure of enemy paratroopers who had landed in their rear. With the support of units of the 146th Engr.Bn, the 62nd FA Grp., they held fast and denied the enemy access to important roads that would have enabled Von Rundstedt to expand his salient.

Just released from the First Army's secret list, the 38th has been fighting on the continent since D-plus-6. They claim to be the first American unit to have entered Paris last August, screening the Fourth Division into the French capital. Heading the Fourth across northern France and into Belgium, they have since been hitting into the defenses of the Siegfried Line.

One day between December 20th, and Christmas, I was on guard at our outpost. It was around noon and I was alone. The rest of the crew had walked to the mess kitchen for lunch. We had been warned earlier that in the December 16th, break-through of the American front-line now known as the, *"Battle of the Bulge,"(massive German offensive)* many German soldiers had been dressed in American uniforms that they had taken from captured soldiers, and were also using captured American vehicles. The German spies were infiltrating Americans units attempting to seek information about our strength.

It was a cold, clear sunny day as I scanned the snowy field in front of me. I heard a motor and saw a jeep coming up the dirt road from the railroad station to my left. It stopped in front of the outpost, and an officer and a driver got out and walked around to the entrance door. I immediately thought it strange, because no one in our group would ever drive up this road in broad daylight. The Germans could easily see us from the Siegfried Line up on Imgenbroich Hill. The officer was a lieutenant colonel, and the driver a corporal. They came in the door and the driver went to the side, sat down, and never uttered a word.

The Lt. Colonel introduced himself, and did all the talking. He spoke English well—without an accent that I could detect, but so did many of the officers we had captured earlier in previous engagements. When he started to question me about our strength, I told him a bunch of lies. I exaggerated about the number of minefields we had planted, all the tanks we had hidden in the woods behind us, and the extra troop support that we had been given. Being alone, I tried to stall him until my buddies returned from lunch. He must have been satisfied or anxious to leave, because he left before my guys arrived. As soon as they exited the door, I got on the phone and called the command post

at the mess kitchen. I told them to stop that jeep, however; they had already gone by before anyone could stop them. Realistically, the Lt. Colonel could have been one of us and just curious, or he just might have been a German spy—I, will never know.

The powerful German Armor did break through in the lower Ardennes Forest, and punch a *salient (outward bulge)* into the Allies front-line. They were stopped and stalled at the Meuse River and started running out of supplies—especially fuel. As a result, the Germans were not able to maintain their massive armored offense. By December 23rd, weather conditions had improved allowing our grounded *(grounded by heavy snow and fog for many days during December l944)* Allied Air Force back into the air. A counter-attack was launched, and Allied bombers flew day and night bombing targets deep into Germany.

At that time, German anti-aircraft guns used radar for detecting and shooting down our bombers. To disrupt and confuse the German radar, the Allied bombers dropped tons of small thin aluminum strips called *chaff* into the atmosphere. The chaff would produce a cloud of false echoes on the radar screen, so it was almost impossible to pick out the real aircraft from the echoes of the chaff. Chaff could be found everywhere on the ground in Germany.

Christmas Eve, 1944, had arrived. There was snow on the ground, which helped beautify our area even the evergreen trees around us had snow on them. This all reminded me of Christmas in Minnesota; I was feeling pretty homesick. There was a small evergreen tree by our outpost and I decided we should have a Christmas tree. I decorated our little tree with handfuls of chaff that I found under the snow. It wasn't much, but for a while it took our minds off the war.

For Christmas, my fiancée in Minnesota was sending me a pair of sheepskin-lined boots to keep my feet warm on these cold winter days. I was looking forward to getting them, but they never arrived. We heard German forces had captured some of our mail depots in their attack. I presumed some German soldier was warmly wearing them.

Another possibility of why I had not received the sheepskin boots could have been theft in our rear echelon. *Rear echelon (personnel that deal with administrative and supply duties)* depot personnel handled everything that came to the front-line troops. Someone there could have simply kept the boots or sold them on the *"black market," (illegal trade)* which we knew existed. I personally witnessed one episode of shortcutting supplies. It concerned down-filled sleeping bags.

One day during a lull at the front-line, I had a chance to go to the supply depot in Eupen *(Konzen to Eupen was 12 miles (20 km) northwest),* for a badly needed hot shower. At the depot, I noticed many of the personnel *(rear echelon)* had down-filled sleeping bags. We front-line combat soldiers had bags made from wool blankets. Though the down-filled sleeping bags were requested, only a few of our officers ever got them.

On Christmas Day morning, I awoke to a clear blue sky. From inside the outpost shed, I could hear the continuous humming noise of numerous airplanes flying overhead; it sounded like they were flying very low and fast. Assuming they were ours, I went outside to get a better look. I was about to wave at them, but quickly pulled my arm back, when I realized the planes had Swastikas displayed on their tails. They were headed west, toward Eupen, our main supply depot, which was probably their intended target. The sight of so many German planes, flying at will through the air, was

completely unexpected. By now, a few of my buddies had joined me outside to watch this spectacle. The planes were a few miles west of us when chaos ensued, as Allied Fighter Planes pounced on the German Fighter Planes, and a great show of dogfights began. Because of the distance, we could see planes being shot down, but couldn't tell if they were theirs or ours. Not many of the German planes returned, but they could have retreated in another direction. One of the planes, a German Bf 109 Messerschmitt, was flying back at tree-top level, and behind it about a half mile, was an American P-51 Mustang chasing it down. As the planes approached the Siegfried Line, they had to pull up to clear the Imgenbroich Hill. The German plane made a broad sweeping turn to the left. Somehow the P-51 closed the distance and fired a burst. The Bf 109 flew into the hillside and disintegrated in a cloud of smoke and fire. Although we won that particular aerial battle, there was little doubt; we had also lost some of our own pilots and planes on that Christmas Day, 1944.

A few days later, and another clear day at our outpost, I heard a low flying plane coming from the east. It was an American P-47 Thunderbolt flying at an elevation of about one thousand feet *(305 m)*, which was surprising, because they usually fly in groups of four and fly much higher. When the plane flew overhead, the sound of his engine seemed normal, but I could visibly see that the plane was losing altitude. Shortly after he passed by, I heard an explosion and saw a column smoke about a mile away. The pilot must have been hit or passed out, or died before he crashed. A few of the men from our unit hiked over to the wreckage and recovered his dog tags.

The day before New Years, I was ordered to accompany a group of soldiers, with a few of my guys, and some demolition engineers, to help carry explosives. The mission

was to blow up a concrete bunker in the Siegfried Line Defense. There were about fifteen of us, and we each carried approximately twenty pounds *(9 kg)* of explosives. It was New Year's Eve night, and we all met at 10 p.m. *(2200 hrs)*, picked up our loads, and headed east following a fence-line.

The night was cold with several inches of snow on the ground. The moon was almost full, but intermittent storm clouds occasionally blocked it out. Whenever the moon would pop out from under the clouds, we had to lie down and wait for the next cloud. With the snow on the ground, each time the moon shone, the darkness of night transformed into daylight. Slowly, we worked our way through the *Dragon's Teeth*, with the fear of mine traps and machine guns waiting for us. Much to our surprise and relief, there weren't any!

With relative ease we reached the bunker, and went inside. There were several large electric motors in operation, but no sign of German soldiers. We dropped our explosives, went back outside, and took up defensive positions, as we waited for the engineers to strategically place the charges. When they were finished, we all left by the same route we had originally taken to get there. Around midnight, and with everyone safely out of harm's way, the engineers pushed the plunger, and a tremendous explosion destroyed the bunker. Where were the Germans, were they celebrating New Year's? We couldn't figure out why they had left a bunker like that unprotected. This particular bunker's electrical equipment was the ventilation supply for a large section of the Siegfried Line. For whatever reason, New Years, 1945 was brought in with a bang!

Troop *A* was to remain at Konzen Station until the middle of January.

CHAPTER 12: WESTERN GERMANY, MONSCHAU

Sometime around the middle of January 1945, we left Konzen Station and Troop *A,* was sent to Monschau. Before leaving Konzen Station, I had to remove all the land mines I had put in earlier. Removing them is much more dangerous than setting them. There are two pins in an instantaneous fuse, an upper pin and a lower safety pin. The lower pin is supposed to stop the firing pin from hitting the cap and charge. It's the first pin you put back in before removing the mine. All mines, except one, were successfully defused. When I approached this particular mine, something didn't look right. The trip wire was slack instead of taunt. As I got closer, I could see the upper pin was partially out, and the striker was resting on a bent pin. I backed up, laid down, and pulled the wire. The grenade exploded without any problem. Perhaps some small animal, like a rabbit or squirrel, may have run into the trip wire.

We arrived in Monschau later in the day; it was only 3.5 miles *(6 km)* south of Konzen Station. *(Monschau was the area where our Troops B, C, E, and F, had fought fierce battles with the Volksgrenadiers on December 16th, during the German Winter Offensive).* Our platoon leader set up living quarters in a grain mill made of rock. The mill was an interesting structure. It had a creek running through it with a large water wheel that provided power for a stone grinder. The mill was not in operation as it was January, and the creek was frozen.

Behind the mill to the east was a large, very steep hill. This area was part of the headwaters of the Roer River, but a long way from the famous Roer River Dams. I was instructed to set up an outpost on top of that hill. The temperature was extremely cold *(14^{o}F / -13^{o}C),* and the snow was over a foot deep. We had to carry all of our equipment

up that hill, as there was no road. At the top of the hill, the ground leveled out and contained a small forest of planted evergreen trees. On the east side of the forest was a large open treeless field, slanting up toward the town of Imgenbroich *(it was the same town we could see from Konzen Station).* This position brought us closer than we had ever been before to the Siegfried Line Defenses; the Line was now clearly insight. This made for a touchy situation for both sides, since the Germans could see us just as well.

We set up our machine gun on the east side of the small forest and had a good line of fire over the open area in front of us. Assuming the Germans might try to knock out our gun with mortar shelling, we dug a deep standup pit for the gunner. I wanted to secure our outpost with booby trap mines, but the 12 to 16 inches *(30 to 40 cm)* of snow on the ground made that impossible. Instead, I tied several parachute flares to the trees with hand pulled wire triggers on them. We pitched our tents a little further back in the woods on top of some dry hay. Haystacks were everywhere in Germany. We had small stoves in the tents, but they were mainly used for cooking *C-rations (pre-cooked or prepared wet canned food).*

Due to the extreme cold, we all took turns on watch, and alternated guard duty almost every hour. One night after I had completed my watch, one of my men, who was a very high-strung, nervous individual relieved me. I had no sooner crawled into my sleeping bag when he came running back to the tent saying that he had, *"Heard noises out there!"* I told the nervous soldier to get back to the gun pit, and the rest of us would follow close behind. I immediately woke up some of the other guys. Since we all slept with our clothes on, we left the tent within minutes. As we neared the pit, I went left to fire a parachute flare that would light up the field. The soldier behind me went directly

over to the pit. I hadn't yet set off the flare, when six or more shots rang out from the gun pit. I ran back only to discovered our nervous soldier mistook our man, who had gone over to the pit, for a German solider, and he proceeded to cut loose with his .45 caliber Thompson submachine gun. The impact of the bullets drove our man back into the bushes. I began cutting off some of his clothes to see where the bullets had hit. To my relief, his wounds were red holes in his muscles with little or no blood. He was hit several times, as I remember, in the right thigh, right upper arm, and left thigh. We radioed for the medic at headquarters, and in the meantime, I gave him a shot of morphine to ease his pain. The medics arrived shortly and took care of him. Luckily, the wounded soldier wasn't hit in any vital spots. He made a good recovery, and returned to our Troop several months later. During all this action, there was no sign or problem with the Germans. We were to have a similar situation with this same nervous soldier later on, when we had moved deeper into Germany.

The January weather stayed freezing cold for the next few weeks. For some reason, the Germans in Imgenbroich must not have liked the cold weather either. We never saw a patrol, nor were we shelled despite being such an easy targets. It seemed to be more about surviving the cold than avoiding bullets. We were issued non-insulated rubber overshoes to put over our leather boots. The overshoes afforded little to no protection on our very cold feet. I solved this problem by stuffing dry hay in the overshoes, then putting them on without the leather boots. This worked great as long as you didn't have to walk very far. When the hay got damp, it lost its insulating qualities, so I changed it with more dry hay. Before long, an Allied Infantry Division took the town of Imgenbroich, and we were on the move again.

JANUARY 1945, MONSCHAU, GERMANY

Two of my buddies, one in a snow camouflage suit used for winter patrols.

The stone building behind them is the stone mill for grinding grain.

CHAPTER 13: ON TO THE ROER RIVER & DEDENBORN

With the successful defeat of the Germans Troops at the Siegfried Line in Imgenbroich, we mounted up and headed for the Roer River Dams. The infantry division that took Imgenbroich didn't bother to clear out the few remaining Germans who were still inside the bunkers, because their primary goal was to reach the Roer River Dams. For this reason, when our Squadron moved out of Monschau, we did not go directly through Imgenbroich. Instead, we went south around it, then east to another sector where a portion of the Siegfried Line *(the Siegfried Line was over 390 miles (650 km) long and contained thousands of bunkers)* had been taken earlier and was cleared of the enemy. The German Troops that got left behind in Imgenbroich eventually realized the Allied Troops had overrun this area, and they were now trapped. They started leaving the Siegfried Line bunkers in small groups, in an attempt to go east to reach their own line across the Roer River.

The Allied Troops also wanted to reach the Roer before the Germans could blow up the dams and flood the river. Because my squadron was fully mobilized, we had a bit of a speed advantage over the German Troops, who were now mostly walking, due to their shortage of vehicles. After passing through the Siegfried Line, we traveled east toward the village of Dedenborn. With short days of light *(early February)*, our traveling hours were limited, so we pulled into a large field with a farmhouse to spend the night.

The next morning, some of the guys were preparing breakfast using rations, while others hadn't awakened yet. For some reason, I felt we were being a little too complacent. The farmhouse and field were on a flat area that dropped steeply off on the east side into a broad valley. The east-west gravel road we had arrived on was not visible

from the farmhouse. To better secure our location, I decided to place a machine gun on the edge of the field to cover the gravel road. I was alone and digging a spot for the gun when I heard marching footsteps on the road. Looking up, I saw a group of soldiers with a leader walking towards me. At first I thought they were Americans. As they got closer, I realized they were Germans. It was too late to holler for assistance from my buddies, because that would give my location away, and the Germans hadn't yet spotted me. I picked up the machine gun and when they were almost below me, I yelled in German, *"Hande hoch (hands up)!"* They looked up and saw me standing there with the machine gun pointed in their direction. All of them, except the leader, immediately dropped their weapons, took off their steel helmets, and raised their hands. The leader jumped behind a large boulder and tried to rally his men. Then I shouted, *"Nein waffen (no weapons)!"* I don't know if they understood me, but finally in English I bellowed, *"Get that son-of-a-bitch out of there or I will shoot."* The men persuaded their leader to give up. I slid down the bank toward the soldiers and noticed that the leader had dropped a *"Radom 9mm Pistol"* on the ground. I picked up the *Radom (see front cover),* and then marched my twenty-two captives back up the road to the farmhouse. Needless to say, my buddies were very surprised to see us coming. It's quite possible these German soldiers were some of those left behind at the Siegfried Line bunkers in Imgenbroich, and were ready to give up.

Unfortunately, the Germans made it to the Roer River Dam first, and blew it up before any of the Allied Troops could stop them. Some German tanks, self-propelled artillery, and soldiers made it across the river before the flooding started, but most did not, and were captured. When we reached Dedenborn, we could go no further; the

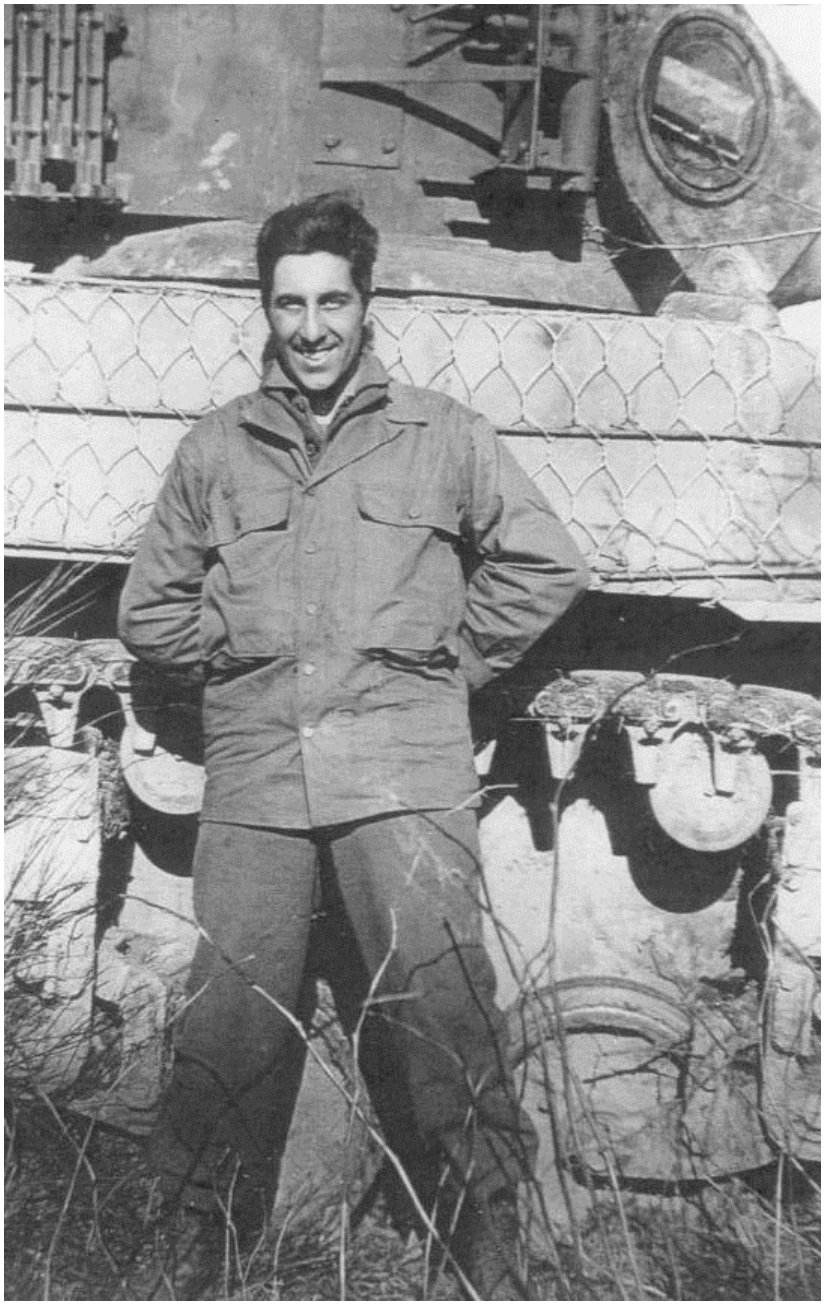
flooded Roer River stopped everyone. It would take at least three weeks for the river to recede enough to let us cross. We parked our vehicles in a fairly large field, near Dedenborn, and settled in for the long wait. The field was near the top of a steep hill. There was a gravel road next to the field that went west several miles to the Siegfried Line and back to Imgenbroich, the little town on the high ridge, that had once given our Troops so much trouble.

On the gravel road near our parked vehicles was a German farm wagon with two dead horses and a dead driver. The driver had to be in his sixties. A shell had hit between him and the horses. It appeared that he had been hauling ammunition to the Siegfried Line when he got hit. The fact that Germans were using a horse and wagon, and an old man, supported our belief they were short of materials and personnel. When we left the area three weeks later, they were still there on the road. It was not unusual for such things to be booby-trapped, so we did not move them.

The three weeks spent near Dedenborn, waiting for the Roer River to recede, was a welcomed break. It gave us a chance to relax and get some much-needed rest. We found a fairly good cabin in the woods to stay in. It was great to have a roof over our heads after sleeping in the snow at Monschau for so long. We had time to do maintenance on our equipment, check supplies, and engaged in more training. Several of our armored cars had been replaced with M5 light tanks *(the M5 tank was powered by twin Cadillac V8 engines)*, so we all had to learn how to run these new armored vehicles. The bad thing about the three-week break was that it gave the German defenders time to fortify their roadblocks and lay more mines. Our anticipation of this would soon prove to be true.

Although it was February, there was hardly any snow here, considering we were not that far east of Monschau. The German patrols did not give us any trouble as they had either been captured, or were on the east side of the river. Since they didn't shell us, which was unusual, could only mean they were short of ammunition. They did have a monster cannon that occasionally, shot over our area. The shells sounded like a freight train going by. They were probably aiming for our 5th Corps supply center in Eupen, Belgium, which was about 14 miles *(23 km)* west of us, as the crow flies. I discovered after the war, this particular cannon could only be moved around on railroad tracks. This cannon most likely was a Krupp K5 heavy railway gun used by the German Army. The K5 had a maximum firing range of 30 miles *(50 km)*, easily within reach of Eupen. The shells were also a good size weighing approximately 560 pounds *(255 kg)* each. Some of our guys said they actually saw the shell going by. I could hear it, but never saw it.

As February passed and March arrived, we were joined by a battalion of Rangers. The Rangers were an elite group of soldiers, who had advanced offensive training and unique skills such as rock climbing and martial arts. They were used primarily for special missions. The Rangers were a welcomed addition, as we never received enough reinforcements to replace our lost ones. They gave us more firepower and support. We were happy to have them.



FEBRUARY 1945, DEDENBORN, GERMANY

The author in work cloths *(Fatigues)* learning the operations of the M5 Light Tanks received to replace some of our Armored Cars.

CHAPTER 14: CROSSING THE ROER RIVER

By March 1945, the Roer River flood level had dropped considerably. A pontoon bridge was erected at Rurberg, not far from Dedenborn, and we were able to cross. Each Troop had a designated route and villages to attack and capture. We ran into many roadblocks as expected. The Germans did their best to stop us, but we were doing what we were trained and equipped for, combat reconnaissance. Sadly, we lost a few men, but the Germans suffered more losses. Many were killed and hundreds were captured. It seemed the German High Command was sacrificing these defenders for their own safety so that they could get across the Rhine River. The closer we got to the Rhine, the stiffer the resistance became. We encountered more tanks and stubborn defenders; our casualties began to increase.

On March 4th, we had reached the village of Hergarten, about ten miles east of the Rurberg, Roer River crossing. We were passing by a small farmhouse when a younger, teenage German girl came out to the road and stopped us. She was crying and pleading with us to follow her. She kept saying, "Mutter, Mutter," and was pointing to a small shed by their farm home. Inside the shed, laying on a piece of carpet placed on a dirt floor was her dead mother. She had been killed by artillery shelling the previous night. There was nothing we could do for the girl except to let her know that more of our Troops and medics were close behind; we had to move on.

This was tough for us to take, because civilians were not normally part of our gruesome business—usually they had vacated the area long before the battle. We had dealt with some civilians in France and in Belgium, but none in the approximately five months we had been in Germany. We had been instructed not to fraternize, in any way,

with the German civilians. As we moved farther east, we began seeing more civilians. Many of us would take extra food from the chow line to eat, only to leave it for the starving children, German or otherwise.

By March 9th, we finally reached the Rhine River at Remagen. The Allied Forces had captured the famous Remagen Railroad Bridge *(famous because it was the last standing bridge across the Rhine River)* on March 7th, two days earlier. Infantry and Armored Units were being rushed across, because the bridge was unstable from previous bombing and all the other German attempts to destroy it. Despite the best efforts of the Army Engineers to save the bridge, ten days later, March 17th, it finally did collapsed, killing and injuring many of the men who were trying to save it

No sooner had we arrived in Remagen and we were ordered to leave. Our reconnaissance expertise was needed elsewhere. The entire squadron, including Group Headquarters, was sent south to Saverne, France. Our new assignment was to screen for the 6th Corps Seventh Army. It was a very long journey *(250 miles or 420 km)*, as we backtracked west, through villages and places in which we had previously fought and defended—such as Imgenbroich and Konzen Station. We then traveled north to Liege, Belgium, where we turned south to Saverne. In a way, it was kind of a relief passing freely through those areas without being shot at or shelled as before. By the time we arrived in Saverne, the combat situation had changed, and within a few days we were ordered back up north where we had come from, the Remagen Bridge.

We were glad to be going back up north, as the area around Saverne was heavily booby-trapped with explosives. The trip back took several days and we followed the same roads as far as Liege, Belgium. One problem we encountered on our return trip that

we didn't have initially, were dusty roads. The roads were very dry when we returned. Most of us didn't have goggles for our eyes and suffered terribly from the dust while driving. We had to alternate drivers frequently because of it.

From Liege we turned east to Aachen, Germany, and further east to Duren. Both of these German cities had been bombed beyond description. Allied engineers constructed routes across these cities by going over the top of the rubble instead of clearing roads through them. We reached Remagen, *(again)*, on March 30th, having traveled over five hundred miles to Saverne and back without ever having to fire a shot!

(refer to map page 95)

CHAPTER 15: CROSSING THE RHINE RIVER

By the time the Remagen Railroad Bridge collapsed, enough American troops and tanks had succeeded in crossing over to the east side, and establishing a very strong bridgehead *(strong position secured inside enemy territory).* Meanwhile, the Allied Engineers had finished constructing a pontoon floating bridge about a third of a mile downstream from the collapsed Remagen Bridge. The pontoon bridge made crossing the Rhine River still possible, but less efficient, as strict weight and speed restrictions on the bridge had to be observed. After arriving back at the Rhine River at the end of March, we *(the 38th Cavalry)* would now have to patiently wait our turn to cross over to the east side.

It was a gray, cloudy day when the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was finally allowed to cross the pontoon bridge. Because of weight restrictions on the bridge, we had to keep a sizable distance between each of our vehicles. As one can imagine, it took a lot of time to get all of us across—*approximately 200 plus vehicles including tanks, and about 800 men.* Considering the river's fast current and choppy water, we made it without incident.

Upon reaching the east side of the river, we regrouped and traveled south (upstream) several miles before leaving the river valley. This route lead us to higher ground and better roads. Before long, we entered the Autobahn *(the German freeway)* and motored very fast heading northeast toward the large city of Kassel. The only obstacles in our way were a few blown overpasses that were easy to drive around and did little to slow us down. Our fighter planes now dominated the sky, so there was no danger from strafing German aircraft.

THE REMAGEN BRIDGE WEST TOWER ON THE RHINE RIVER

The bridge was captured by the Americans on March 7th, and collapsed into the river on March 17th, 1945, after repeated bombing by the Germans. The author took the photo while crossing the river on a pontoon bridge erected by Allied Combat Engineers.

PONTOON BRIDGE ON THE RHINE RIVER

Crossing the Rhine River on a Pontoon Bridge below the collapsed Remagen Bridge. Note the distance we had to maintain between our heavy vehicles. We are approaching the East bank of the river.

It took us less than three days to travel 140 miles from the Rhine River, to Fritzlar, through Merxhausen, and finally east to Kassel, capturing a few German soldiers along the way. I remember it well, because the following day, April 4th, was my 22nd birthday.

On April 4th, one of our platoons caught a German convoy of soldiers and trucks trying to escape east, deeper into Germany. After a short firefight, the Germans surrendered. As we were inspecting the captured German trucks, much to our surprise, one of the trucks just happened to be loaded with Five Star Hennessey Cognac. The Germans must have taken it from the French, and now we were about to take it from the Germans, until the captain drove up and took over. By that time, many of the bottles had found their way into our bags. I didn't have a cake that day, but by the hand of fate, we celebrated my birthday that night with French Cognac.

A few days later, my squadron traveled to another small village to scout for any pockets of German activity. The mayor of the village told us there were no German soldiers in his town; they had already left. It was getting late in the day, so we set up roadblocks around the village and stayed for the night. My platoon, Troop *A*, set up our roadblock on the west side of town, where we had originally entered the village. It was a secondary gravel road on a hill with woods on both sides. We dragged dead trees and stumps from the woods to block the road, then positioned a .50-caliber machine gun near the woods on one side of the road, and finally placed an armored car on the opposite side of the road. The armored car had a 37mm cannon and a .50-caliber machine gun. The roadblock was well covered.

The night quietly passed by without any action, but early in the morning a German staff car approached from the west *(Note: Because we were mobilized, we were*

able to pass by thousands of German Troops who were left behind at the Rhine River without transportation, and trying to escape east). The German staff car must have thought it was a German roadblock because the driver stopped and got out of the car. We hollered at him to raise his hands. Startled, he jumped back into the car, got it turned around, and took off at high speed. We began firing and could see our tracer bullets hitting the rear of the car. The car continued on a short distance racing toward a 90-degree left hand turn in the road. At the turn, the staff car went straight ahead, and hit a large tree. No one got out. All four men in the car were dead, one turned out to be a General. Their decision to escape was absolutely senseless, because the war was already lost for them. It was now only a matter of time until the Germans surrendered; as it was evident their army was in complete disarray. Groups of German soldiers were scattered everywhere, many of them without leadership and many just wanting to give up.

Moving deeper into Germany, we began seeing more and more *Displace Persons (DP's—the people forced into concentration camps, because of persecution).* Most of their German guards had been captured or fled, as American Troops flooded into the Nazi Countryside. After years of captivity, the DP's simply didn't know what to do, or where to go. On April 12th, my squadron entered Nordhausen, Germany; it was the first concentration camp we had encountered. With all the guards gone, emaciated prisoners were roaming freely everywhere. Many of these people said they had been working in underground factories dug in the hills around town. They were forced underground, as a result of Allied bombing. We couldn't do much to help them, as there were thousands, and we had to move on. Regrettably, they would have to wait a bit longer for the Red Cross people, or the Allied non-combat troops to come to their aid. *(see map page 96)*

CHAPTER 16: PURSUIT THROUGH CENTRAL GERMANY

On April 13th, my Troop *A* stopped in one of the many small villages in our pursuit eastward. The village was roughly 25 miles *(40 km)* west of Halle, Germany. My sergeant asked me to reconnoiter the next village which was two miles farther down the road. I selected a jeep, a driver, and a machine gunner. We left our Troop and headed south on a good road located on the west side of a shallow valley.

After a short uneventful ride, we entered the village on its main street. The town seemed to be deserted, and the uncomfortable silence of this empty little town bothered me. Slowly moving ahead, I told the driver to watch the front, the gunner to watch the left side, and I would watch the right side. There were several two-story buildings on both sides of the main street, which made this situation even more precarious. A cannon shot suddenly rang out and echoed off the surrounding buildings. The echoes disguised the shot and we couldn't tell where it came from or where it had hit. Then a German soldier came running out of one of the building and surrendered. Not knowing if this was a trap or ambush, we quickly took him prisoner and made him sit on the flat front hood of our jeep with his legs wrapped around the vertical wire catcher. Without further delay, we spun the jeep around, pushed the gas pedal down to the floor, and headed back out of town as fast as we could go. A German tank on the eastern side of the valley began to fire at us as soon as we cleared the village. He fired three successive shots, but because of our speed, all three shots fell short. Fortunately for us, the tank gunner couldn't have been too experienced—he was using armor-piercing shells where he should have been using exploding shells. Within a few minutes, we made it back to our Troop *A* with our prisoner, who had hung on to the front of the jeep for dear life.

When we returned to our Troop, much to my surprise, there was a squadron of new American Tanks equipped with 90mm cannons that were capable of knocking out anything the Germans had. I couldn't help thinking to myself that the American Armored Units could have used these tanks much earlier in the war, especially during the *"Battle of the Bulge,"* and the ferocious tank battles of Aachen and Duren, where we lost so many units.

The squadron's Commander was interested in our scouting mission, so I briefed him on what had happened in the village up ahead. Their mission, at this stage of the war, was basically the same as ours, and that was to clean up small pockets of German resistance and take prisoners. A short time later they moved out and headed toward the village. Unfortunately, we never heard the outcome after they left.

That entire Armored Tank Squadron was made up of African American Soldiers. It was the first time I had ever seen African Americans in a front-line combat unit. After the war, I learned the Americans had actually activated three African American Tank Battalions. This particular squadron that we encountered could have been members of the 784th Tank Battalion, because their route through Germany, which was just north of ours, seemed to coincide most closely with the route of the 38th Cavalry.

CHAPTER 17: HALLE, GERMANY

By April 14th, the 38th Cavalry reached Halle, Germany. On the east side of the city, there was a large airfield with many different types of German Bombers parked around the perimeter. They were not camouflaged or in *revetments (protective walls)*. I remember wondering why these targets, out in the open, had not been bombed or strafed. To make sure the planes wouldn't be used again, we drove around machine-gunning all the tires and engines. It appeared that the airport had been abandoned sometime earlier and the planes were simply left behind—perhaps a lack of fuel and pilots. Halle, as were many of the towns we had passed though since leaving Nordhausen *(our first concentration camp),* was full of free roaming DP's. We remained there over night.

In the morning, we noticed that the rubber pads, on the tracks of our M5 light tanks, needed to be reversed. The steel tracks were made in sections and had hard rubber pads on both tops and bottoms. Having traveled nearly 1800 miles, the pads were badly worn down. Since there didn't seem to be any German Troops around, we decided to do the job. The job took longer than expected; daylight quickly turned to dusk, and we needed more time and light to finish. Our captain gave us permission to turn on the jeep headlights, which is never done in combat. While we were working, anti-aircraft fire could be heard off to the east. We shut off the lights when a single fighter plane, flying southwest at terrific speed, flew over us. Though most of us were good at identifying planes, nobody knew what this was. The anti-aircraft shell bursts were way behind the plane. Sometime later, I was reading an aviation magazine and saw a silhouette of the same plane. It was a *German Jet Me 262*. It was the first and only jet I saw in WWII.

CHAPTER 18: MERSEBURG AND LEIPZIG, GERMANY

Sometime around April 18th, Troop *A* reached Merseburg, Germany without much trouble. On the outskirts of town, we came upon a fairly large building with several tall flagpoles. Each pole had a colorful flag or banner. One of the flags had the Nazi Swastika symbol on it. I cut that one down to save as a souvenir. Upon entering the large building we found several canoes, kayaks, and other types of watercraft. This facility turned out to be an abandoned boat club. Behind the rear of the building was the Saale River *(this large river was a tributary of the Elbe River).* Since we hadn't seen any German Troops for some time, our sergeant decided this was a good place to take a break. We borrowed some canoes and kayaks, stripped down to our underwear, went for a swim, and did some boating. The swim was certainly a good reprieve from having to think about all the stressful demands of war, even if was just for a few hours, besides; we all got to take a much-needed bath.

By now, the Russians were beginning to close in on Berlin. Some of the German soldiers were surrendering to Americans to avoid being captured by the Russians for fear they would be shot. Other groups of organized German Troops were heading south to Bavaria and Czechoslovakia to join their forces already there. Austria and Czechoslovakia were to be their *redoubt (fortified last stand).* During this time, some members of our Troop *B* escorted Major General Huebner, of our 5th Corps, to the town of Torgau on the Elbe River, to meet with Major General Balankov, 34th Corps Commander of the Russian Red Army. That meeting took place on April 27th, 1945. It was one of a series of meetings would take place in Torgau to bring American and Russian Commanders together. This historic event received a lot of media attention, as it

marked the beginning of contact between American and Russian forces during the invasion of Germany.

While these meetings were taking place the, *"Battle in Berlin,"* waged on with Soviet forces rapidly advancing though the city. On April 30th, 1945, Hitler committed suicide in Berlin. On May 2nd, the city surrendered, however, fighting continued until the end of the war.

The 38th Cavalry was once again on the move to another area south of Leipzig. We were told German soldiers were hiding in the nearby woods. My Troop *A* took position guarding the east side of the woods while some of our men went around to the west side to sweep toward us. Off to our left *(south)* was a small cabin on the edge of the wooded area. It was about eight hundred feet *(240 m)* away. One man, in my group, decided to check out the cabin before taking his post. He no sooner entered the front door than a shot rang out. A few seconds lapsed, and I saw a German soldier run out the rear door toward the woods. I shot at the running soldier, but did not hit him. Not wanting to leave my position, I asked one of the other guys to run over to the cabin to see what had happened to our man. I expected the worst. My guy came back mad as hell and nearly in tears. He was carrying a German Luger 9mm Pistol and said our buddy was dead. He had been shot in the head and killed instantly. The German soldier who shot him had dropped the gun before he ran. A short time after the incident at the cabin, our Troop *A* intercepted a German soldier who had come up behind us. He had no visible weapons, but when ordered to empty his pockets, out fell some 9mm pistol bullets. The war was over for him. We remained in the area for a few more days checking out rumors of German Troops hiding in the surrounding woods.

From the Leipzig area, the 38th Calvary traveled south to Eger, Czech Republic to assist in the offensive push into Czechoslovakia. While preparing our vehicles and weapons for the mission, I was checking the ammo in the turret of my armored car when the announcement was made that the war was over. It was *VE Day (Victory in Europe)*, May 8th, 1945. My buddies were jubilant and celebrated by shooting their guns into the air. I figured I had survived this far; I wasn't about to get hit now—so I lowered the turret seat, sat there quietly, and thanked God.

Of the approximate 225 members of my Troop *A* reconnaissance unit, we lost twenty-four *killed in action (KIA)*, seventy-three *wounded in action (WIA)*, three *missing in action (MIA)*, one *prisoner of war (POW)*, and eighteen *non-battle casualties (NBC)*. Our total casualty list was over fifty percent of our Troop. Not all of the fifty percent were involved in front-line scouting or combat because this list also includes support personnel services such as cooks, mechanics, supply, and many located at Headquarters.

During the German breakthrough of our line at Monschau, Germany on December 16, 1944, Headquarters Troop was attacked and suffered some casualties as a result. Although these men were never involved in patrolling, scouting, or offensive attacks on the front line, there were times when they were in danger from strafing aircrafts and artillery. In fact, credit for the first shot to hit a German *Bf 109* fighter plane in Normandy was given to the cook's assistant. Without their essential services, it would have been difficult for those of us doing the scouting to perform our duties.

CHAPTER 19: ON TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA

When the War was declared over, the 38th Cavalry was sent south to a small farming town in Czechoslovakia called Skocice. The village was about fifteen miles south of Pilsen, home of the famous Pilsner Beer. The terrain around Skocice was made up of rolling hills and valleys with forests of evergreen trees scattered throughout the hillsides. Hay, corn, and vegetables seemed to be the main crops. The roads were gravel, narrow, and dusty. *(refer to map page 96)*

A larger town called Prestice, probably like a county seat, was about five miles farther north toward Pilsen. Unlike the village of Skocice, Prestice contained paved streets and businesses. Prestice reminded me of a small Midwest American town. The businesses in the one and two story brick buildings had been built together to form a square around a central town park, which contained swings, picnic tables, and large trees for all the villagers to enjoy. A sidewalk and a paved road surrounded the park. Our Headquarters Troop was stationed there.

My Troop *A* stayed in Skocice and was housed in a large room that may have once served as a dance hall and meeting place for the village. Cots were brought in for us to sleep on. Most of our vehicles had to be parked in other areas within walking distance, as the roads were too narrow to accommodate them.

Though the war was officially over, there were groups of German soldiers in Czechoslovakia that refused to surrender. Our peaceful respite ended on June 10th, when we were told a large group of Germans were discovered in a forest not far from Pilsen. We were ordered to assemble in Prestice fully *armed (full arms, ammo, and fuel)* for combat the morning of June 11th. As each of our Troops arrived for the mission, we

parked our vehicles as ordered, on the road around the edge of the park. Because of limited space, we had to park almost bumper to bumper. It took some time to get organized and to receive orders before our Captain gave us the order to mount up.

I was already in my armored car standing up in the turret as the rest of the soldiers hurried to their respective vehicles. Suddenly a *phosphorous grenade (a fire and smoke grenade)* exploded behind me in one of the jeeps. Some of the burning phosphorous landed on my steel helmet and field jacket, but I pulled the jacket off before it burned through my clothes and into my skin. When I turned around to see what had happened, everyone was running away. I saw fire in the back seat of the jeep and realized the main ammo, bazooka shells, machine gun bullets, and mortar rounds, were soon going to get hot and explode. I jumped into the jeep, started up the engine, and with some difficulty, was able to jockey it out of its tight position. I drove as fast as possible and headed for a large tree in the middle of the park. As I approached the tree, I took a rolling tumble out of driver's seat as the jeep crashed into the tree. I got up and ran for cover. Luckily for me, the ammo didn't explode until I had gotten clear of the jeep. The exploding ammo, of course, destroyed the jeep and the bazooka rounds hit some of the buildings. To my recollection there were no injuries to soldiers or civilians. This incident was caused by a gunner, who assigned to that jeep, made a cowboy leap into the back seat when the order was given to mount up. He landed on a burlap sack of ammo, and his boots twisted the safety pin out of a grenade. For my action, I received a Soldier's Medal from Major General Harmon, U.S. Army Commander. I also got a small raise in my monthly pay.

In the end, we didn't go on our combat mission; the German soldiers were somehow persuaded to surrender.

C I T A T I O N

Soldier's Medal

Corporal Raymond J Leone, 37558634, 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, United States Army. On 11 June 1945 a quarter-ton truck parked in a troop formation in Prestice, Czechoslovakia, caught fire. The truck was heavily loaded with rocket anti-tank rounds, white phosphorus grenades, rifle grenades, hand grenades, and small arms ammunition. Fully realizing the critical threat to the personnel and vehicles in the area, Corporal Leone, at the risk of his life ran amid burning phosphorus fragments to the flaming ammunition-laden truck and drove it to a deserted area where its exploding could do no further damage. Corporal Leone's heroism undoubtedly prevented a large number of casualties and reflects the highest credit upon himself and the Army of the United States.

E. N. HARMON
Major General, U. S. Army
Commanding

HEADQUARTERS OFFICIAL

JUNE 1945

The author receiving the Soldier’s Medal from General Harmon

JUNE 23, 1945

Czechoslovakian girls in colorful costumes from the Pilsen Liberation Parade

On June 23rd, our entire squadron participated in the Liberation Parade in Pilzen. Although we were not the actual liberators, a number of units were asked to participate in the parade—it was a gala celebration for everyone. The Czech people dressed up in their best colorful uniforms and costumes. The women wore decorated blouses and flared skirts. The Pilsen Parade was similar to the Liberation Parade in Paris, France, except for the absence of snipers, who had managed to disrupt the Paris Celebrations.

There wasn't much to do through the summer months in Skocice. The weather was very nice at this latitude of 49.5 degrees north, nearly the same as our American-Canadian Border. Some of us passed the time away swimming in the nearby river even though it was polluted. A few of us fixed up an abandoned motorcycle and used it for hill-climbing fun until it broke and was beyond repair. Often we helped the local farmers with their crops, because many of their sons had not returned home.

One day in late June, I received a letter from my older brother Al, who was with the 35th Infantry Division. His unit was stationed in Kruft, Germany, which was 12 miles *(20 km)* south of Remagen. I showed the letter to my lieutenant and asked him if I could take time off and visit Al. I hadn't seen him since before D-Day in Exeter, England. My lieutenant said we could both go, as he was going to Paris on business and could use some help with the long drive. We left the next day, and upon reaching Kruft had no trouble finding the 35th Division and my brother. Al and I got a chance to visit for a couple of days before the lieutenant and I left Kruft, and continued on to Paris.

From Kruft, Germany our route took us through Bastogne and Houffalize, Belgium. Both of these towns were the sites of many horrible tank battles during the *"Battle of the Bulge."* As we traveled on the main road, I counted well over one hundred

knocked-out American and German tanks that were still there from December 1944. The two towns were completely destroyed to rubble and only the road had been opened so that vehicles could get through them.

Arriving in Paris, I noticed a marked difference in how the people and businesses acted toward American soldiers since the Liberation in August 1944, only ten months ago. We didn't seem to be as welcomed anymore. A *black-market (illegal trade usually in scare commodities)* thrived and it was business as usual. It was disappointing to see how quickly the French people had become so complacent after their four years under German occupation. The rest of our trip to Paris and back to Czechoslovakia was uneventful.

On my return to Czechoslovakia, I heard that Russian soldiers were being seen regularly driving through Skocice. It wasn't long after that we had to cater to some high-ranking Russian officers at a meeting and party in Prestice. I remember waiting on tables serving food and drinks—Vodka, of course that the Russians had brought. After the meal, I played drums in a small band that some of us had organized as entertainment for the party. Later on, I heard this area was now Russian territory and we would have to leave. This rumor soon became fact.

One Sunday, I had gone to church over in Prestice with some of my buddies. After church, I picked up a copy of the *"Army Star & Stripes,"* newspaper from Headquarters before heading back to the barracks in Skocice. When I got back, I laid down on my bunk with my clothes on and pulled a blanket up for comfort. I was reading my paper, when a Sergeant came over, sat down and asked me for part of my paper to read. As we were reading, one of our soldiers walked over to show us a small .25-caliber

pistol he had just gotten from somewhere. As the soldier stood by the Sergeant, he said, *"Look at my…,"—BANG*, the gun went off! The Sergeant, fortunately, had his helmet liner on his head. The bullet ripped through both upper sides of the Sergeant's helmet liner, missed his head, and hit me in the stomach. I felt a slight sting, threw off the blanket, and put my hand inside my shirt expecting to feel blood. Instead I felt a small hard object. It was the bullet! I pulled the bullet out of my stomach *(I still have that bullet scar)* and handed it back to the soldier. Meanwhile the Sergeant had stood up, looked at his helmet liner, and proceeded to berate him and cuss him out. If it hadn't been for the Sergeant's liner slowing down the bullet, I would have probably ended up in the hospital. After passing through the helmet, the bullet still had enough force to penetrate my blanket and shirt. Since no one was hurt, we let it go at that.

The American Steel Helmet

The American Steel Helmet consisted of two helmets, one inside of the other. The inner helmet was lightweight and made of impregnated resin and composition. The outer helmet was made of steel and manganese and was quite heavy. The outer helmet was made to fit over the inner helmet and could not be worn without the inner liner. The steel helmet was not able to stop a direct hit from a *German Mauser Rifle (bolt-action rifle that fires a high speed 9mm bullet),* but could deflect a non-direct shot or shrapnel most of the time.

The outer steel helmets were used for other functions aside from head protection. They could be used for digging. Sometimes they were simply used to hold warm water for sponge baths. Occasionally during the winter, I would use my helmet to mix snow and chipped chocolate together to create a fake ice cream. Since we didn't have real ice cream, it was the best I could do. Although some guys cooked in them, it wasn't a good idea, because the heat from cooking could possibly weaken the metal. In the end, no matter what we used the helmets for *(as long as we didn't damage them)*; head protection was the top priority.

GERMAN Mk IV TANK

A German Mark IV Tank that was knocked out during the “Battle of the Bulge,” Bastogne, Belgium December 1944. The tank appears to have been hit by a firebomb.

AMERICAN SHERMAN TANK

I took this photo of an American Sherman Tank that was *"knocked out"* by the German Tiger Tank's 88mm cannon. Notice the uppermost hole at the junction of the frontal and side armor-plate. Any anti-tank gun we possessed then, with perhaps the exception of our 76mm equipped tank destroyer, would have glanced off the German tanks. It was said; it took five of our tanks to knock out one of theirs. It wasn't until nearly the end of the European War that the American tanks were equipped with a 90mm cannon.

CHAPTER 20: GOING HOME

After the war in Europe was declared over, the U.S. Armed Forces announced a discharge system for releasing soldiers who were not needed in the Pacific for the invasion of Japan. Points were given to soldiers based upon such things as medals received, time overseas, and time in service. Anyone with eighty-five points or more was eligible for discharge. They also had announced anyone who volunteered for Pacific duty could go home for one month before being sent over to the Pacific War. One of my buddies from Texas and I each had eighty-two points; this was not enough for discharge, but close. Considering the way the war was progressing in the Pacific, we both decided to volunteer for Pacific duty.

Before long, my buddy and I left the 38th Cavalry behind in Czechoslovakia, and were trucked to Germany and then entrained to Camp Lucky Strike, in Le Harve, France. Le Harve wasn't that far from Normandy Beach where we had started on June 12th, 1944. The train trip through Germany and France was no luxury affair. We traveled in *"forty & eight box cars," (box cars that were used to carry troops, which meant they could carry forty men or eight horses—this was seen as a miserable way to travel);* a name carried over from WWI. We didn't complain, however, we were on our way home! It took several days to reach Le Harve, because the railroad tracks and bridges had all been destroyed in combat, and repairs were only temporary, so traveling was slow.

Upon arriving at Camp Lucky Strike, my buddy and I spent almost six weeks there with nothing to do except read books and play games *(cards, chess, etc..).* We couldn't go walking on the beaches or fields for fear of stepping on unexploded mines. The long delay really tested our patience, as we both anxiously awaited to go home.

40&8 BOX CAR

A 40&8 Railway Box Car *(40 men or 8 horses)* we traveled in,
from Germany to Camp Lucky Strike near Le Harve, France

On August 6th, and August 9th, l945, two atomic bombing attacks took place against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. Six days later, on August 15th, the Japanese surrendered to the Allied Forces. On September 2nd, 1945, the surrendered was official which meant that the Pacific War was over.

Once the surrender of Japan had become official, my Texas buddy and I were hopeful that we would not be going to the Pacific after all. Also around this same time, the point system for discharge had been lowered from eighty-five points to eighty points, so we were now both eligible with our eighty-two points for discharge.

Finally on September 31st, we boarded a Norwegian ship for the trip to New York Harbor. The trip was a far cry from our trip over on the *Queen Mary*, almost two years ago. It took us ten days to sail back to New York, rather than the five days it took us to get to England when we had first arrived. The ocean was quite rough and the ship, being less than half the size of the *Queen Mary*, pitched a lot. Many of the soldiers on board were seasick. I avoided getting sick by staying in the center of the ship where the pitching was not quite as bad. As awful as the trip was, I didn't mind; I was going home, in one piece, and on this trip there would be no danger from German submarine attacks.

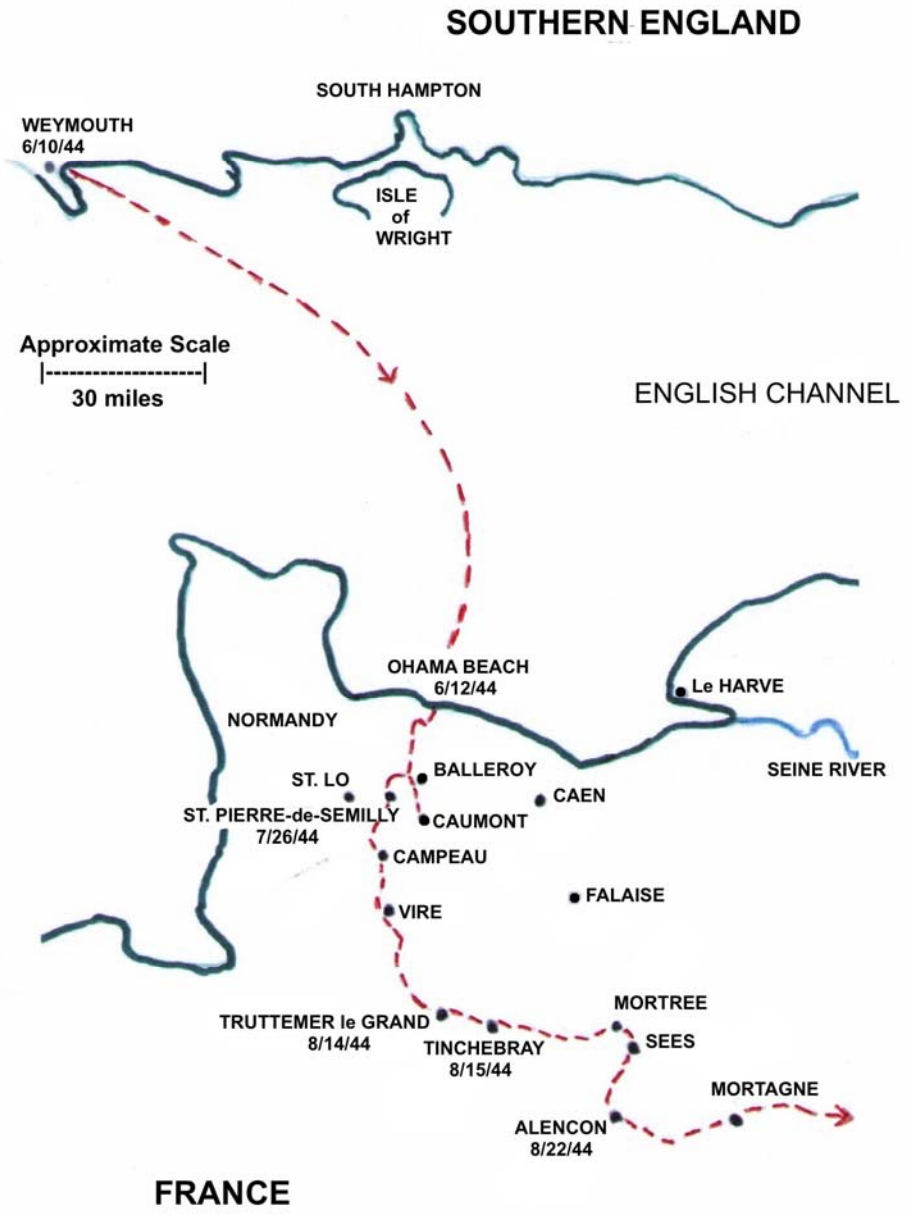
We finally entered New York Harbor late in the evening. Office lights in the buildings were on. The Statue of Liberty seemed more beautiful now than two years ago when we left to go to war. Our ship docked on the New Jersey side of the harbor. It was great to be back on American soil again. After a couple of days of processing, those of us going to the Upper Midwest were loaded onto a train heading for Chicago. From there, many of us went by bus to Camp McCoy, in Sparta, Wisconsin, to complete our discharge.

At Camp McCoy, I was assigned to a barrack similar to the ones we had in Texas—all the barracks, at that time, must have been built using the same floor plan, because they all seemed to be identical. Since the barrack was almost empty, I chose a bunk on the lower floor near the shower room. There was no water on the second floor. All facilities needing water were on the first floor, including the drinking fountain.

The next day I was sitting on my bunk, when a soldier from the second floor came down the stairs to get a drink of water. I was close to the water fountain, and when he stood up, I said to myself, *"That looks like my brother George."* I wasn't entirely sure it was George because his skin was a yellowish color, and I hadn't seen him in over three years. In a low voice I called his name, and it was him! He had arrived from the Pacific a few days before me and was sleeping upstairs. My brother's yellowish skin was caused by a drug called *atabrine, (a synthetic substitute for quinine),* given to soldiers for malaria.

We arrived home *(Duluth, Minnesota)* together on October 19th, 1945. My fiancée was still my fiancée, after two years absence. We married the following spring, May 6th, 1946, raised three children, and have been together sixty-four years. With the help of my working wife, the G.I. Bill, and borrowed money from my oldest brother, I received my Bachelor Degree at the University of Minnesota, and my Masters Degree in Geology, from the University of Missouri Graduate School. While in college, I earned a commission as a second lieutenant in the Air Force, but never had to serve in active duty.

BATTLE ROUTE OF THE 38th CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON
Modified from Major C.E. Rousek, Jr.'s map of 1945



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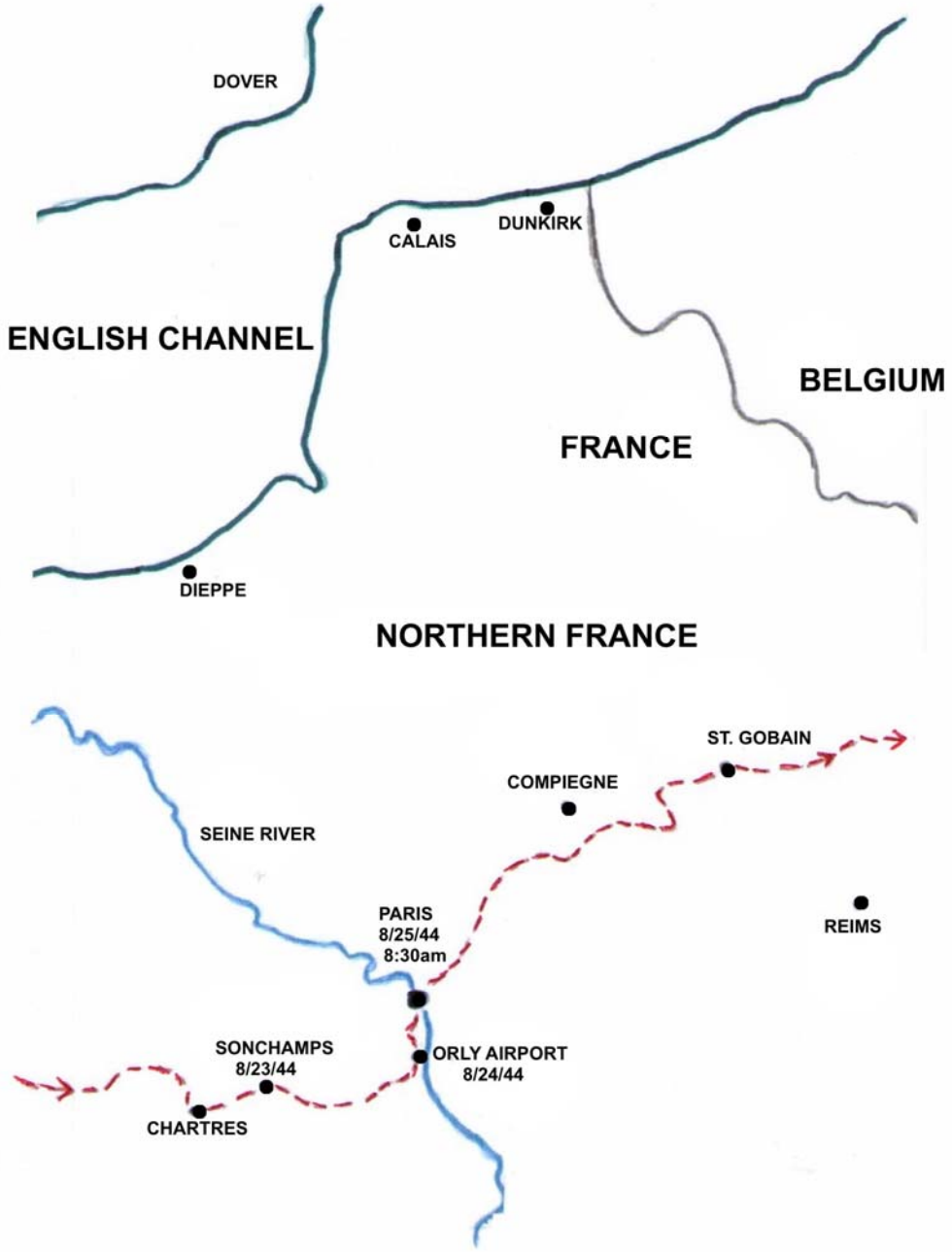

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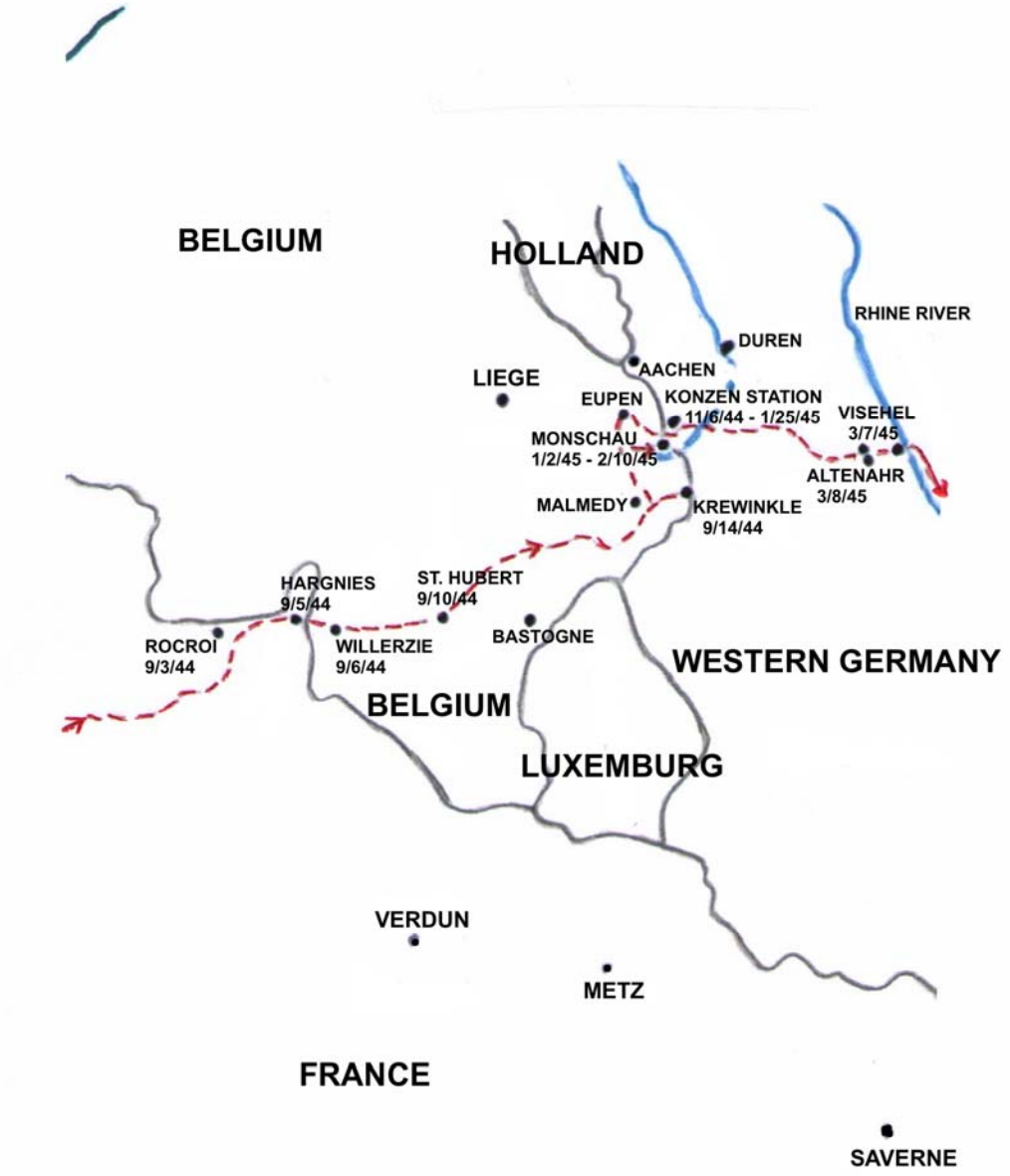

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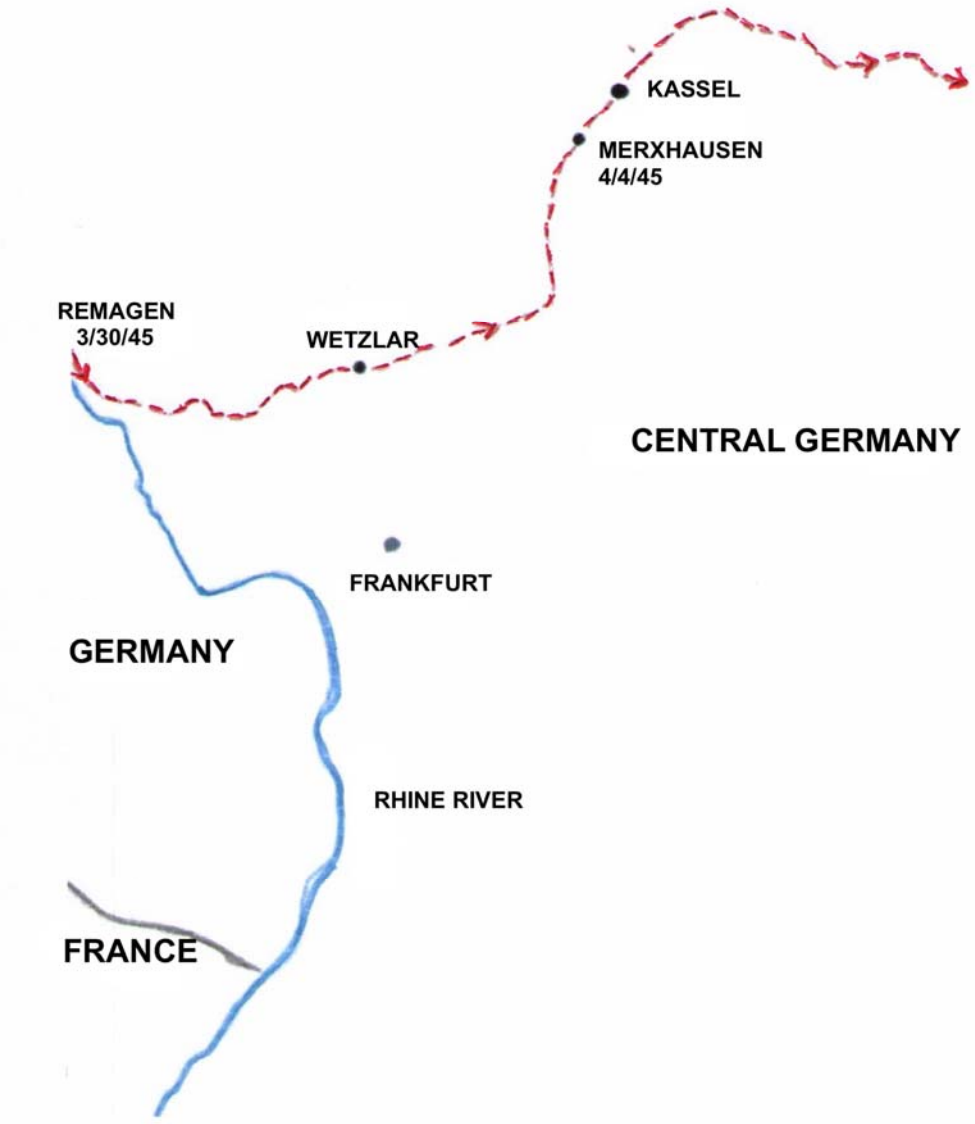

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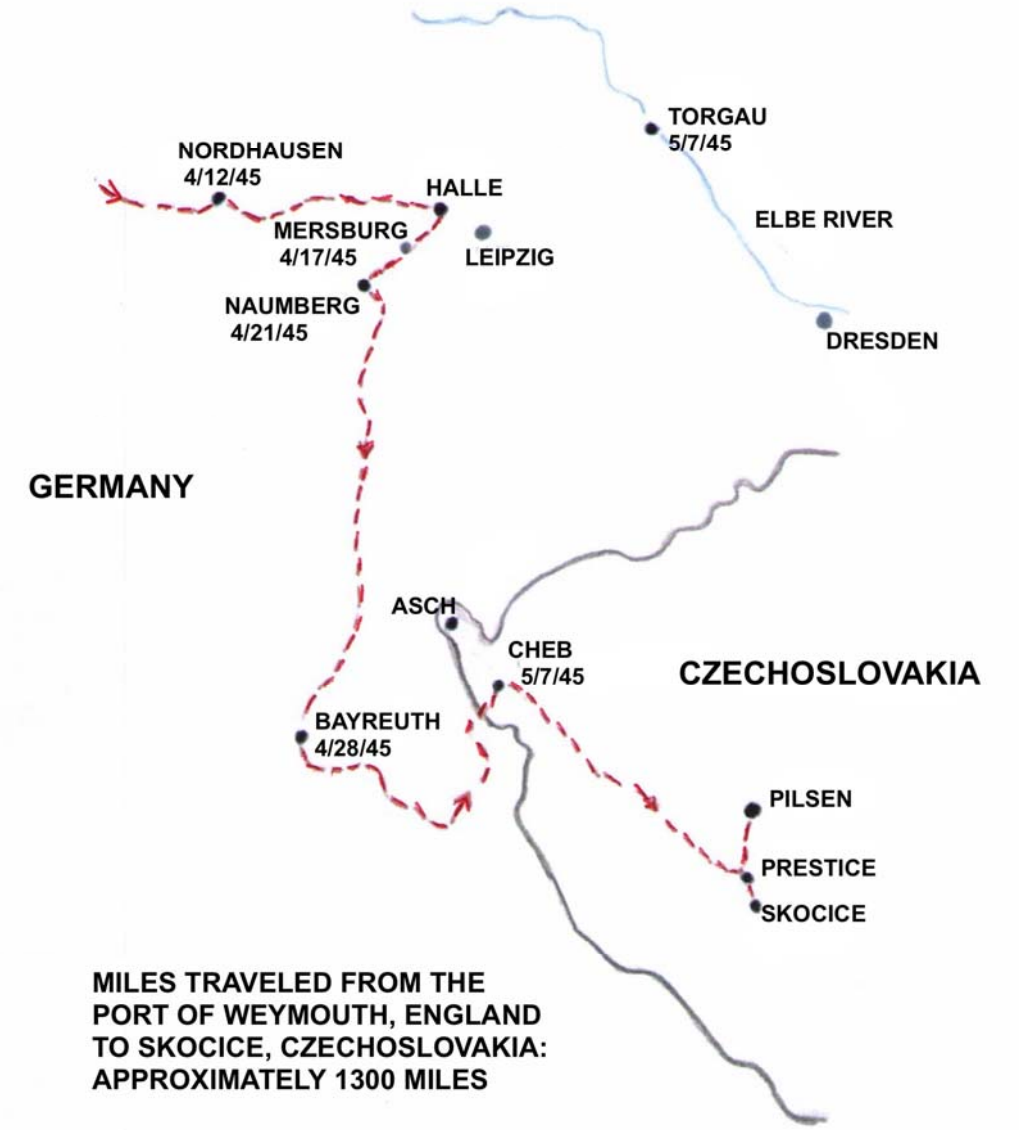

Mr. & Mrs. Raymond J. Leone hiking in the beautiful Sierra Nevada Mountain Range--July 2009

About the author: After the war, Mr. Leone went back to school and in time, graduated with his Master's Degree in Geology. He worked as a geologist for many years, and eventually retired in 1985. Today, both he and his wife, Virginia, who are avid hikers, spend much of their time enjoying the scenic hiking trails in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.