

Ludweiler To Heppenheim Via Bertchesgaden

Ludweiler was a small city just on the French side of the Saar. One large street that ran perpendicular to a street that ran parallel to the front facing the Boche. There were stores and housing along the street where WE took up defensive positions. The Infantry troops that WE relieved had dug trenches and foxholes along the full length of our responsibility. WE just moved in when they moved out. The immediate front was mined and prepared with pyrotechnics, some on trip wires. UNFORTUNATELY, WE did not know the exact positions of these aids. Two platoons manned the positions while the third relaxed and slept. "A" Company was on our right flank. Their area included a German Baby Factory. Some very plush apartments had been built to provide a place for the Super Teutonic Women that were pregnant with the Super Men's Babies. It was a plan by the "Paper Hanger" to refurbish the declining population of the Third Reich. The apartments were complete with walkers, bottles, and cradles; alas some possessive autocrat had moved the girls out.

We had a telephone system from my C.P. to each of the defensive positions. We could talk to each major position at all hours. First Sergeant Knight found an old record player, in good shape except the main spring was broken. He or Cpl. Bob Fonner would slowly wind the crank and the results were amazing. The music was sent out to each position at all hours of the night. A little noise in front of the positions would cause someone to ask for a flare to be fired by the mortar squad. Someone determined that a flare cost \$17.50, the cost of a war bond. After that

each time a flare was needed, the request was “send up another war bond”. WE had a good working relation with the Jerries, you stay on your side of the fence, & WE will stay on ours. The Jerries had a strong point directly down a glade in the woods to our front. WE could see them plainly & occasionally WE fired a salvo into the side of the bunker just to keep them alert. They would respond with shots into the side of our buildings; no harm done on either side. There were occasional patrols that were required. For the most part, they were uneventful, but disaster struck after WE had been in the positions for several weeks. A Calvary unit was to replace us. Two incidents occurred that are of note. The Colonel asked to be escorted around our positions, as we toured an area in front of the trenches I stepped on an unmarked mine or pyrotechnic. All I was aware of was a great blast & being hit from my right ankle to the right side of my chin. When I recovered, the Colonel was standing over me glaring as if it was a staged affair. I spent the night in the hospital, & several days in a prone position in my C.P. I was skinned from my right foot to my chin. The next calamity occurred a day or two later when the Colonel decided he wanted to send an intelligence patrol out in broad daylight. At the appointed time two units appeared, armed to the teeth and looking for an unnecessary fight. I assigned Sgt. Jim Iden to take one group to the north and Sgt. Elmer Lucas to take the unit moving to the east. After about two hours, Sgt’s Iden’s group returned without making contact. No word from the Lucas patrol. WE waited, waited and after four hours, WE gave up. The entire patrol was lost. WE heard no firing and were at a complete loss as to what could have happened.

After our long wait it was growing dark, the platoon S/Sgt., Will Tully and I spent some time considering our options. I could see he was not willing to just let the incident drop. As I reached for an M1, he did likewise and WE began our mile long search for the patrol. Thirteen years later in the P.X. in the Brooklyn Army Port, I met Sgt Lucas. He said they had been ambushed, captured without firing a shot. The Jerries had marched them with others from The Saar to eastern Germany where he was rescued by allied troops in early May. He had decided to stay in the army and had been promoted to T/Sergeant. We had a nice visit, I never saw him again.

I had been thinking for some time about trying to get field promotions for S/Sgts, Tully, Reeves, and Mailey. I knew I would lose them but I really believed they deserved to be commissioned. For some reason Reeves was delayed but the other two were approved, about a week later Reeves was approved. I lost all three. Reeves and Mailey went to Co. A, and Tully was assigned to Co. C. Newly commissioned Russell DeBoer from Co. A was assigned to me. Sgt Jim Iden took over the first platoon, Sgt Henry McDaniel became the second platoon leader, and Walter Fritz headed the third platoon. They were great selections; the transition was smooth.

March rolled around, the snow was gone and WE had word that WE were going to start the final movement to Berlin or points east. WE were reassigned to our engineer duties and when the push started, WE were with the lead division. Our “friends” in front of must have realized that they were going to get hit big, for as WE moved forward there was no sign of them. From our maps, I had noticed a

very congested industrial area to our front & was amused by the name of the city it encompassed. "Bitche" & WE were headed right toward it. WE entered it, just one step behind the Infantry; I had never seen so many mines and obstacles. Everything movable was mined; the rail tracks were booby trapped or destroyed; buildings blown to block the streets. I stressed to the platoon commanders the importance of assuming everything or anything might blow at the slightest touch. We cleared the main street, one way, & moved through after a full day & nights work.

Late in the evening of the second day of the push an artillery commander came to me & asked that WE clear an area for his unit. Such requests are made to our S-3 & then an assignment is made. I knew it would take hours, that I would get the assignment & would do the task in the dark. I gave the order for Lt Phelan's, Second Platoon to clear the area. He assigned Sergeant John "Uncle Fump" Flynn to the task. All went well until they encountered a tree that had been blown across a small access road. The detector man apparently missed an area covered by small limbs, when several men attempted to drag the tree off the road that terrible noise "Splat" was heard, A "S" mine had been activated. They dived for cover & I am sure that Ten prayers were said in that part of a second that it takes for the mine to explode & spray It's deadly pellets on the men below. NO BANG!! Only a dull thump as the unexploded mine hit between the huddled men. Some careless German Sapper had neglected to insert the center cap that explodes the device; on the other hand, could it have been a purposeful act by another Jerry that was tired of the killing?

The following day was Sunday, Sgt. Flynn had ordered his squad into Class A's, and they attended Church as a unit.

The next week was rather uneventful. WE removed hundreds of mines from the roads & parking areas. WE had the unfortunate experience of encountering many of the new TM44 Teller mines. The igniter was a pressure, relief configuration. Pressure on the Cap or relief of the cap caused the mine to explode. WE took no chances, WE used the SAFE approach by hooking a long wire onto the mine & pulling it to an open area where WE detonated it remotely. WE found that some were booby trapped & exploded in place. A load of road fill dumped into the crater quickly remedied that situation. Our basic mine detector was the standard metal detector, the SCR 625. Soon after arriving in France, the stateside engineers decided it should be improved upon. WE had been having trouble with mines that contained no metal. The new issue, the ANPRS 1, detected voids or changes in the ground structure. WE solved the problem of our distrust of it by using both detectors at the same time. Truthfully, the new detector, with the old, better served our purpose.

The Infantry fighting was intense but moved steadily at a comfortable pace. On the 28 of March 1945, WE were approaching the Rhine River. I received orders to move my company across the Rhine by way of a floating pontoon bridge courtesy of The Seventh Army Engineers. The bridge crossed the Rhine at Worms. Early that night WE found ourselves in a long line of vehicles going nowhere fast. After sitting for several minutes I decided to walk along the line of trucks. At last I came to the head of the line. There appeared to be nothing holding up the lead

truck, sure nuf the trucks ahead of this one had moved on and no one had wakened the driver of what was now the lead truck. I prodded him & soon the entire convoy was moving. As each unit peeled off into designated staging areas, I found my company at the head of the column. I told my exec to hold the company here while I went on ahead. Smoke filled the air & there was an uneasiness that filled the night. The city of Worms was just ahead, we were traveling at a fast pace as we rounded a street corner and for goodness sake we ran down the barrel of a 120 mm cannon mounted on a Tiger tank, at least I thought we would go directly down the bore. It was the biggest tank gun I had ever seen. I thought we were goners, Bass swerved to miss the titan, S/Sgt McDaniel went flying for cover just as two GI's stepped from behind the tank. "You Guys in A Hurry" one asked. "Everything is secure here if you want to stay" "I am to move my engineer company across the Rhine" I said. "The road to the bridge is about where you first entered the city he replied". I returned to my company and as I went back, I saw the signs marking the route. Without any troubles company B 48 Engineers crossed the Rhine on 29 March 1945, my 26th birthday. Our exciting entrance into Worms almost caused us to minimize The Great Cathedral and the influence that Martin Luther had on the religious world.

WE traveled east up the Rhine & bivouacked for the night in what had been a parking lot for vehicles. I just wanted to get the company bedded down for the night. The following day, with no orders from battalion, I gave orders to get our trucks & other gear cleaned, WE had picked up a ton of mud. WE would not have passes an inspection. I sent

Lt Haley in one direction, Lt Phelan in another to reconnoiter for usable engineer materials. I decided to go inland along the Neckar River. I found several dumps of potential engineer materials and as I was returning, I found a huge saw mill on the West bank of the Neckar. I went inside & found the machinery in good working order. I spied a fair sized crate next to a door & for some unknown reason I looked inside. To my surprise there wrapped in straw was ten large size bottles of four stars Cognac. I loaded it onto my jeep, all the time envisioning a short snort for every man in the company. It was dark by the time I arrived at the company. 1stSgt. Knight had pitched the company headquarters tent, which WE seldom used. AS I entered, I noticed the smell of liquor and that Sgt Knight was a bit edgy. The reason was the temporary mail clerk was very drunk. "What goes on here" I asked Sgt Knight? At that time Sgt Knight said" You might want to talk to Lt Haley, "Captain" Cpl Fonner went to fetch Haley immediately. In a few minutes, there stood before me one drunken Lieutenant. "Reporting to the Company Commander as Ordered," he said in a slurred voice. What is the story I asked? The facts were that while carrying out my orders he had found a cave of liquor, not just a Cave but one that could engulf a deuce and a half truck. Several aisles with liquor stolen from France & the other European countries that had been sacked by the Jerries. He had returned to the company, commandeered a $\frac{3}{4}$ ton truck, a one-ton trailer & filled them with Cognac, Brandy, Benedictine liquor, & various other spirits. I think he tried to drink all that he could not load on the truck & trailer. Here I stood a paragon of virtue with two tons of liquor

parked in my company area. I called Battalion Headquarters & advised Lt/Col Foley about our find. He immediately put a guard at the entrance while hauling away about ten tons of the choicest. WE had a liquor ration for each man for the rest of the war.

WE were not to rest for long. The Neckar had to be bridged and Company C was called on to do the do. Disaster struck for someone underestimated the length of the bridge. It was to be a ponton bridge, not an easy bridge to build. I am not sure if S-3 goofed or Company C just failed to do the job; in any event Mike Finnegan, commander of C Company was relieved & Co A was called in to finish the job. I had the "exit" on the far side to build & was busy bulldozing two exit ramps from the river edge to the street above.

WE left beautiful Heidelberg the next day, proceeding inland along the Neckar. Our brief stay was like a sightseeing outing although WE did draw some artillery fire from the direction of the famous medical school. The city was essentially undamaged and we actually strolled down Wilhelm Strasse. Perkio's was closed but I had dinner there ten years later. The war began to warm up again WE built two more fixed bridges and one Bailey with only minor injuries. WE never had a chance to stay two days in one place; find a place for the mess truck to set up & dig in for the night.

The countryside that WE were taking over was beautiful flat farming lands. Fighting had been fierce; our troops had employed their artillery fire in a rolling & completely razed everything that stood before them. This practically eliminated infantry casualties.

As I came into my CP one afternoon a fellow, Ray Dzillo, that did odd jobs for the 1st. Sergeant came to me with a beautiful P-38 and an SS Officers Dagger. He said he had roused an officer out of a cellar & had found them with other belongings of the Jerry. I hinted that they would look good in my pack but got no response from him. The following day he came to me and said that he was on the leave list for a trip back to Dijon France but was told he would have to clear with me. I told him I would let him know the next day. "But the detail is leaving at 0500 hours tomorrow" he wailed. I walked down to the mess truck for a cup of chocolate, visited awhile & returned to my bunk. There lying in full sight was the Pistol & the Dagger. I called him in, told him I would not accept the gifts & that surely he could go on leave. One more thing he said, "May I borrow your low cut shoes to wear while I am gone. "I'm sure they won't fit", I replied, he was 6'4". "Oh they will fit I have already tried them on." About a week later I was granted leave to Dijon. As I was packing I looked for my low cut slippers. "Oh yes" "Dziallo must have them". I called him in, asked their whereabouts and with bowed head He murmured "I ran out of money so I sold your shoes" He seemed so ashamed but did not offer to repay me. Dziallo was a wonderful fellow & made my life much easier. If I were out late my bed would sure be made when I returned. He deserved many thanks from me.

On about 28 April, 1944 I received orders to send one platoon to Headquarters 45 Division. We were not far from Munich. As the war was winding down I decided to query my headquarters. The S3 said that the 45th was in the vicinity of Dachau and thought they might need additional

help. The 120 Engineers must have been committed. I gave orders to Lt Charles Haley, a good Boston lad and S/Sgt Walker Fritz of Peoria Illinois, with their third platoon, to report to the G3, 45th Division. It was a long night for me so an hour before dawn my jeep driver, Rex Bass, and I set out to see how things were going. I arrived at Dachau at first light and discovered that the 45th had already taken the infamous camp. The third platoon of Co. B 48th Engineers had been at the forefront and had cut the locks from the front gates allowing the infantry free access. The honor goes to Sergeant Fritz. The guards around the camp along with a dog at each tower had been killed, at the front gate the Commandant with his executive officer lay dead. The few inmates that were mobile had kicked them to death. There were about thirty railroad cars stretching from the camp back into the town of Dachau, the floors of each were covered with dead Jews in their striped pajama-like clothes. Many bodies were stacked near the "shower" buildings that contained the giant ovens that awaited the dead Jews. I talked with the Div. G3 and as WE had done our job, he turned my platoon back to me. After a few minutes WE departed. WE had seen enough. A few pictures are still available to let others see that this sort of murder should never take place again.



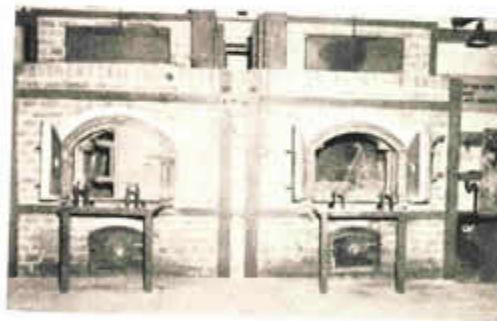
Tagged for the Ovens.



Starved Bodies in a Railroad Car.

DACHAU

"WE FOUND IT ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE"



Crematorium.



It was the first of May, patchy snow was still on the ground, the nights were cold but the days were beautiful. WE were moving every day; a few miles closer to Munich & WE could tell the war was almost over. We came upon the AutoStrad; a great double highway that at one time moved the German machines of war at a fast pace to the west. It had served a dual purpose; it was an almost endless landing strip for their Air Force. The median had been painted green. From the air it looked like as if a hedge divided the lanes. Hundreds of planes were parked in the woods adjacent to the highway. They had run out of

gasoline! Rex & I were traveling at a fast pace & all along the lane going toward our lines were thousands of conscripted workers. They were Hungarian soldiers used only by the Nazis to maintain the infrastructure of Germany.

On the 6th of May I was assigned the task of finding, recording and reporting any materiel dumps in the area south east of Munich. Early on that morning, along with Sgt's McDaniel & Fritz I set out to see what we could find. Our first adventure took place as we entered the small town of Hagsberg. On both sides of the main street were armed German soldiers. They stopped and stared at us as if we were a complete surprise. "My God" I said, "what have we gotten into"? "Just keep driving on to that large building ahead of us," I told Bass. It appeared to be the headquarters for a hospital or a hospital itself. I got out of the jeep & told Mac & Fritz to follow me at a high port. I entered the building & was met by a Sgt/Major; in his fair English he told me The Commander of the garrison was on his way to meet me. A Lt/Col came hurrying down the steps & told me his troops were under my command. He had surrendered about 200 armed service troops to me. He was a doctor & the building was a small hospital. I told him there was a cavalry unit behind me that should arrive in a few hours. I suggested that he store all his arms in one place & put a guard on them. As the SS Troops still imposed a danger to them he asked that a small unit remain armed until arrival of the Cavalry. I said o.k. And WE took our leave of our

WE continued on toward the higher elevation to our south and soon found a small depot of artillery pieces. I

noted the position on my map as WE continued on. Another mile on WE came to a beautiful park. The Jerries had stored tons & tons of materiel among the beautiful walks, fountains & picnic tables. There was hundreds of large movie cameras, rifles by the thousands and many artillery pieces. Sgt Mac suddenly shouted "Look Capn', what I have found" There must have been a thousand beautiful pistols all in one big pile. We started selecting souvenirs when I thought "Why not one for every man in the company"? WE found a large box that would just fit in the rear seat of the Jeep & filled it with about 250 of the choicest pieces. As WE were admiring our loot a large truck loaded with German soldiers drove into the park. Of all people a Navy Lieutenant came toward me with one hand in the air. He too wanted to surrender. I told him to go to the east along a certain road and he would meet a unit that was prepared to process him. He noted that darkness had set in & would like to stay with us. I replied that WE were going to camp where WE were standing. He grinned a little & suggested that we go into the town, just a few hundred yards away, and stay in a nice warm hotel. Why not I thought I had done everything else unconventionally on this day. The hotel was small but nice & with a few rations from us the owner prepared a simple but tasty supper, complete with wine. I asked the Lt. why was he here in the Redoubt Area of the Alps. He replied that the navy had ceases to exist & several Naval Officers had been assigned to prepare the foothills for emplacement of large artillery pieces for a last ditch stand. In the few weeks that he had been there nothing had been accomplished. I assigned rooms so that WE would be in two adjoining,

Bass & I together with the two sgts next to us; a female soldier had a single room with the German Officer next to her. The Jerry soldiers all doubled up where they wanted. WE remained alert, one awake at all times, and the night passed uneventfully. Coffee the next morning with German bread & American jam then we were a ready to go our separate ways. One would think we had been fighting together rather than each other as we shook hands all around. My survey over, WE returned to my company about noon. Everyone was excited about the pending truce.

Late the next afternoon I had orders to build a fixed bridge across a small river just to our front. Information from S-4 stated that he had no additional bridging, I was on my own. The gap was 110 feet, I had only 60 feet of bridging. The flow of the river covered 55 feet. The 12 foot dry gap to the near bank was about 60 feet. A reconnaissance of the near by town revealed a railroad yard with tons of cord wood & 12 foot posts. I was in business. A near by gravel pit provided me with fill and binder. We started work at sundown & finished just as the sun came up.

Last Bridge built by Co B 48 Engrs., 4 May 1945



RECALL...When WE were in Italy We were situated on the main highway that ran directly into the German lines. Sightseers, stationed as far back as Naples would stop and ask "Where are the German lines"? Our factious answer was to say "Stay straight on this road, when you are stopped by a German PM you will know you have gone too far". One day a jeep load of sightseers did not come back. On 15 May as WE were preparing to build the Baileys across the Rapido in front of Cassino WE found an abandoned Navy wrecked jeep sitting in the bar ditch. On the sixth of May 1945 as WE were moving toward Berchtesgaden WE came upon a terrible traffic jam. A crossroad was jammed with American trucks going forward & German trucks going to the rear. I walked ahead and there in the middle of the road stood a huge MP directing traffic. I had to look twice for the traffic director was a huge German M.P. clad in his dress greens, large pendant of authority around his neck & taking no guff from either side. I wondered if WE had come too far. As I neared he saluted, I returned the salute, gave him a thumbs up & returned to my Jeep. Boy what a war these last two days had been! Late that afternoon WE pulled into Berchtesgaden. Lt Dawson had gone on ahead and selected a group of college dormitories. A large area was available & the kitchen crew moved into a real up town kitchen. The entire company enjoyed a spacious dining room in an airy well-lit hall. Motor pool personnel hooked our generator up to my C.P. & Lo & Behold lights came on in the building that housed our kitchen.

MAY EIGHT 1945...THE WAR IS OVER!! We celebrated in the company street. A few hidden bottles were

broken out but for the most part WE just walked around shaking hands & marveling that WE had made it. WE stayed in the Berchtesgaden area for about a week. WE enjoyed cruising on the Koenig Sea, visiting a small-secluded village located several miles at the back of The Sea. The people that lived there were probably touched very little by the daily rigors of the war.

Orders came one day to move out. It was to be a battalion move. WE moved in one group to the area of Heidelberg. I was assigned to a small village just to the north of Heidelberg, Heppenheim. It was a wonderful bivouac area; The City Park. It was a complete recreation area. An Olympic size swimming pool, which WE soon opened with the help of the City Fathers. The Germans were allowed to swim in the morning while WE did our chores but were barred for the rest of the day. A large area soon became a softball diamond. Will Tully arranged a game between Co B and a nearby MP unit. He sandbagged them by bringing in a nationally know pitcher, Arlo Lamb from Co. C. WE won and about \$800 dollars passed hands. WE were billeted in homes along a large main street. My headquarters was in a three-bedroom house with a large garden. On day a young girl came to the 1st Sgt. & asked to see me. She had found out that her Father was a prisoner in a compound WE maintained. They were used in road maintenance & other duties that were needed. She asked if she could see him. The prisoner was brought to my CP, he was a man about 40 years old, one of the old ones drafted at the end of the war. I hired her to keep house for us & directed that her Father work in our garden each day. It all

worked out very well, our household chores were done & two people were made happy.

July rolled around and I was given leave to England; spent four days in London & three in Scotland. I did a lot of sight seeing, went dancing most every night, ate so-so English food & even tried “fish & Chips”. I drank the first cup of coffee of my life at a Red Cross Doughnut Shop.

Upon my return to Heppenheim orders were waiting rotating me home. The order of returning home was based on points accrued, time of service, time overseas, awards & marriage status. I had about 132 points so along with Bill Munson I departed the 48th about the 10th of July. Bill & I spent two days in Paris, went by train to Marseilles flew by B-17 to Casablanca then by C-54 to Miami.

THAT’S IT I had made the circuit!!!