



PARKER'S RETREAT

Rabat, Dec 1971

I am writing this for my children so that some day they may read it and remember their father. It is an adventure story of sorts, and it has had a great effect on me.

After graduating from infantry Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, as a second lieutenant, on June 20, 1944, and getting married three days later, I reported to the 106th Infantry Division at Camp Atterbury, Indiana on July 1. This division had been one of the better units in the United States but had been stripped of all but a cadre of officers and noncoms in order to provide replacements for the Normandy landings. Some 10 of us from my OCS class were sent to it as part of the process of building it back up to strength.

Morale in the division was not very good. There were a good many jokes about our being readied for Military Police duty in Germany or some other noncombatant role. The jokes were based on the fact that we were receiving a wild assortment of replacements, many of whom were not fit either by training or description for combat. Thus, I was given the first platoon of the antitank company of the 422nd infantry and discovered that of my platoon. Less than a third had had infantry basic training. One private was a carpenter who had spent the war making training aids and had risen to the rank of sergeant in the process. He had suddenly been plucked out of his job and put into the infantry, and had been demoted in the process. I never knew why; but his morale was as one would have imagined, and he knew nothing about the infantry. Another private had been a pastry cook in some military establishment until a month earlier, when he, too, had been drafted into the 106th. This story could be repeated over and over again through the Division. Fortunately, our noncoms were good, and we received an infusion of new infantry replacement training center graduates just before we sailed in October. Overall, the Division was not very effective, however.

Before going overseas, we were inspected by General Ben Lear, he of Yoohoo fame. Our division commander general, Alan W. Jones, was reported to be anxious to get his unit overseas and get it into action, and there was a certain amount of fudging about our readiness. Two small incidents

indicate the atmosphere. First, one of my colleagues was given the job of testing units from another regiment on night patrolling. The first unit he tested performed abysmally and he gave it a failing grade. He was called to Division Headquarters and told to change the grade to show that the unit had passed. Second, we had in my platoon a .50 caliber machine gun that had long since fired more than enough rounds to be labeled class X and replaced. We tried in vain to get it replaced before leaving Atterbury, were told there wasn't time, and went into combat with it. It fired perhaps a dozen rounds on the morning of December 16 and then broke down irreparably.

In any event, we sailed from Boston on the Aquitania on October 12, landed at Glasgow ten days later and moved into a bivouac at Fairford in Gloucestershire. It was cold and damp, but we had rather a good time for about six weeks until we were taken to Southampton and put on little channel steamers (I had to stand up at the top of the companionway and literally kick my men through the door to their compartment, it was so narrow) and taken across to Le Havre. We spent ten days in the mud and rain on a hillside near Le Havre and then moved off across France in motorized column. On December 10 we replaced the 2nd Infantry Division along a 27-mile line, just over the border from Belgium into Germany. The 42nd had as part of its sector the Schnee Eifel ridge which runs roughly northeast to southwest to Bleialf.

This had been a quiet sector and we were apparently being moved into the line at this spot to give us a gradual introduction to combat while the Second Division moved out for an attack to the south. The 42nd relieved the 9th Infantry and I inherited a very cozy position in the village of Schlausenbach, where I had the task of defending the regimental headquarters against tank attack. I had two 57 mm guns in position on the northeastern side of the village covering the approaches from Kobscheid and Auw. Our field of fire was admirable and we had just enough defilade to protect us very effectively against flat trajectory fire. The gun on the left was commanded by Sergeant Michael Valovcin of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and that on the right by Sergeant William Chappelle of Chicago. A third gun, under Sergeant Arthur Wiegert of Overland, Missouri, was detached from the platoon and set up near one of the Siegfried Line bunkers in the Schnee Eifel, near the elevation known as Schwarzer Mann.

My platoon sergeant (John Harrell of Bainbridge, Georgia) and driver (Albert Kath of Janesville, Wisconsin) set up housekeeping in a little farmhouse on the very edge of the village, about 50 yards in front of our guns. We soon worked out a comfortable routine and looked forward to Christmas.

We were subsequently caught in the German offensive of December 16, which became known as the Battle of the Bulge. The Bulge was the salient in the American line of which we were the northern flank. The 106th was pretty well eliminated from the fight. Of its nine infantry battalions, three survived intact. Most of the rest of the Division was captured.

The following is from an account I wrote the following spring.

On the morning of the 16th of December, I pulled the three o'clock guard shift in our little farmhouse. I started a new pot of coffee and began a letter to Jeanne. After a little time had passed, the customary early morning barrage started, the artillery positions were just about a mile behind me, and by nature of the terrain, the shells came fairly low over the house. I could hear the very encouraging sound of outgoing mail and was happily thinking about the poor Germans who

were getting killed with precision and finesse. Finally, it seemed to me that the sound changed just a trifle, the shells sounded different.

After fifteen minutes or so, I realized that this was incoming freight, the Germans were shooting back at us. And we all knew they didn't have any artillery left. I expected the firing to die down, believing it to be merely interdictory, but instead it increased in intensity and soon shells were falling all over my little bailiwick. I took a look outside and saw the town of Kopfscheid, a mile to my left, a mass of flames and tracers, apparently a very strong patrol action. I knew that there was a troop of the 14th cavalry in that town and being very fond of the cavalry, figured that they would soon dispense with the nuisance. Finally, when dawn came, I went down to my gun positions to inspect them and see how the men were getting along under fire. I was amazed to find that three shells, all of them duds, had landed within twenty yards of one position. The men were down in their holes, looking green around the gills. At the company CP we discussed the matter and decided it was very good battle indoctrination.

About 8 a.m. we found that a general attack had broken out along the entire front and that there were Germans running around all over the place, which was disturbing, to say the least. Later in the morning, we found that we were cut off from Division and that our artillery was no more. Also, we had very little food, water and ammunition. That afternoon I had a very exciting fire duel with a couple of Tiger tanks at the very extreme range of 1700 yards. My gunners couldn't hit a thing, but neither could the Germans, and everybody was quite exhilarated. That night a platoon of Tank Destroyers came into Schlausenbach to help and it was very encouraging, because I was beginning to think that if any tanks ever attacked our positions, we wouldn't have much luck. We strengthened our positions and prepared for the worst. On the morning of the 18th, we suddenly pulled stakes and made for the woods. Our rifle battalions were attempting to attack back towards St. Vith, and we were to follow them up if they made a breakthrough. They walked into a terrific nest of 88s, MG 42s, mortars, tanks and every thing else imaginable. We began to consider the situation desperate. Up until that time we hadn't worried a good deal as we had heard the Ninth Armored was to make a breakthrough, that ammunition and supplies would be dropped to us, and that Patton was on his way. Blissful ignorance. When the rifle battalions were very effectively stopped, the motor elements, with which my platoon and I were riding, attempted to make a run for it and find some gap in the German lines. We tore through one town and up a hill only to run into a group of tanks which stopped us momentarily; then we turned and went down another road. By some chance my company commander, Captain Edward Vitz, was in the lead jeep and I was right behind him. As he topped a hill, he ran over a mine and the jeep flew into the air, bodies hurtling in several directions, and stray bits of equipment littering the landscape. That stopped the whole column. They were hopelessly snarled up by that time and we knew we didn't have time to clear any mine field. I ran up to the jeep and we found everyone alive. The first sergeant and our radio operator were pretty badly hurt, but everyone else was doing fairly well. We began administering first aid and waited for developments. About that time the captain who was in command of the column came up and informed us that we had just surrendered, which didn't impress us very much as we were going to run for the woods when night came and that was not far off. However, when we thought about the fact that we could see Germans all over the place and that we didn't have any idea where our lines were, we had no rations, most of us had sore feet, and the forests looked most inhospitable, we changed our mind, which was probably just as well. Although I will always wonder what would have happened and if I just lacked the guts to try.

About night fall we loaded the wounded on some trucks and took them to a German field hospital, most of them were delirious and I felt very bad about leaving them, especially two of the boys from my platoon who had been shot in the leg. That night I slept on the ground in an enclosure with about 500 prisoners and succeeded in doing a bang-up job of freezing my feet.

The next day was the 20th, and we were a sad looking sight as we marched out on the road in column of fives and started toward Germany. That day we marched for 32 miles, through Prüm and other towns I cannot remember. We got no food or water but thought the sugar beets we occasionally found on the road most delicious. Water we drank from the ditches. And I thanked God many a time that the United States Army gives you so many shots. Otherwise we all would have contracted something. We reached the town of Gerolstein at 2 a.m. on the 21st - tired, hungry, and frozen. Here I ran into Johnson, Prell, and Shapley from my company, also my entire platoon less the wounded, and a number of other officers from the regiment. Prell had attempted to escape but he ran full tilt into a German tent and was recaptured. We slept on the ground for a few hours, Shapley, Kastenbaur and I sharing my blanket. I slept soundly. At daybreak, Johnson and Juster (cannon company) convinced me I should go up to a nearby German aid station and get my feet treated, so Juster lead me up to the place, pushed me into a compound and told me to turn right. I took about three steps when a Hauptmann came up to me, grabbed me and pushed me in another column. I found myself alongside Lt. Howard Alexander, our Exec. and six other officers of the regiment. I asked what was going on and they said. "We're going to the train." Then the guards came along and handed us some crackers and cheese and marched us off through the town to the bahnhof. Here we loaded on 40 & 8 box cars full of manure¹ and pulled out for parts unknown. This was one of the last trains to leave Gerolstein, and if I hadn't gone to get my feet fixed, I never would have made it. Lady Luck had smiled again. After a day or two we came to Limburg, site of a large transient camp. Here we waited until the 26th before pulling out, receiving very little to eat, and spent a most unhappy Christmas.

On the evening of the 23rd. the RAF came over to bomb the industrial and rail facilities at Limburg, and they succeeded in giving us a very bad night. One bomb fell on a barracks full of American officers at the camp and killed some 67 officers. Jack Kilkenny, who was an usher at my wedding was among these. We had about forty casualties on the train; several of the cars broke open and the men rushed out into an open field running for an air raid shelter, a bomb lit in the field and caused a number of deaths and a larger number of wounded. I found a hole near the train and dived into it, finding myself on top of an American and a German soldier. Nationality didn't seem to make much difference.

We left Limburg on the 26th with great rejoicing; we were actually looking forward to a permanent camp. We crept through Germany for five days, stopping frequently and always moving slowly. I might add at this point that it is extremely uncomfortable not to be able to lie down for nine days. Once. during this leg of the journey I got about half a cup of hot soup², I was almost sick from eating so much. But the greatest hardship of the journey was not the physical but the mental - it was like staring at a blank wall for a short eternity when you're starving and cold, your mind doesn't function properly and you can't keep your mind on anything but food; I could always see a plate of

¹ An obvious exaggeration. The cars had been recently used to transport horses however.

² In the Stuttgart Bahnhof

scrambled eggs and pancakes floating before my eyes and it eclipsed all other mental activities. And constant preoccupation with physical hardships reduces you to a kind of agonizing lethargy.

On the 30th of December we arrived at Stalag IV B, Muehlberg. We stood in the open for three hours before finally entering the delousing chamber, but it was worth it - for here we had the most wonderfully hot shower of our lives. It was so hot that we all felt faint and light-headed upon emerging from it. I was so dirty the Germans sent me back three times before they'd let me get dressed, each time it got better.

After the delousing we were processed and taken to a barracks. There was no American compound at IV B so we were taken in by RAF non-coms. They had hot tea and soup waiting for us, and water to shave in. Those boys were wonderful to us. They gave up their own beds, their food, and their cigarettes (which were as good as gold). It was almost amusing to find that I was in a barracks with my platoon. How that group managed to stick together I don't know, but it certainly was good to see them, even if they were ragged and haggard. I'll never see a nicer, more cooperative platoon.

The English had been prisoners for up to five and a half years and they had prison life down to a perfect routine. There was no quarreling and everyone helped his neighbor. We greatly admired their system and decided that Americans could never do as well. We were astounded to see beautiful cakes all over the place - I mean cakes like you find in a bakery.. By many devious methods they had obtained flour and sugar, and using powdered milk and jam from their Red Cross packages had baked some masterpieces. It seems that this was an annual occurrence, that every Christmas and New Years they had a big blow-out. New Years eve they had a show, which we attended. There was one female impersonator who was so realistic that we almost fell out of our seats. And the show itself was far better than any USO show I've ever seen.

We stayed in the IVB ten days, receiving one Red Cross package (English) per two men. These packages were our lifeblood. They contained powdered milk, chocolate, cigarettes, coffee (soluble) or tea, biscuits, jam, processed meats, cheese, salmon or sardines, prunes or raisins, and sugar. Each box contained ten pounds of food. They usually came every two weeks at most camps, sometimes they came once a week.

While at IVB some more of the regiment came in. I met Jim Hesse, from Wichita, who was an old friend of some of my fraternity brothers and he and I became informal "muckers", the English equivalent of partner.

We left Muehlberg on January 8 for Oflag 64, a camp for American officers at Szubin, Poland. That trip was fraught with trials, We occupied half of each box car and the guards occupied the other half. There was a barbed wire fence between us. When we had a "rest stop", we either had to climb over the fence to the guard's door or have them get out and open the door on our side. I was the only German speaker in the car and a number of the officers had violent diarrhea, which meant that every hour or so, night and day, I would have to tell the guards that someone had to go (including myself). Hesse was pretty sick and I will never forget the night we went through Frankfort am Oder. the train wasn't stopping and Hesse had to climb over the fence, open the

guard's door, and with a guard holding on to each hand shove his rear out the door and into the wintry blast. It was funny even then.

We arrived at Oflag 64 on the 10th of January. I found that Colonel Goode, who lived across the street at Ft. Leavenworth, was the senior American officer, that each man got a parcel a week, that cigarettes were plentiful and that it was colder than hell. Hesse and I moved into a cubicle with 6 other officers. One a high school classmate of my brother's, and another a good friend of Hesse's. I got a wool undershirt and two blankets, got a copy of Gibbon's Decline and Fall from the camp library, crawled into my sack and stayed there, except that I contracted diarrhea myself and was constantly running to and from the latrine, living in constant fear of an indiscreet accident. I couldn't eat potatoes or bread. The staples of our diet, and I was living on cheese and toast. Trading my other foods for cheese. I did make one chocolate pudding and it was the most delicious chocolate pudding I've ever eaten anywhere at any time. We spent a good part of our time cooking exotic dishes from our meager materials, and the goodies that were turned out of things like biscuits, D-rations. and the never failing powdered milk would surprise many a chef. We all swore that upon our return we would take our wives into the kitchen and show them how to cook on a tin can using cardboard for fuel and next to nothing for materials. But always I could see and taste scrambled eggs. Never did I want anything worse.

When the Russian drive commenced, we all speculated on what the future held for us. That the Germans would evacuate us we didn't doubt for a minute, but as each day came and the Russians drew nearer, we saw no signs of our impending departure other than a constant stream of refugees pouring down the roads in wagons, trucks, cars, carriages and on foot. Finally, on the morning of the 20th, we were told to be prepared to move at any time. Frenzied action followed. all sorts of costumes were assembled. people sewed pockets all over their clothes, made little sledges and packs to carry their belongings, rolled up their blankets, and dressed for the cold march to come. I put on two suits of wool underwear, two pair of wool socks, two sets of wool OD's, two sweaters. a field jacket, and my trusty field coat, a wool knit cap and a towel for a scarf completed the ensemble³.

Then came a flurry of eating - "bashing" was the term employed at the Oflag to describe any consumption of food beyond the normal routine amount. And bashing passed all bounds that night. We were issued a new parcel and I knew that one was all I could carry in my condition. So I finished the half a parcel left from the last issue. I made a wonderful pudding, end ate one whole box of raisins straight. It was wonderful but it didn't help my diarrhea. All of the cigarettes we had stored were brought out, and there was a mess of them. Many of the officers had received tobacco parcels from home and we had cigarettes to burn. I had three cartons.

The next morning we marched out in the cold air and after much preliminary stalling around started down the road, leaving about 50 or 75 sick under Colonel Drury in the hospital. That march clarified the term "rat-race" for me. There were approximately twelve or fourteen hundred officers and they were spread out for five miles. Everyone was carrying everything he owned, and as this or that got too heavy, he dropped it along the way. There were cigarettes and cigars, pipe tobacco, books, food, blankets, clothes, and officers littering the road for miles. It was a mess. After some 16 kilometers of very painful trudging, we pulled into a large Polish estate and were herded into the

³ I weighed 134 pounds with all these clothes on, according to the dispensary scales.

cow barns. Some of the men complained of the smell and rather liberal distribution of dung, but it was the first time I'd been warm in a month. We could get milk from the cows. and I thought the smell was wonderful.

In the morning we were quite startled to learn that all of us too sick to march would be left behind. Hesse and I were both in misery as a result of our bowels and feet - we didn't march. There were about 200 of us who didn't. We moved into the mansion of the place and bedded down on the floor, waiting for we didn't know what. About 1030 that night a Sherman tank came down the road with a Russian driver. It was cause for no little celebration. Except that I was too sick and tired to care about anything and I didn't get up to see the Russian. Besides, some of us continued to think that he'd probably fail to recognize us and start throwing a little weight around. But finally we decided we were free. So what?

The Russians told us to wait and they would bring trucks to take us to Moscow where we would eat from platinum plates held by MoIotov and Stalin, or so the general impression was. Three weeks later we were still eating bread and soup and no trucks. For which I do not blame the Russians: they were too busy fighting a war to release invaluable trucks for a load of prisoners. Finally, growing weary of inaction,

Hesse and I and a Polish-speaking boy from Detroit named Sito took off for Warsaw. I might add that there were only about forty of the original 200 left by this time. And what with missing a train and a number of other things, we even got behind the forty remaining. The farm we had been at was called "Wegheim" and was five kilometers from the town of Exin. In Exin we stayed in a hotel and slept in beds. That was the first night, the night we missed the train. The next night we slept in the railroad station. And the following night we slept above a creamery across the street from the station. The man who owned the creamery and his family occupied a very nice apartment that must have cost a pot full of dough. We actually had tub baths and the water was hot. Also, we sat on a genuine white porcelain flush toilet. I don't know which felt better, the tub or the toilet.

About 4 a.m. the following day, a train pulled into Exin and the stationmaster came over as was prearranged, jerked us out of our warm beds and placed us on the coal car in the rear of the engine. We Soon got tired of the cold and worked out way up to stand behind the firebox and chat with the engineer. Here it might be time to say that in Poland at the time of this story, and still⁴ for all I know, there were no scheduled trains, nor any passenger trains such as we know in this country. You might wait fifteen minutes and then you might wait two weeks for one to come. They were usually always ammunition or supply trains returning from or going to the front. No coaches were provided and all accommodations were à la box car or, if you were less fortunate, a flat or oil car. I have seen a flat car covered to overflowing with refugees taking off on a five day trip in the dead of winter. Long exposure to such conditions has apparently hardened the Polish peasant. Everywhere you saw refugees, babies, girls, young men. old men. old ladies. It was not at all uncommon to see a 70 year old woman trudging down the road with a fifty or sixty pound load on her back. I will never forget the time one old. grandmother asked one of the officers (six feet tall, 170 pounds) to lift her load up on her back. He couldn't even budge it. She grunted in disgust, threw it on her shoulder and walked off. Of course, the officer was in a weakened condition. But she didn't know it.

⁴ i.e., in June 1945.

Later in the morning we arrived at the oldest city in Poland, Gneseu (Gniezno). Here we met the first group of American GIs. They had been at Stalag III C near Kustrin and were heading for Warsaw also. At this time rumors were floating all over the place to the effect there was an American committee in Warsaw. Lublin. Odessa, and every other locality you visited. The Poles were telling us stories of American planes landing near Warsaw and carrying away our comrades who preceded us. Then we met some French prisoners and they had heard the same story over Radio Switzerland. No latrine ever boasted more gossip. We hopped some open box cars in Gniezno and rode for a few hours to Wrzesnia where we asked about trains to Warsaw. As always we got the same answer: "It's not definite, maybe an hour, maybe a week." Well, what with missing about five or six trains, we stayed two days in Wrzesnia. We probably wouldn't have gotten out when we did had I not noticed that the French men were suddenly moving (without telling anybody - so they could get a good box car with straw and maybe a stove) and we followed right behind them, even to the extent of riding the same car. We were trying to avoid an English speaking Pole, who had been a member of the Polish underground and said he had assassinated some Gestapo leaders, because he was hinting broadly about us smuggling him out of the country. Which was all well and good, but for all we knew, he was a Gestapo agent himself. I've forgotten how long that ride to Warsaw lasted. I know I did enjoy it because the Frenchmen found a stove for the car and seemed to have a genius for finding fuel. Also, they had candles and were all in all quite sociable. One of them even told me I spoke German without an accent.

When we arrived in Warsaw on February ZZ, we found nothing but devastation. The entire city was demolished. It was actually frightening; you could tell that it once was beautiful, but it was certainly a mass of wreckage then. We walked across the Vistula on a temporary bridge and were then in Praga, a suburb of Warsaw that was in fairly good condition. After a few hours walking around we found the Polish Red Cross building and got some soup. They told us that we were supposed to go on to Lublin, but we also heard that the Russians were putting all escaped prisoners in a camp there (Mydanek?) where all the Jews were cremated by the Germans. We also found that they were collecting all prisoners in Praga and sending them to the former Polish West Point at Rembertow, about four or five miles out.

We didn't particular care to enter either of these establishments as the food was practically the same as our prison rations and they weren't too clean. We spent the first night at the Red Cross. Three GIs came in with a sack full of sausage, cakes and doughnuts (which our mouths had watered over as we passed them in shop windows but which we were unable to buy as we had no zlotys (two cents American money, and each doughnut cost twenty-five zlotys) that they had purchased with the proceeds of selling the bicycles they rode from Germany. They got nine thousand zlotys for three bikes and they had eaten up six thousand of them that day. But they were happy as hell. I ate one of the doughnuts and it was delicious. Hesse and I swore we'd get some of those or die trying, we never got them; we didn't die either.

A little later a man came in and started trading for clothes, a GI shirt was worth six hundred zlotys. He spoke English, so I went up to ask him if he was trading for Belgian francs, of which I had five thousand. He turned out to be an American who had been living in France and was taken by the Gestapo. He was some sort of a millionaire, or so he claimed, and after a little discussion, he wanted me to go in business with him and open an American bar. We were to work up capital by

buying and selling the English pounds and American dollars the GIs were bringing in to Warsaw, those two moneys being the only ones that always had a ready market. I was sorely tempted and would have liked very much to have gone into business with him as he was a pretty sharp customer. He had come to Praga with only his clothes and not a word of Polish, and by trading had worked a coat up to three thousand zlotys and an apartment.

I was still debating about three days later when we were staying with a Polish moonshiner on the outskirts of the city. He was making a sort of white lightening out of rye. It was really pretty good but a trifle on the potent side, especially at the rate they drank it. We had a merry time in that house, plenty to eat and drink, and a good bed to sleep on. My mind was made up for me very rapidly when Hesse took an inspection trip out to Rembertow and came back in a hurry with the news that the Ruesians had made up a train there and were preparing to load all the Americans and English in an hour or so and take off for Odessa where we would catch a ship. We hurriedly grabbed our belongings, ate a meal, and said goodbye to our hosts. We got to Rembertow in the nick of time, four or five coming in right on our tails, and loaded on the train. The accommodations were a little crowded, but we didn't give a damn because we were going home. It took us a week to get to Odessa. Along the way I traded off my socks for two loaves of delicious bread. We also got some supplies taken from a captured German warehouse. All in all, it was a pretty good trip, the stove was hot all the time, and we got two hot meals a day (cabbage soup and a sort of thick barley or rice stew).

We arrived in Odessa about the first of March and moved into a couple of abandoned mansions. The boys who had gone to Lublin were there ahead of us and we had a sort of reunion. Also, a major from the Moscow military commission was there to meet us and had American cigarettes, corned beef, chocolate bars, life savers, preserved butter, and all sorts of various goodies. We were just starting to eat again when an English boat came in with a load of Russian prisoners. The suspense was terrible, but we finally loaded after being in Odessa a week. When we hit the dining room on the ship we would sit and eat white bread until we thought we'd burst. It was our first real white bread and it tasted like cake. It was wonderful. About a week later we pulled into Port Said, stayed there a week enjoying the sights and the food. Then we traveled to Naples, spent a week there, loaded on another boat and came home. We all got 60 days leave and we were all happy to be back.

FINIS

EPILOGUE

Reading that account through for the first time in at least 25 years, I am struck by the details I left out - by the emphasis on Warsaw as opposed to Schlausenbach. I do not mention, for instance, Captain Broyhill (Joel - the Congressman from Virginia), who was commander of the 422d Cannon Company. On the afternoon of December 17 (or 18th?) a German horse-drawn artillery battalion pulled up in parade ground formation in a flat little valley to the southwest of and clearly visible from Schlausenbach. They apparently were unaware of our presence. Their performance was beautiful. They looked like they had just come from the Spanish Riding School at Vienna. Perhaps they had. Someone called Broyhill, who came up to the brow of the hill and directed fire from his

company against the Germans. In a very precise and thoroughly efficient way, Cannon Company's little 105 mm howitzers poured literally everything they had into that little valley. They had no ammunition to speak of when they finished. The Germans were caught completely by surprise and the carnage was terrible. I still have a sick feeling about those horses and men, and the picture of them dying is as clear today as it was 27 years ago.

Also left unmentioned was one of the comic incidents that had illustrated the sort of problems we had. I had stationed Petersen and Sorenson (the carpenter and the pastry cook) in a foxhole on the southern edge of town with a bazooka and six rockets and told them to fire at any tanks coming down the road in front of them. I left them thus for 12 or 24 hours, I forget which, and on coming back asked them what their orders were. Petersen said that he was going to fire the bazooka at a tank. Sorenson looked disturbed and said, no, he was going to do the firing because he didn't know how to load. Petersen then confessed that he didn't know how to load either. The two of them had sat there all day without bothering to find out who was going to do what.

I was also distressed to discover that the gunner in Valovcin's squad, a mechanic named Tiede, had such poor glasses he couldn't see through the telescopic sight on the gun. We discovered this after the firefight with the tanks, when Tiede explained his marksmanship by "saying he had never actually seen the tank he was shooting at. We changed his job, but never got a chance to shoot again.

In any event, these memories lived with me over the years and I promised myself a trip back to Schlausenbach to see what was left and to see if I could get a better idea of what happened and why. The opportunity finally presented itself in early June 1971, when I attended a conference at Stuttgart. I took time off afterwards to make a sentimental journey back and the following is my journal.

Scblausenbach. June 10, 1971

I can locate approximately Valovcin's and Chappelle's gun positions, but there are new buildings and trees in the way so that I cannot be sure. I cannot decide where we put the 0.50 cal. Machine gun that fired three shots and quit. The little stone farmhouse I slept in has been remodeled, added to and stuccoed over so that it is almost unrecognizable.

I can still recognize the building in which the anti tank company was headquartered, but it, too, is being remodeled. Behind it I can see clearly the bank I was standing against when a sniper almost got me. I cannot find the field where we laid the mines and where the lieutenant from Cannon Company was killed. There are too many trees.

There is an old church which I don't remember at all. Where regimental headquarters were, there is now an inn. There is another, in which I am staying, next to it. There are two pensions up the street, both full. The Schnee Eifel has become a tourist center of sorts and there are lots of elderly people out promenading in the rather chilly air. The countryside is green and very picturesque. and I find the hill in front of town, known as Schwarser Mann, is some sort of attraction. I must investigate tomorrow.

The drive over from Koblenz was through a smiling countryside all the way. All the villages were decked out with flags and the shops were closed - it being Ascension Day. Gerolstein turned out to be a very pretty town - not at all what I remembered. The railway station was unrecognizable, but I was told it was the same building that was there in 1944. I was very pleased to be able, after several false starts, to find the field where we slept those few hours the night of December 20 and to find the building where I went to ask for first aid, only to be shoved into another column and marched off to the railroad station. I also found the row of houses, from one of which an old lady emerged and gave us water.

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Prüm, June 11, 1971

Some questions answered. Regimental headquarters were in the lower of the two inns in lower Schlausenbach. The name of the family which owns both inns is Scherberich.

I went to the farmhouse on the edge of town where I lived for a week. The lady of the house was admiring her windowboxes. I explained my interest in the house and asked if the original still stood within the stucco exterior. She said it did and took me in. Everything was oilcloth and plastic, but the three original rooms were there. She had only lived in the house 11 years and was originally from Brandscheid. She had never seen it in its original state (she was 9 in 1944). Her father-in-law, however, now 81 (or was he her grossvater-in-law?) was there and was the 1944 owner.

He was an old and feeble man, stretched out on a day bed. He seemed pleased to see me, but communication was difficult because he was deaf and I had trouble understanding his pronunciation. We all agreed 1944 had been a terrible time - they had all fled to the east until the war was over. He said the clock on the wall was the same one that had been in the house in 1944. It still ran. I told him it had still been running when I left although, in point of fact, it had stopped and we couldn't get it started again. He seemed pleased. He had never heard of the footlocker I left in the cellar. His son (or grandson) came in as I went out - a husky man in his early 30's with a pleasant face. He was startled, but when he heard the story was reassured and friendly. His wife asked if I was on pension. She sounded wistful.

I reconnoitered the lower road to Kobscheid and Auw. I decided that's where Peterson and Sorenson sat with their bazooka. From there I could look down into the lovely little valley where the battalion of German horse-drawn artillery had drawn up only to be caught unaware and smashed by Cannon Company. There was nothing in the scene to suggest the shambles of beasts and men which had been there. A Schlausenbacher was peacefully perambulating about in a tractor. On reflection, I realize I don't know what he was doing - plowing, harrowing, or what.

The inn in Schlausenbach was very simple, but not uncomfortable. My evening meal of goulash and bread was quite passable, and the young wife of the equally young proprietor gave me a great breakfast of ham omelet, bread, lard and coffee. Lots of cholesterol consumed in these parts. Tonight I find I left my raincoat there and must go back tomorrow.

The road we took to go up to the Schnee Eifel ridge when we evacuated Schlausenbach on December 18 is now passable only by Jeep, or so a farmer told me. He said my rented VW couldn't make it. I therefore took another track, which could have been the original one for all I knew. The pine forests were just as dark and threatening as I had remembered. I don't know why they plant the trees so close together, but the effect is intimidating.

Near the summit I came across an old German bunker, partly demolished and surrounded by a fence. Had I not seen some of the originals. I would not have known what it was.

The road along the top of the ridge is now beautifully paved. About 3 kms. towards Bleialf from the point where I entered the ridge road is a ski lift, at the Schwarzer Mann. The ski lodge which was there burned down last winter, I am told by a USAF sergeant from Prüm station, a nearby U.S. facility.

On to Bleialf, via a detour to Brandscheid. Bleialf doesn't look like the place, neither do Grosslangenfeld, Winterspeit, or Winterscheid. I was certain, for some reason, that we surrendered at Bleialf, but after exploring every road in town, was sure it was not there. I consulted the map and decided that in terms of distance Schoenberg, just over the border in Belgium, was more likely. The magic figure was 32 miles we allegedly marched to Gerolstein on the 19th. I don't know how we knew it was 32, but think the Germans told us it was so many kilometers. Schoenberg is 23 kms. from Prüm by the route I took, plus 20 to Gerolstein, makes 43, or roughly 25 miles. Maybe we took a different route in 1944, which explains the difference in mileage, but I can't work it out on the map. We had to come via Bleialf.

In any event, off to Schoenberg. There is a long hill, which I seem to recall, and I remember the overweight medical officer who dropped out somewhere about here and wonder what happened to him. I thought I remembered the place when I found the sugar beet, but could not find the town where someone threw bread to us, nor could I find the place where we passed the frozen bodies of a U.S. artillery battery. Schoenberg looks vaguely familiar, and its geography fits my recollections, but I won't swear to it.

There are so many new buildings and so much vegetation it is hard to tell, but I think I found the place where Captain Vitz's Jeep blew up, on the hill above town, actually in the hamlet of Arnscheid, according to the map. It is green and peaceful looking. I was not sure which of two sites it was and took pictures of both.

Just outside Schoenberg I came across a farmer, about my age, herding his cows along the road. He was husky and vigorous looking. I asked him if one spoke French or German here. He replied, "Comme vous voulez, mon cher." I asked him about alternate routes to Prüm, but he couldn't help. Finally, I explained what I was looking for. He was very sympathetic and said he had been a paratrooper in the Wehrmacht at the time of the December offensive and had been fighting at Remagen Bridge. He had never heard of the 106th. I left him and went on, or back, to Prüm, where I checked into Zum Goldenen Stern Hotel. Lunch at the hotel next door, not bad. Have changed my reservations and am leaving from Köln for Rabat tomorrow. Köln is 100 kms. from here.

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