

The following history comes to me via Wayne Deveise, whose dad, Maine Deveise, served with C/725.

"Charming Charlie"  
A History of Battery C, 725<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion  
by  
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Battery C

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Dedicated to the officers and men of Battery C, 725<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Battalion, U.S. Army, World War II



Captain Robert E. O'Connell  
Battery Commander

Officers and Men of Battery C

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1st Lt. Monte L. Reed  
Amick, Charles C.  
Anderson, Stanley R.  
Bainbridge, Joseph A.  
Bennett, Robert C.  
Bingham, Frank  
Bloom, Joel N.  
Bloys, James R.  
Blue, Erwin R.  
Bohn, Willard  
Boyd, William T.

Duncan, Marvin W.  
Erickson, Edgar J.  
Friedman, Milton  
Frisk, Vernon C.  
Fuquay, Charles E.  
Gardner, Daniel A.  
Gardner, Calvin N.  
Gassaway, Joseph W.  
Gazzo, Frank  
Gray, Howard L.  
Haley, Wendell S.  
Hall, Clyde T., Jr.  
Hall, Frank E.  
Hamilton, John C.

Buck, Austin L.  
Burnette, Raymond O.  
Champagne, Joe S.  
Chadwick, Miles E.  
Coffman, John A.  
Cold, Bernard  
Coker, William E.  
Couch, Altomus H.  
Crossett, Junior W.  
Crownover, Wendell M.  
Dahlman, Clyde J.  
Dahn, William C.  
Develse, Maine D.  
Drew, Joseph D.  
Dryden, William A.  
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Lang, Robert L.  
Lawrence, Robert E.  
McDonald, Charles W.  
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Manuel, Herbert  
Martin, Robert J.  
Medrano, Andrew  
Mulbery, Jack M.  
Narbut, Stanley J.  
Napier, Roscoe  
Newbill, Paul H.  
Norris, James R.  
Nuckols, Jack P.  
Olson, Weldon L.  
Parsons, Clyde J.  
Patin, Horace  
Paull, Leon E.  
Pedicone, Pierino P.  
Perkins, Donald S.  
Poling, Kenneth O.  
Portera, Joachim  
Potter, Harold W.  
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Powell, Robert R., Jr.  
Price, Willie T.  
Ramey, Woodrow W.  
Raub, Phillip  
Read, John J.

Hapes, Murl  
Henry, John G.  
Hiatt, Willis R.  
Hicks, Robert E., Jr.  
Hoffman, Ray E.  
Hogan, Lloyd E.  
Hunt, James A., Jr.  
Izbitsky, Meyer  
Johnson, Harold C.  
Kanton, Stephen J.  
Kite, Henry A.  
King, Warner, Sr.  
Kent, James A.  
Kinney, Wade M.  
Klanderud, John D.  
Reed, Glen F.  
Rima, Donald J.  
Robertson, William C.  
Robinette, Dean M.  
Sanders, John T.  
Schenk, Owen F.  
Shoff, Niles R.  
Sexton, Earl W.  
Shelton, Harlan L.  
Skaggs, Norman D.  
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Sutcliffe, Robert P. E.  
Sverchek, Joseph M.  
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Toms, Hartley E.  
Trinkle, Arthur E. Jr.  
Urban, Joseph F.  
Viars, Bruce H.  
Walker, Lewis E.  
Wallbaum, Calvin A.  
White, Reed C.  
Willhoite, Donald A.  
Wilson, Gordon W.  
Wood, Edward A.  
Wuollet, Chester W.  
Yates, Ray D.  
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C Battery at Bad Orb, Germany, July, 1945

### Part 1

To plot the varied itinerary of the 725th Field Artillery Battalion, and, specifically, Charlie Battery, in all its movements, would consume a pair of volumes, at least. Perhaps it would make good reading—we'll give ourselves that pat on the back - but in this particular volume we are concerned only with our more recent adventure from 24 December, 1944, to date, from leaving Fort Wood to the long waiting after the fall of Germany and Japan.

We left Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, on that December day with the routine:

"Okay, boys, let's mount up; Bring battery in this car, right here."

Capt. R. E. O'Connell, Battery Comdr., informed us that all the hot rumors, conjectures, and cussing the officers would have to stop, because "censorship starts right now, men—as soon as we get on the train. Be careful what you say in your letters."

We boarded the train at 1600, bound for the east coast. The land of the Missouri Waltz vanished behind us in the melodic click of the rails, and some of us softly sang, "Meet Me in Saint Louie, Louie-." It was drowned out by a loud, rousing, version of "Over There," with almost everyone boisterously joining in the line saying, "and we won't be back-Period!"

The trip to Camp Miles Standish, Mass., was without event and we arrived at 9020, 22 December, 106 strong. None of us will forget the eerie secretiveness of that detraining. Lined up in a column of threes, we heard through the cold, misty air, a loudspeaker, sounding as if the announcer were actually a ventriloquist, throwing his voice from a mile away: "You are now at a secret destination. Do not attempt to communicate with persons outside this installation by other than approved military channels . . . Pick up your duffel bags and follow your guide." Oh boy! Did you hear that? Secret Destination! What a picture those two words painted. We followed in a long, chilling, arduous, hike to our barracks, long, low, and cold.

Few of us remember just where or how we heard it, but it must have been about this time that someone began giving us a line about this operation having "been done thousands of times before and the men helping you here know just what they're doing. Just leave all the details up to them and the job will go off like clockwork." That sounded good to us—we hadn't heard that particular one before; maybe the army is really getting an efficiency expert after all. Well, we'll see

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After eating a few meals in a 2000-man mess hall and spending Christmas and New Year's in a haze of sweating out packages, we began to realize that we weren't here on a sight-seeing tour. But we did get a chance to see some of the country. Boston, home of the Parker House and baked beans and Paul Revere stories, was only 35 miles away and we had a big time courting the pretty, black-curly-haired, Irish colleens who window-shopped from Scollay Square to the North Church.

We boarded the Boston-bound train early but not too bright the morning of 7 January, loaded with all our paraphernalia. When we got off, it was just as the man at Miles Standish had said-there were the Red Cross girls with coffee and donuts, plenty of each. Well, we thought, better get a good look at these beautiful, sweet, smiling American girls while we can, because only God and SHAEF knew when we'd see any of them again.

We stood there munching donuts, joking among ourselves and with the girls, when suddenly we turned around, and there hitting us right between the eyes, was The Gangplank, This Is It, we mumbled-Embarking on the Greatest Adventure of Our Lives, it says here. Frank Hall yelled, "Is this trip really necessary?" and we marched up the plank. The SS Mariposa of the Matson Line at 1215 wasn't very full, but it continued to swallow more and more troops all that day and the next. Some of us were in the galley policing the kitchen and about nightfall on 8 January felt the huge ship lurch slightly. We must be moving! True enough, the receding waterfront and pinpricks of light through the falling snow showed us that we were really leaving Boston, United States of America . . . So Long...

## Part 2

There is no feeling on earth or water to compare with sea-sickness. A man doesn't just feel bad - he's really sick. Many times on that wild ocean voyage did we hope for quick and painless release just make it quick. An addition to the misery was the meals on board; the food wasn't only bad ... most of us just didn't feel like eating, couldn't think of eating. When and if we ever began to feel better, we went topside to look at the Big Water. The bracing salt air restored life and we just leaned against the rail and looked across the great expanse of sky and rolling water feeling small and helpless before such vastness and immensity-how far was it to land? A thousand miles? Ten thousand miles? No . . . Only a mile - straight down.. That was the only conception of land we had. Any other was too all-encompassing to imagine.

The Mariposa was a big ship, not too old, and sturdily built; but she had been constructed to please the fancies of the Pacific, and the cold, gray, tossing Atlantic treated her rather roughly. There were about 4500 men on board, and the mess lines twice a day wound through the labyrinthine corridors in mile-long lengths.

A daily routine was the boat drill. About the first thing we learned as soon as we boarded the Mariposa was that the craft was a ship, not a boat. The small 70-man wooden vessels were boats, lifeboats, but anything as large as the Mariposa was definitely a ship; and the Navy personnel impressed us with that fact more than once. The boat drill to which we refer occurred at 1400, and we dashed on deck clutching our life jackets, playfully referred to by some as "Mae Wests," to hear the ship's loudspeaker blaring: "Open your valves ... open your valves." Then, later: "Close your valves ... close your valves ... roll up your hoses and put them in the rack." These orders were for the benefit of the crew who aimed the fire hoses over the side and poured water back into the already full ocean. The procedure became quite a joke among the Army personnel; the order to "roll up your hoses and put them in the rack" was so obvious. We fancied that perhaps the crew wouldn't know what to do with their hoses after using them. They had to have someone tell them, it seemed, or otherwise they were bound to stand simply on the deck long after boat drill was over.

We passed the days basking in the warm sun playing poker, reading, writing-doing the same things that millions before us had done. And thinking the same thoughts, too: Wonder if I'll see this ocean again?

If I ever set foot on land again, I'll never leave it, no matter what. That statement proved to be not quite true.

For the most part, our ocean voyage passed without incident. We knew about where we were going and from the map in the chaplain's office, we could determine when we left the wild Atlantic for the calm, blue Mediterranean. We passed through the Straits of Gibraltar one midnight, and couldn't see the Rock or any of its lights. The water rolled only slightly; perfect submarine weather, we thought. But all our fears were forgotten when we put safely into port. We all came on deck that bright, sunny 18 January, and saw the 2500-year-old port of Marseilles from about a mile off shore. Our escort ships, light destroyers and corvettes, which had accompanied us from Gibraltar and which we had hardly noticed yesterday, were plying in great circles about our vessel. The harbor was full of ships, although some of them were lying on the bottom with only their superstructure visible, and looking somewhat strange that way. When the Allies captured Marseilles there was not a ship left floating; docks, quays, and harbor installations were damaged far beyond those of even Naples.

We went down into the bowels of the ship, moved down the plank, and once more set foot on land. It seems to have been Frank Hall, an ex-Air Corps MP, who reached down, patted the cobble-stoned street, and muttered, "Good old Mother Earth". Marching a hundred yards, we dropped our bags and waited for trucks to the staging area. It was here that things first began to go wrong. The efficiency that we had heard so much about was present in almost everything up to this point, but we waited, and waited, and waited for trucks.

All the merchant seamen debarked and strolled past our OD-clad ranks, dressed in sharp-looking and well-fitting civvies. Their job was finished for the present; they were going into the city on pass to enjoy the pleasures of wine, women, and song. They always slept in a warm bed, ate at a well-spread table, and knew nothing of the horrors of foxhole or K-ration life. Duke DeVeise, Philadelphia and Chester, Pa., ton-notch boxer and instructor, and once in the Merchant Marine, bemoaned his fate:

"Now why the hell didn't I have sense enough to get in this goldbrick Navy? Or at least, I shoulda stayed in the Merchant Marine."

Daring the wait, we had a chance to examine our surroundings. For some reason we had expected the fields, the streets, and the trees of France to be strange. The ground should have looked alien and different, but somehow it didn't; it was just like any other we had ever seen. Marseilles itself resembled almost any American city we had left just a few days ago, except for the terrific damage to its outskirts. Winding up the distant mountain was the ancient Cornish Road, clogged with all types of GI trucks. One of the first things we noticed was the way our United Nations star was painted on the trucks-it had a big white ring around the outside. That in itself seemed strange and new-we had never seen any like that, except in the newsreels. Here on the quay we saw, too, our first Germans in Europe; they were PW's working without a guard-ragged, unkempt, but not hungry-looking as most of their victims were. And they certainly didn't appear to be supermen, not by a long shot, but other American soldiers had discovered that before us; otherwise, we wouldn't now have been standing in comparative safety on a French dock.

The long-awaited trucks, huge cab-trailer affairs, finally arrived with clashing gears and roaring engines about 2100. In the dark, we piled on, to be taken for a wild, screaming ride at breakneck speed through the narrow, bumpy streets. American soldiers were no novelty here, we learned

disappointingly; they had been in Marseilles and in France all these long weeks before. Some Frenchmen merely waved a half-hearted greeting as we shouted back and roared out into the country. We were riding in the best Army tradition packed like sardines-and the bitterly cold wind cut through our heavy wool uniforms, chilling us to the bone. After a half-hour, we saw from a distance a vast area dotted with many hundreds of camp fires, and suddenly we rolled up into the middle of those acres and were dumped unceremoniously out of the trucks, to stumble behind a leader who seemed to know where he was going. No, he didn't. He took off in another direction, finally got on the right track and led the way to a bivouac area. Dumping our equipment in a helter-skelter fashion, we collapsed on the bare ground, then decided to pitch tents and went to bed, cold, tired, and more than a little disgusted. More Army efficiency. Someone half-hummed: half-sang, "Where do we go from here, boys ... oh, where do we go from here ... "

### Part 3

Aside from the awful cold and almost primitive living, we were fairly well pleased with ourselves so far. We had come all the way from the States without a mishap and were ready to start paying for all the training time, and effort the Army had given us. Of course, we had given the Army some of that time and effort, our own time and effort, but we now felt ready to finish winning the war. Our mission was to do the job and get it over.

Delta Base Section, CP 2, was the so-called semi-official name of our location, out on a wind-swept, wide-open prairie in Southern France. None of us can ever forget the adverse conditions endured there. No matter what we did to prevent it, we lay in our sacks and shivered, our teeth chattering like castanets. We slept fully clothed, found some straw, piled blankets, overcoats, and paper all around us, but to no avail. The wind blew fiercely up from the valley all day, and we stood up or sat on the ground to eat from mess kits half-filled with sand. Someone told us that he'd heard conditions at the front were "much better than those here," and we replied, quite naturally, that this statement seemed to be obvious-things couldn't possibly be worse. But we hadn't been shot at yet.

It wasn't until a few nights later that we did think of dodging hot steel. The full moon was high in the cold winter sky when an air raid siren wailed from far away. To supplement the siren ;auto horns were sounded and people began yelling. The first sergeant came down our row of pup tents and ordered everyone out. Then we heard something that sounded like a 40 mm. anti-aircraft gun, but soon the explosions began to space farther apart and sound louder, like bombs, going crrrummp! crrrummp! Snatching only our shoes and overcoats, we ran like mad for the dispersal area, some 300 yards distant, from where we could see the thousand lights of the camp go winking out one by one. Motors were heard roaring thousands of feet above, but they passed on. After shivering for half an hour in the winter night, we dashed back to the comparative warmth of our tents.

The same thing happened for two or three more nights, and the raider, presumably German, was appropriately dubbed "Bed Check Charlie," in keeping with a war-long tradition but his mission must have been one other than that of which were so afraid for he never dropped any more bombs.

Sometimes we walked four miles to the American Red Cross donut and coffee dispensary, where, as a matter of fact, we never saw any Red Cross personnel; male or female, and where we stood in line for hours, waiting. Roaming the barren countryside to look for pine needles and foliage with which to floor our tents, occasionally we would find a Frenchman upon whom to exercise our newly-acquired language with a view to bartering for wine. Sometimes we got some, and downed it, making a terrible, distorted face, but saying, like Blackie Lang, "Damn, that's good stuff!" There were two kinds of wine in that part of the country, says Blackie: the kind that tasted like water, and the kind that resembled gasoline. Later on, we found the country had a liquid which looked like water and tasted like gasoline-schnapps, no less.

Most of us yearned to take just one more invigorating hot shower because it's difficult to bathe from a steel helmet, and we thought a trip to Marseilles, some 20 miles distant, was the answer. Arriving in the war-crowded city and inquiring for a "bain," we were disappointed to learn that none was to be had. A beautiful, English-speaking French Red Cross girl told us that "in France nobodee bathe on Mon-day." Well, we'll go look over the town. Coming back a few days later, the same Mademoiselle told us "in France nobodee bathe on Thurz-day." Oh, well, who wanted one anyway?

A closer look at Marseilles revealed that it was very like any fair-sized American town, as we have said before. Several things presented themselves; however, which made us feel that we were really seeing something new and different-the traffic jams, everyone driving his charcoal-burning flivver with the horn, the incessant and varied noises, and the sundry stinks and smells. Girls, young and old, wandered the streets, most of them draped around a gay and laughing Allied soldier. Uniforms ranged from simple, well-fitting U. S. Navy to flashy Indian Ghurka, but most Allied uniforms were supplemented with at least one item of American GI equipment. We never did learn the reason for such a left-handed display of our uniform.

At DBS, we picked up our guns and tractors, after having not seen them for many weeks, along with new jeeps and trucks. Readyng our equipment for the drive up to the front, we suffered our first personnel loss, but he has since returned. Clyde Hall, in Blackie Lang's third gun section, was injured in the foot while cleaning the cosmoline off the "Howitzers" as Joe Drew used to say. After an absence of four months in the hospital, he rejoined the battery in April at Gutenberg.

On the morning 2 February, the detail section and some of the firing battery left CP 2 by motor convoy, bound for the 7th Army front. The howitzer sections, with their guns and tractors on flatcars, left Marseilles the following day, riding in the infamous French "40-and-8's"-although eight men in one car would have been enough, Passing through some known and some little-known French cities-Avignon, Orange, Montelimar, Valence-the first day, the motor convoy stopped for the night at St. Rambert, in a sea of mud and pouring rain, We slogged to a sieve-like, stable affair, and bedded down not quite at peace with the world, The second night was spent at Dijon, where some few of us acid-tested our sleeping bags by sleeping atop six inches of snow. Stopping in Epinal the third night, we slept in a rayon mill on a concrete floor. Arising the next morning, Capt. Robert O'Connell, Battery Commander, got our combat orders, and was heard to remark that "today should see us right up there." We imagined we could then already hear the guns firing, An all-day drive brought the convoy through bomb-shattered, depopulated towns, and although we had seen such towns before, they hadn't been so noticeable, Now each of us began to muse "Wonder if I'll be in a house and have that happen?" Joe Drew, Irish mainstay of the battery, was driving a six-by when the column stopped for a moment's rest in a small town. Some small arms fire was heard and looking around uneasily, Joe asked a passing Infantryman, "How far are we from the front?"

"About 70 miles," replied the dough.

Joe let out a great, long; pent-up breath. Then, slightly puzzled, he asked, "Well, what the hell's all the shootin` about?"

"Oh, that's just B Company runnin' through a problem."

"Oh ... Yeah ... Fine."

Driving slowly, we continued the march through rain, snow, and fog. Just before nightfall we got near the front-or what we supposed was the front, because we didn't know exactly where we were. On each side of the road, loud explosions were heard. They could have been enemy batteries-we imagined they were, and that we were on their list. Every two or three hundred

yards, there were signs saying: "Roads and shoulders! Geared of mines," and we dared not drive off the beaten path. About 1900, 6 February, we stopped in Seingbouse, France, and dismounted. The long trip was over. We were here. The Battery Commander said, "Blackout discipline will be observed, because the Germans are only 9000 yards away." Smoking that night was done in buildings.

#### **Part 4**

After that terrible night of waiting for an 88 to come tearing into the battery area, conditions began to improve somewhat. Unfortunately, everything could not improve all at once; we had come into the line at the peak of the rainy season and the countryside was an oozing mass of the stuff that can make or break an army--mud. After wading in it a foot deep, we were ready to give up. But we were living in houses again, fairly comfortably, with French Alsatian people who spoke German, giving Cpl. Bill Dahn, Cleveland-born of German parentage, a chance to exercise his second and alternate language.

The day after the detail section and advance party arrived at Seingbouse, the cats, guns, and crews pulled into position about a mile from the town. An ideal gun position was maintained, as far as terrain features and camouflage were concerned, in a wide open field, but the comfort and ease were nil--you guessed it; mud was the enemy - mud in which the tractors, guns, and trucks sunk axle deep, mud that clung to our boots and made us slip headlong into its grasp, mud that wormed its gooey way through our socks and soaked our tired feet. The gun crews worked like men possessed getting the pieces ready to fire. At last, that same day, it came--Fire Mission! Charlie is ready! First gun to fire was that of S/Sgt. H. C. Johnson, Chief of Sections, with Dahn gunning and John Sanders "pulling the string," to send the round tearing toward Jerryland.

On 9 February, John Klanderud was slightly injured when hit by the recoil of Johnson's gun, but he quickly recovered and rejoined the battery.

A few days later, we displaced to another position one mile south of Seingbouse on the Henriville road, because of the adverse conditions in the muddy field. The second position was on higher and more wooded ground. Fortunately, we had come into a quiet sector, and received no counter-battery fire, although some alleged enemy rounds were heard crashing into the woods a thousand yards behind us.

Lieut. Brastrup, Battery exec. Initiated his post behind No. 2 gun, assisted by Lieut. Monte L. Reed, Don Willhoite, phone operator, Milton Friedman, computer, Charlie Amick, recorder, and Clyde Dahlman radioman.

Evidently we had done something constructive, or destructive, whichever way it may appear, with our 155 mm. howitzers, because February 15, we march ordered to Ebringen, indicating that the Germans were that much on the run. Again we occupied French billets and went into position just outside the small town, near a cemetery. Here our anti-aircraft support joined us from the 443rd AAA Bn., and we realized, perhaps for the first time, the terrific strength of the Allied Armies, because we hadn't seen many units on this side of the world except our own. Naturally, our own small sector was only that-small, even with its many battalions of thundering artillery throwing high velocity death at the Jerries. But when we stopped to ponder on the many long miles embraced by the front, each mile jammed with top-notch troops as was ours; we felt that our Army was the greatest the world had ever seen.

Soon after we were set up in front of the cemetery we got semi-official word that a big offensive push was in the offing and that a great deal of ammunition would probably be expended. In any event, we were ready. That night, the news materialized as we heard, above our own firing, what we considered the most devastating of barrages. Guns and howitzers of all sizes were splitting



the air with their roars, and in our mind's eye, we pictured the Infantry leaving their foxholes stealthily, aiming and firing intermittently as they crept steadily into the ladder-like explosions of our heavy artillery. As each company of riflemen moved up, our elevation on the guns was increased slightly to allow for the shells bursting a few yards ahead of the advancing doughs, in the midst of blue-clad Jerry soldiers.

On 20 February; the Reconnaissance Officer and party went up to act as Forward Observers with Co. C. 274th Infantry. Included in the party were Lieut. W. W. Geister, of Chicago, then R. O., Cpl. E. A. Wood, Louisville, Ky., instrument man; and T/5 Lewis Walker, Fair Play, Mo., radioman. The same day, we received news of the first Jerry to be captured by the battalion. Lieut. C. W. Wilkerson, of Portland, Ore., actually ran the man down on foot while he was forward as battalion RO. He has since returned to Charlie battery.

Cpl. Milton Friedman was slightly injured in an auto accident a few days later, but returned to the battery after being hospitalized.

We march ordered on 23 February to Buschbach, France, about 15,000 yards from the German border, and began the Battle for Forbach, our major participation. Going into position on the forward slope of a large hill, we started firing the following day and increased the tempo of concentrations every night. It proved to be the longest time spent in one position while we were in the line, because the Forbach fight was a long, hard, bitter one for the Infantry. Many of us had a chance to roam the countryside hunting any game we could find. Huge jackrabbits proved to be the extent of animal life. They were about the size of a wire-haired terrier and leaped along the ground in great three or four yard bounds. To hit one in motion from a hundred yards with a rifle was quite an accomplishment, but some of us did it. Worthy of note among the rabbit-hunters, as well as other scavenging professions was John C. (Baldy) Hamilton, whose cohorts and partners in crime have recently dropped the cognomen for one more fitting: "Radar," because he'll pick up anything.

In the Buschbach position, we roughed it by living in the field at the bottom of the hill on which our guns were. A quietly babbling brook ran right by our door, and Spring was almost here, with the birds bursting into trilling song and the sun, thawing out the cold, tired winter.

Several times we fired missions of which the S-2 would tell us the result by phone. On one occasion, the FO watched for three days a German kitchen truck feeding its mess line, noting time, activities, and number of men. On the fourth day, Lieut. Wilkerson quickly adjusted Charlie battery on the truck, completely surprising and disrupting the proceedings. To say that the meal was interrupted would be a masterpiece of understatement, for one observer reported "mess kits, rifles, truck and Germans disintegrating in the air."

## Part 5

An unforgettable event occurred the night the OP line went out. Our two battery OPs had phone communication with the switchboard and the following line was cut, presumably by artillery or other enemy fire. Wire Corporal Bernard Coll loaded his wire truck and started out, accompanied by assistant Wire Cpl. Drew, with Murl Hapes driving. It was the party's mission to repair the severed line, and in the dark it was always quite a problem. Rocky Crownover and Drew went to work with a wireman from Hq. Battery named Keegan, on a 200-yard strip of ground under direct enemy observation. The night was dark as the inside of a whale, with the Krauts presumably only a few yards away. Practical joker Drew, believing in any thing for a laugh, asked:

"Hey, Keegan, how 'bout a light?" "A what?" answered Keegan.

"A light-a match."

"God, Joe, the Krauts are only three yards away!" said the badly shaken Keegan.

"Well, get a light from one o' them then."

"No, Joe, f'r Gosh sakes, don't strike a match-not up here, Joe! They'll see us sure, Joe!" (Puffing and gasping for breath.)

"Ah, the hell with it, Keegan! Gimme a match-" "No, Joe, not up here! Wait'll we get down, Joe, please!"

"Well-okay. I'll wait awhile."

Keegan had to be hospitalized the next day. Coming back from the OP was the toughest job; the truck crept along, with Drew, Coll, Crownover, and 'Hank' Henry stealing along beside it, their rifles at the ready. Straining their eyes to the utmost, as if by straining they could see better, one would raise his carbine and make as if to fire, but would change his mind upon seeing that his target was a tree.

A few days later, the RO party, with Lieut. Geister, Wood and Walker, came back to the battery for a rest. Wood described the conditions on the OP as "rough," and painted lurid pictures of fatalities on either side of him, caused by the infamous "shoe mine." On one occasion, he and Lieut. Geister, working with the Infantry, picked their way forward a few hundred yards to a clump of bushes, from which they began observing. Their mission completed, they groped their way back to the jeep, near which they were stopped by a doughboy who inquired, "Say, how'd you guys get up front there?"

"Why, we just walked and crawled," replied Wood.

"Through all those shoe mines? Geez, you sure can pick 'em," exclaimed the dough.

Wood and the Lieutenant just groaned a bit and looked at each other out of the corners of their eyes.

First Sgt. Robert "Tex" Martin and Bill "Stretch" Dryden, of Fairfax County, Va., seeking adventure, went back to the OP with the party, which set up a position in a huge partially-wrecked house on a high hill outside Forbach. They were confronted by German infantry but backed up by American. Just as they settled down to a fairly peaceful night, the phone rang with a routine call, loud and clear, and scared Wood out of his so-called wits. A half hour later, the phone rang again, and Wood turned a bit pale. Answering it, he whispered to switchboard operator Niles Shoff that he'd "have to quit ringing this phone, message or no message, because the Krauts can hear it-they're only a few yards away." Actually, the Krauts in question were more than a few yards away, but the phone rang no more that night.

Back at the gun position, we hadn't been counter-battered, but were expecting it any time. We settled down to a long wait, but the next night we were awakened by the eeriest of sounds imaginable-a long, piercing scream, starting at the apex and coming down the scale, then a loud, flat crummp! "Outs those sacks and into a foxhole!" someone yelled, and we scrambled out into the night. The 88s were landing quite a distance away, but the sounds were accentuated by our location in a long valley; and everyone swore they were exploding right next to his foxhole or tent. The shelling finally ceased after an hour of scaring us out of our wits, and the sun rose on a battery of madly digging boys who had said yesterday, "Yeah, if it's gonna get me, it's gonna get me, and there ain't nothin' I can do about it." But now they said, "Yes, if it's gonna get you, it's gonna get you, but there are things you can do to prevent it."

Some of us examined the shell holes the next day and found that the nearest 88 had landed a hundred yards to the left of Sgt. Wade Kinney's No. 4 gun, outside the main gun position. The Coloradan drawled that "if they all stay that far away, this won't be too rough a war."

The same thing happened again that night, with the notable exception that the shells were farther away. Probably influenced by the events of the previous night, Bob Sutcliffe called the exec post from No. 4 gun:

"Oh, sir," said he, "did you know that we're being shelled up here?"

"No, I didn't know that, Sutcliffe," said Lieut. Brastrup. "Where are the shells coming from?"

"I don't know, sir," replied Sut, "but they're not coming from our side."

Later that night, the air was rent by a thunderous barrage, presumably from both sides, and terrific explosions lighted the sky for miles around. Through the flashes of light, we observed what appeared to be an anti-aircraft gun's time fire-white puffs of smoke some few thousand yards distant-but they must have looked like something else to Gunner Reed White, who called Lieut. Brastrup:

"Sir, did you see those parachutes coming down over there?"

And immediately the rumor spread like a rumor: "German paratroopers landing over by Baker Battery!" But closer observation revealed the "parachutes" to be just white smoke puffs.

An incident better forgotten was the one known as "Frisk's Retreat," but it seems appropriate here.

Just two or three days before we left Buschbach, Sgt. "Bunyan" Frisk went forward with his second section late one afternoon, intending to register the following morning, and then bring the rest of the battery up. The position he occupied was one vacated just a few hours before by another battery. Came nightfall, everything was peaceful one moment and terrifying the next; for 88s began dropping all around Frisk's position. German artillery had the range and deflection of the spot from previous observations., and harried the crew all night. In the morning, everything was quite calm, but fortunately, orders were given to move back to Buschbach, which they did gladly.

On 20 March, we march ordered to Spicheren, a short distance from Buschbach, stayed one night. and moved out through Forbach to Krughutte, Germany We all felt a surge of pride as we read the sign: "You Are Now Entering Forbach-Courtesy of the 276th Infantry Regiment." The town had been liberated only a short time when we rolled through the debris-littered streets, and we saw for the first time the effects of our efforts and the efforts of our hard-hitting Infantry - trees felled across roads, houses in ruins, road blocks completely destroyed, few stores left to serve the war weary French, who stood in long lines waiting for the shopkeepers to open up.

## Part 6

Krughutte was a small village in which all houses were alike, very much like any American mining or manufacturing town. The Infantry had obviously been there before us, for everything in the houses was ruined, thrown helter-skelter by the souvenir-seeking doughs. We did, however, manage to find a few things of interest - Nazi flags, knives, and rifles., but the prize was a Jerry motorcycle which Motor Sgt. Red Kanton coaxed into performance, and went tearing down the street riding it like a veteran.

Leaving Krughutte, we drove through battered Saarbrucken and again observed the effects of total war; P-47s and heavy bombers had leveled great areas of the city, queen of Germany's Saar coal region. The Wehrmacht had retreated and given us not much of a prize, a city in which there were only a few civilians left walking the rubble streets.

At Hutschenhausen, the entire battalion was grouped together in a few blocks our guns and tractors in garages, and we learned we were a part of the Army Reserve. Conjectures and rumors began to fly - we were a part of the much-talked-about Army of Occupation.

We stayed in Hutschenhausen only a few days, and drove to 98-mile-distant Gutenberg on 01 March. It was located not far from the Rhine River in the heart of the German wine district, as we found upon exploring the well-stocked wine cellars of the houses. There occurred here an incident which no member of the battery will ever forget-Payday at Gutenberg. The effects of the wine made some of us feel as if we owned the world when we lined up in the slightly weaving pay line. At least a third of the battery was indisposed and couldn't make pay call, but those present made up for the loss. Sgt. Martin, slightly red-faced, strode up to the paying officer, ripped off a highball that started a draft through the room, and reported in the best military manner. Later he was asked by Lieut Brastrup:

"Were you all right at pay call, sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tex. ""Did I do something out of line?"

"No, you didn't: that's why I thought something was wrong with you."

The pay-off at pay call came. However, when Norman Skaggs staggered up to the table, reported, "I come for my money," as he recalled the line from "Tall in the Saddle" a movie-seen three or four times by most of the battery.

Sgt Martin, Dumalie Couch, and Rocky Crown - over discovered a "Gasthaus," or beer tavern, on the far end of the town, and opened it with a gala celebration. Dumalie, donned in an immaculate top hat, white tie, and tails, was the capable bartender, assisted by bouncers Martin and Crownover. The latter had very little to do in their line, however, for the lads conducted themselves in a manner becoming gentlemen or a reasonable facsimile thereof. Occasion for all the celebrating was the 21st birthday of Cpl. Sam Stephens, Easter and April Fool's Day, a couple of which we observed a bit late. We would have celebrated the Fourth of July and Christmas, but that would have been going a bit too far.

Clyde Hall and Bruce Viars, the latter burned in a gasoline explosion at Buschbach, rejoined us about the same time that Clyde Parsons left. Parsons was injured when he fell, or walked, out of a second story barn window on the fatal day of the wine cellar discoveries.

Guterberg was a nice little town and we hated to leave it, but we moved on 10 April to the prosperous-looking village of Gau-Bickelheim. The houses were big rambling affairs with plenty of livestock in their backyards, and the town was completely untouched by war. We were engaged in mere occupation duties and had plenty of time to sit in the gardens and enjoy the beautiful German spring weather.

With Charlie battery furnishing a part of the guard detail, the battalion participated in operating a huge PW camp near Gau-Bickelheim. Situated in a valley, the camp covered about eight acres and had a capacity of 50,000. There were no barracks or living quarters, no latrines or water facilities, and we stood outside the fence watching the poor examples of the beaten Wehrmacht trying to live as human beings and failing utterly. When we arrived, there were 35,000 inmates, with a constant turnover. The prisoners were fed in great, long pines of four abreast, run through

in a seemingly never-ending column twice a day. These were the smart Krauts, the ones who made it easier for their army to be beaten into surrender.

Ober-Rosbruch was the next town in our itinerary, to which we moved on 22 April, a trip of 80 miles. Continuing our occupational duties we policed and patrolled towns, rounding up Nazis and possible Nazis. In these actions, we often had occasion to take into custody many civilians who protested that they were "good German-nix Nazi!"

Most of us, those who had any thoughts at all along the subject, knew that the Germans had to be treated firmly but civilly, according to the SHAEF ruling Whether or not they were Nazis had nothing to do with it-everyone was considered an ex-party member. Sometimes we were called upon to administer a treatment more drastic than civility or firmness, and we had to decide, right then whether we were going to "fight fire with fire," or whether we would say that "two wrongs don't make a right." It would be difficult to gauge the feeling of each as regards that decision, but a mere estimate shows a preponderance of the former theory of "fighting fire with fire." It is realized more every day that if one gives a German an inch, he will take a mile, but that is not to say that if the German gets a bit of rope, he will hang himself with it -he will hang you with it.

One day some of us were standing about on the road when a jeep squealed to a halt. A lieutenant leaned out briefly, said, "The war's over, boys!" and drove on. Taking his word for it, we dashed up to Sgt. Martin's gin mill and broke out some spirits to celebrate the Day. Before we had once toasted the long awaited European victory, someone came in to say that the news was officially untrue-at best, it was an unconfirmed rumor.

Red Kanton, motor sergeant and sometime motorcycle rider, let the two-wheeled demon get the best of him when he broke his arm in an accident and was lost to us permanently. We hear that he is still hospitalized in England or the States, but no one seems to know definitely.

## **Part 7**

From Ober-Rosbruch, we moved up in to the foothills of the Bavarian mountains most beautiful part of Germany, to Konigshofen, on 3 May. The town was one of tree-shadowed streets, pretty, untouchable frauleins in flowery dresses, and smiling, prosperous looking German farmers.

Here, on that memorable 8 May, we learned of the unconditional German surrender, and celebrated the official end of the long, nerve-wracking war with some displaced Australian soldiers who happened to be in the vicinity and newly released from a PW camp, where they had been interned for four years. They were amazed at the might of the Allied Armies, the tanks and guns and planes which had multiplied, so during their absence.

Opportunity knocks but once, and we answered it by supplementing our sometimes scarce rations with venison from the hills around Konigshofen. All the one-time rabbit-hunters turned into deer hunters, but few were successful. Deer hunting is an art, as we soon learned from Jeep Herder Larrupin' Larry Lawrence, who claims to have spent more time than anyone else in the battery in quest of the buck. On one occasion, a firing squad including Lawrence, Willhoite, Crownover; and Lloyd Hogan, sallied forth and flushing two does from the underbrush, brought them down with a withering fire. One of the animals was so full of holes it wouldn't have floated in molasses.

We left Konigshofen behind us and went to Sterbfritz on 9 May, but stayed only two days, and moved into Wachtersbach on the 11th. We had excellent quarters there, large rambling houses with gardens, kitchens, spacious bed rooms, and beautiful furniture. Best attraction in the town was the beautiful large park, with lily ponds, ducks, benches, and all the elements that make a real park. Shaded paths wound up the hill, and more of those beautiful untouchable frauleins

strolled along arm in arm. Soon we began to relax in a state of suspended animation, where we did very little constructive acting or thinking. Sun baths, letter writing, and just lying around in a lazy manner became the order of the day. Just as we had begun to think that the Army of Occupation wasn't such a bad deal, we had to go to work again.

The Germans had operated a prison camp outside Bad Orb, about eight miles from Wachtersbach, and we took it over after all the inmates had been liberated. The official name of the installation was Kriegsgefangenen Stammlager Mannschaft Stalag IX B and it had been mentioned a few times in news dispatches as one of the horror camps, though it was outclassed by Buchenwald and Belsen. There was a graveyard about two miles outside the main enclosure, where there was definite evidence of Russian, Serbian, Polish and French graves, most of them of the common type, but no conclusive proof of any American interments. It was assumed that Americans were buried there since American soldiers of the 28th Division had been in the camp, and we heard rumors that eight Yank graves were in the cemetery. A thorough search disclosed nothing, however.

The camp itself was not a beautiful sight: ground littered with paper and debris, barracks in a madhouse of destruction, American helmets lying everywhere, and German and American equipment of all kinds thrown helter-skelter before the oncoming American tanks, which had crashed the gates and roared through the camp, creating a destruction all their own. The barracks were full of ripped straw mattresses, overturned and broken beds, and bits of evidence that reminded us that American soldiers had been there: snatches of "Flash Gordon" and "Terry and the Pirates" comic strips, a few paper-bound Armed Services Edition novels, the kind that are everywhere overseas, empty Red Cross boxes and hundreds of empty C-ration cans. And to say that the whole installation smelled would be putting it mildly. It reeked with a stench that will permeate through the years of history as long as generations have the power to remember.

Lieut. Reed and a staff including Sgt. Kinney, Duke DeVeise, and Ray Hoffman, took over the camp and got it clean - with the German civilians from the surrounding town doing the work of course. A week's effort made it more or less livable for the German soldiers who began to arrive about 26 May. The plan was that they would be discharged from the camp to continue as farmers, merchants, and shopkeepers, to get Germany back on its feet. (It was not our lot to question why Germany should get back on its feet at all).

## Part 8

The ex-members of the vanquished Wehrmacht at first arrived in sparse numbers, but later came in long truck convoys to bring their number at its peak to 350. Some were actually discharged, but the majority stayed until we released the camp some six weeks later. Those of us who were in and around the camp at the time had a good opportunity to again observe the German, and the old theory proved itself time and again - give him an inch and he'll take a mile. Most of the prisoners were compatible enough and seemed to like their camp, with the notable exception of the 80-odd SS men, some of whom still retained their hard-instilled Nazi arrogance. We wondered how many of them had been here before, or had been at Dachau and Buchenwald before the Yankees came; but of course all the SS men denied ever having been connected with a concentration camp. They all had papers identifying them as having worked in hospitals, driven trucks and staff cars, or pursued some other peace-loving assignment. The man who believed such credentials and such stories was fooling no one but himself.

Where the Erla and Nordhausen inmates slept 1500 men in a barrack and four or five in a bunk, our Germans lived a hundred per barrack and of course only one in a bunk. Where Buchenwald had a form of soup and some bread once a day, our German prisoners feasted on beef, pork, liver; cheese, noodles, vegetables, bread, and even fresh eggs, and they weren't satisfied with that diet. They complained of not having enough to eat, and expected us to increase the ration. The German has a look on his face which he reserves for impossible situations, a look which he

turns on when you tell him he can't have something, a hurt look, as if to say, "Well, what the hell have I done?" Unfortunately, the American, especially the soldier, is pitifully susceptible to that look. If the prisoners were caught loafing during working hours, a gentle admonition brought them listlessly to half-hearted action, but if an SS man and an American PW figured in the event, the latter would surely have been killed had the SS man felt like it - if he just felt like it.

There were no evidences of any of the infamous incinerators or crematories or torture machines of Duchau and Buchenwald anywhere in the camp, but it was said that the comparatively milder death of starvation claimed some of the inmates.

The bad thing about capturing some one or some thing, or even coming by the commodity slightly surreptitiously, is that one always must guard the item and we did that at Stalag IX B, where the Germans were being well fed by the gallant and victorious American Army, treated with kid gloves, and life outside was painfully complicated and sometimes hungry, Anyway, they were to be discharged soon. But they were guarded anyway, until 6 July; when we closed the camp, loaded them on all on trucks, and hauled them away to Limburgh. Our PW headache was over, but it was an interesting experiment, and most of us learned something from it. For one thing, we learned that the German can appear as innocent as a child, if he so chooses. When we were first opening the cage, trying to get lights, water, bunks, clothes, mattresses and blankets for its occupants, the people of Bad Orb and surrounding towns were very cooperative-they all knew just where those things were as well as the whereabouts of the men who had helped supervise the camp before the Americans came and who could facilitate the preparations. But when we asked them about graves, or how many Americans were there, they didn't know a thing, feigned complete innocence; they had all stayed down in the town and knew nothing of the Stalag's workings. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

In the meantime, the battery had moved on 1 June to Bad Orb, where we lived in the big Villa Saline Hotel. Most of the rooms had a porch-balcony affair, where it was pleasant to sit in the evenings after an afternoon swim in the huge pool. Here again, one of the town's main attractions was the park, with quietly murmuring stream running through it, and lots of benches along the sun-splattered paths. We even had a movie house, where year old pictures played almost nightly. We also had our bar-room, the old stand-by well-stocked with Rhine wine, champagne, and cognac, and boasting a fair piano, where Ray Burnette practiced almost every night. The dandies at the Mayflower and Ritz hadn't anything on Charlie's boys, well, not much, anyway-when it came to dining in splendor. We entered the dining room one Sunday to the strains of beautiful, just-loud-enough dinner music from Radio Luxembourg, sat down to tables with brightly colored cloths and real plates and silverware, and were waited on by German and Polish waitresses. Our repast complete, we simply got up and left the soiled dishes on the table, something we hadn't done in many months.

But a somber note was struck one night when suddenly nine of us got orders to leave. Joel Bloom, Jack Nuckols, Wendell Haley, Owen Schenk, Earl Sexton, Joe Champagne, Henry Kile, Meyer Izbitsky and Warner King packed their bags and were gone in three hours. Their destination was the Eighth Infantry Division, and at this writing all of them are enjoying 30-day Stateside furloughs. That transfer made us realize that we wouldn't be together much longer: the division was being broken up for replacements. Robert Hicks, the one-man Sears & Roebuck advertising staff; left a few days later, ostensibly bound for the States; then the Pacific. Many friendships, forged in the flame of war and the army for two years, were broken up when Rocky Crowover, Don Willhoite, Norman Skaggs., Charlie Amick, Junior Crossett, Jim Norris, Bob Sutcliffe, Leonard Sydloski and Ed Wood left in the same manner on 9 July. Their going was marked in a never-to-be-forgotten party the night before in which the only missing person was Irishman Drew, who was away visiting County Cork, the land of his nationality.

This writing finds the remainder of the battery awaiting a sudden shipping order; knowing that it will come and wanting a change, but reluctant to leave each other with a mere press of the hand

and a wry. "So long, bud." We are aware that the Jap must be beaten and that hundreds of thousands of men who fought the Germans must go to the Pacific. We are not eager to do any more fighting, the little that we have done, but we expect eventually to wind up in the Pacific.

In the meantime, we are passing the slow, weary days in the Great, Big, Long Wait...

The End



"The Fighting Third", Blackie Lang's Third Section



C Battery Celebrates VE Day; Ober-Rosbruch, May 8, 1945