Nov 2, 1945

DEAR MRS. DUNN,

YOUR SON WAS MY BUDDY.

I'M SORRY I HAVE TO

WRITE YOU THIS LETTER.

Pvt Robert D. Quinn
39934442

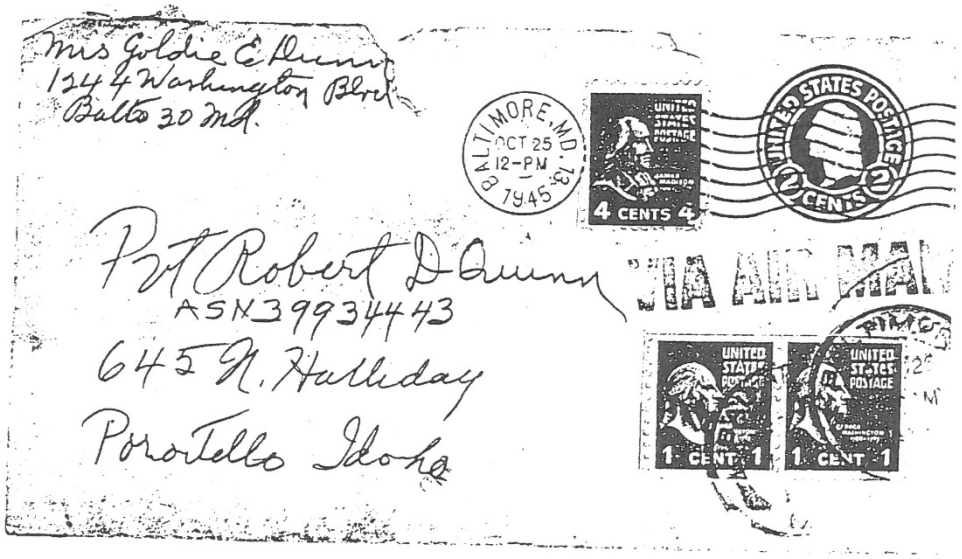
LETTER TO DUNN'S MOTHER

The war was over in Europe. Germany had surrendered. The *low-timers* were shipped back from the European Theater to the States to prepare for the invasion of Japan. While on the train traveling toward our new base at Camp Cooke, California, we read in the papers about an atomic bomb being dropped on Japan. (What the hell is an atomic bomb?) Training for an amphibious invasion had barely started when Japan surrendered. All preparations for invasion were cancelled. We were given forty-five days furlough and I headed home to Pocatello, Idaho. It was a relief to know that we would not be dying on the beaches of Japan.

Peace!! It should have been wonderful after months of combat in France and Germany. And I was home. But every night I woke up screaming and crying Dunn's name. My sheets were drenched with sweat. Tears smeared my face. I was usually holding the pillow, nestling it the way I had cuddled Dunn's head. Memories of his dying moments of agony still haunted me.

I was holding Dunn's head in my lap. The bullet had torn open his throat and blood spurted out of the severed arteries and veins and poured into his shattered and gaping windpipe. His eyes were staring into mine —— pleading. I tried to wipe away the never-ending flow of blood. I was helpless as he gurgled and coughed with his weakening breath. The blood spilled into his lungs. His eyes locked onto mine. He was begging me to keep our mutual promise. "Write to my mother," those eyes were saying. "Tell her how I got it — doing my duty. Tell her I was never a coward. She would want to know that." How many times we had made this solemn vow to each other? How many times? I held him until his eyes glazed. The gurgling weakened —— then stopped. The gush of blood slowed to a trickle and stopped filling the hole where his Adam's Apple had been.

At last I received a letter from Mrs. Dunn.



Balto 30 Md
Oct 25, 1945

Dear Robert, — I recived your letter and was very glad to here from you. I am glad to here from a Buddy that was with Richard and I would be very glad to know how my Son die or any information I can get about it. but would you please explane plaindly what you mean by the way he ~~died~~ die

Yes I recived a note from his commanding officer

and the Chaplain but
only thire sincerley
smithy but not how
he dit. - I thank you
for the informations that
you have gave me and
I wish you the best of
luck and the test of health
may God bless you.
I hope you write me
real soon I thank
you again.

Sincerley yours
Mrs Goldie E Davis
1244 Washington Blvd Baltimore 30
Md.

I read it many times and cried each time. That night, I sat at the typewriter and stared, groping for just the right words to deliver my important message. My mind went back over the events of nearly a half year before.

——————— • ———————

I met Dunn the day I joined the 14th Armored Division in northern France as a replacement. Many young, freshly trained soldiers were rushed from the States and thrown into battle in a desperate effort to halt the new German offensive known as "The Battle of the Bulge." The 14th Armored Division had lost heavily in action in the Colmar Pocket, in Alsace-Lorraine, south of the heavier action in Belgium. Raw recruits were shoved in to fill the holes in the shattered ranks. My new address was, Pvt Robert D. Quinn, 39934442, 3rd Platoon, Company C, 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, 14th Armored Division, 7th Army.

The battle-hardened veterans at first resented the new recruits. They saw us as poor substitutes for old and trusted friends who were gone. And we were green. Untried. Maybe even a hazard in combat. We didn't know how to do anything right.

Dunn had just returned to active duty from the hospital. He had been wounded at Rittershofen. He was a machine-gunner and I was put in his squad as an ammunition bearer. Our platoon had two machine-gun squads of five men each. A gunner — an assistant — three ammunition bearers. Dunn loved his machine-gun. It was his responsibility and he was proud of it. He kept it shined and in perfect condition at all times.

At first, he was exasperated by my inexperience and barely talked to me. It took time, but we gradually became friends. Machine-gunners don't last long. Their average life span in heavy combat is only about thirty-five minutes. A

machine-gun is always a prime target for artillery, tanks and mortars. Turnover was rapid. I began as the fifth man in the squad, but before long I became Dunn's assistant gunner. From then on he made damn sure I knew my job perfectly. He tutored me continually. We lived, slept, ate and fought together as one man. We came to know each other's way of thinking.

Dunn had a pronounced Irish brogue which was strange to my country-boy ears. I loved to listen to him. He was tall and dark and had curly hair. He wore a perpetual grin. But the outstanding quality I loved was his cockiness. He felt he was indestructible. When volunteers were asked for a dangerous patrol, Dunn was always one of the first in line. He seemed devoid of fear. The other men felt sorry for him — bitter experience had taught them, the brave ones didn't last long.

The 14th Armored Division had been enjoying a short rest while the replacements were fitted in. Lost tanks were replaced, as were half-tracks and trucks. Ammunition and equipment consumed in recent combat were replenished. The order to move up into action would come when new supplies quit coming in.

My nervousness transformed itself into clumsiness. The other men went about their business of loading their equipment into half-tracks and checking guns and ammunition. They treated me as a nuisance — barely to be tolerated — and impatiently corrected every mistake. Only Dunn pitched in and helped me arrange my equipment and told me what I should be doing.

"Wear two pair of socks. Have an extra pair in your pocket. You'll need clean socks more than you need extra food."

"Wear two shirts. You'll be cold all the time."

"Carry your trenching shovel at all times. We'll be digging lots of foxholes with it. Probably the first one before morning. You'll need to dig a trench every time you take a crap — like a cat."

"Keep that rifle clean. Keep your belt full of clips of bullets. Carry an extra bandoleer. Have four grenades ready, but don't put them in your belt until just before we go into action."

"Carry enough K-Rations for two days. Fill your canteen with fresh water every time you get a chance. Water gets rationed. Drink lots of hot coffee. That will be half your daily water ration. We can't drink the stuff in the streams."

He kept up a continuous string of chatter which eased my growing tension. He warned me what to expect and how to deal with the emotions of battle — of seeing men die. "You'll get used to it real soon."

The expected orders came. We mounted our half-tracks and joined a slowly moving column. As our blacked-out convoy rolled along the road toward the flashes of light on the horizon, the men huddled silently and tensely in the well of the half-track. They knew battle. They dreaded it. Dunn, however, sat up on the side wall of the half-track and watched the show. I moved up beside him shivering from the wind. (Or?) I remember the wind rumpling his hair as he talked.

"See those stars? We're headed north and east. We'll be back at the same place where I got hit. Just a scratch. But I got two weeks in the hospital for it."

Bursts of light kept flashing over the horizon, followed by a muted thud. "Hear that? Artillery. Count the seconds between the flash and the boom and you can tell how far away it's landing." A pause. "About ten miles, I guess. We're headed that way. Should be there a few hours before daylight."

The roar of battle ahead grew louder, and the pause between the flash and thud shorter. It was my first exposure to real combat. I quivered — half with fear — half with anticipation. Dunn pointed out sights and noises that were familiar to him. In the distance we could see a glow in the sky. "One of our night-time flares," he said. The glow lasted for a minute or two, then disappeared.

Later, in another section of the sky, another flare went up. "That's one of theirs," he observed, "They're brighter than ours, but they don't last as long." It faded as he talked.

All across the horizon, we saw blazing flashes — like lightning in a storm back home. I sat beside him watching — listening. The thunder grew as we came closer. It became a continuous roar. There was a tempo to the roar of our artillery — now behind us. It was a whoose — whoom sound, gradually fading away, with decreasing roar that soon softened to a low rattle.

"That's outgoing mail. Ours. It's headed for Germany." He touched his fingers to his lips and blew a kiss toward the sound. "Kill some Krauts," was his blessing to the artillery shell.

Then a whining roar with increasing crescendo and pitch until it became a scream. It was followed by a flash to our left, quickly followed by the crashing boom.

"That's incoming stuff. Getting closer. As it gets closer, the pitch gets higher. You can listen and tell how far it is going to land away from you. The more you hear it, the further away it is. When the stuff gets real close, the sound is very short, high pitched. Shrill and whiny."

"How do you know when it is going to hit you?" I asked.

"You don't. The one that will get you only gives a second of warning. No time to duck. If you hear it, it's just going to land close. Always hit the ground, or dive down a hole if you got one."

"B-u-u-r-r-r-l-l-l-p," in the distance. It sounded loud.

"That's a Kraut machine-gun. They are four or five times faster than ours. Those damn German engineers built some pretty good machine-guns. Hell of a lot better than ours."

"Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat." I recognized one of our .30 caliber machine-guns.

"See how much slower ours is? Of course, ours is fast enough. And our ammo lasts longer," he said. "I don't see how those Krauts can keep enough ammo bearers bringing stuff up to their machine-guns when they fire so fast."

As we drew closer we heard a "Pop-pop-pop." I knew that familiar sound. "M-1's?" I asked him.

"Yeah. That's our rifles. You can hear the power in them. We got more power in our rifles than the Germans have got."

A few seconds later, we heard the "snap-snap-snap," response. "That's Kraut rifles," Dunn observed. "They just sound different. Maybe the reason is because they're always pointed towards us. Of course, you can tell a German rifle no matter which way it's pointed. An American M-1 has its own special sound, too. You better be able to tell which is which. Or — Blam!" He drew his index finger across his throat.

The flashes of light were all around us. Every few seconds. They were followed by the booming thunder. The explosive chorus sang ahead of us.

"Pop-pop-pop."

"Snap-snap-snap."

"B-u-u-r-r-r-l-l-l-p."

"Rat-tat-tat."

From behind us we heard the rasping roar of our own artillery outward bound. By then, I could tell which way the shells were headed.

Dunn was watching, holding his rifle, and staring ahead. "That's quite a battle up there. Big shoot-out. Maybe they're kicking the shit out of some of our boys and we're being rushed in as reinforcements. That's probably why we're heading up there. Or maybe we're kicking the shit out of them. If we break a hole in their lines, our armor will go through as a spearhead. Better brace yourself. We're only about a couple of miles behind the front now. The half tracks will stop behind a hill over there. We'll have to march the rest of the way in."

That next few days I became a battle-hardened veteran. I might have spent weeks — perhaps my life learning these things for myself. Every new recruit has his personal hero whom he tries to emulate — Dunn became mine.

One battle blurred into another. Each day was an intense engagement as we fought to throw the Germans back. Dunn and I were never separated. We pulled guard together, shared the same foxhole, shared our K-rations and teamed up on every assault.

One night we crawled into the cellar of a house and huddled to hide from incoming mortars and the ever-present German artillery. It had been a long, arduous day, full of violent combat and heavy shelling. We were always marching, running, jumping, diving, hiding. Backs sore from the heavy packs that we had carried. Arms aching from toting machine-guns, ammunition, rifles and grenades all day — digging foxholes again and again. Someone was pulling guard topside. We had a few hours to rest until it was our turn to stand guard.

Dunn and I were trying to get warm in the corner. Our muscles needed to be stretched to get out the cramps and sore spots. Legs throbbed. We huddled over a small flame made by burning the wax carton of K-Rations, using it to heat our food and warm our hands. We hadn't had anything since breakfast.

"Dunn, I think you're crazy."

"Why?" he asked.

"You do things that are insane. You take too damn many chances. Sometimes I think you don't care if you are going to live or die."

He grunted, "Oh, I'll get it some day. I know that. There is a bullet out there someplace with my name written on it. When it's headed my way, nothing can stop it. In the meantime, none of those other bullets can touch me. It is just that one bullet. Waiting for me. It knows me. I'll know it. When my time comes, I'll get it. 'Til then I'm safe."

I searched my memory, "That's fatalism. We studied about it in my religious classes in high school. They sort of believe that when your time is up — it's up. Your death is foreordained. Fate has written it down. Until then, you are completely safe."

Dunn grinned at me, "Yeah, fatal-shitism. That is what I always say. Why worry about it? It's all planned out for us. We can be scared and try to hide, but some day that bullet will find us. You can't hide from it. In the meantime, you can have fun. Go out and do your job. Be the best damn soldier in the army. Nobody can touch you until fate says it's time."

From across the room, someone yelled, "Why don't you two shut your fucking mouths. Cut out the crap, so the rest of us can sleep."

Philosophical conversation is always difficult in the Army.

Dunn never showed a moment of fear. Our common sense was gone. I followed. It became our great adventure. We were warned that we would be killed if we continued our insane tactics. Dunn only laughed. I doggedly stuck with him. I savored his grunts of approval when I did something equally audacious.

Dunn was especially fearless when trying to help someone else. I saw him dash several hundred yards across a field — covered by German machine-guns and mortars — to help a buddy downed by shrapnel. Despite an intense mortar barrage, Dunn picked up the wounded man and ran back with him across his shoulders. While I applied a tourniquet to the shattered leg, Dunn ran out of the house to brave the inferno again. In about half an hour, he returned at the wheel of an ambulance. We loaded the bloody soldier into it and Dunn drove back to the aid-station. Later, he had to return across the same field. That night I helped Dunn dig a piece of mortar shrapnel from the butt of his rifle.

One day, Dunn and I were in a foxhole on the brow of a hill covering the valley below us with our machine-gun. We had a clear field of view. Nothing was happening. We were getting bored so we started talking about ourselves.

"I'll be so glad when this fucking war is over, and I can get out of the God-damn Army. It would be great to sleep all night and not have to pull guard duty," I said.

Dunn kept watching through the binoculars. He talked as he scanned the field ahead of him. "Not me, I like the Army."

"How can you like this fucking Army?"

"I found a home in the Army. I never had any decent clothes, never had any money before. I grew up in the slums of Baltimore. My dad died when I was eight years old. He was an alcoholic. He drank himself to death. That's why I won't ever touch beer. I'll let the other guys have all the wine and schnapps we find."

"Mom worked in the laundry," he continued. "She was always tired. Never had time to do much cooking, or take care of me. I never had nothing. At least, when I got in the Army, I had clean clothes. Yeah! I like Army clothes. And I had money in my pocket."

"What was it like in Baltimore?" I asked, having only known farming towns.

"Oh, the slums were terrible. When I was a little kid, the neighborhood was full of bullies and tough guys. I was always getting picked on and shoved around. In the slums, the little guys always got the shit kicked out of them. When you get big, you kick the shit out of the little guys."

"Didn't you have any close friends? Any girl friends?"

He put down the field glasses for a minute, still staring into the distance. "Naw, nobody. If you had some money, you had friends. If you had a car, you had girl friends." He continued, "Oh, there were girls. But I never had a real girl friend. The good-looking ones always went for the guys with money — or a car — or for the soldiers and sailors. The only gals we got were the leftovers.

"There was one pervert in the neighborhood. He gave us kids candy and a few dimes to let him play with us. I never dared tell Mom where I got some of the extra dimes I had."

Then he looked at me, "When I get out of this Army, I'm going back to Baltimore. I'm going to kick the shit out of that pervert. You have any perverts in your town?"

I was embarrassed. "I grew up in a small town. Everyone was Mormons. We never had any perverts. They'd been run out of town. I never knew of one."

Dunn looked at me. "Well you're lucky. Your family probably had money."

"No, my mother worked as a waitress in a restaurant. We lived off of leftovers she brought home. My folks separated when I was six. My mother had to go to work to support my sister and me. We never had any money, either, but I picked up a few dimes by delivering prescriptions for the local drugstore. I sold newspapers on the street. When I was in high school, I got a paper route to earn my own spending money and buy my clothes."

Dunn was silent for a few minutes as he thought about my story. "My mother worked every day I knew her. She had to work to support me and my drunken father. He was no help. She worked in a laundry. Only day she ever had off was Sundays. We couldn't go to a church. She cleaned house and then slept all day on Sunday. After my dad died, she took a double shift in the laundry. She said it was because she wanted me to finish high school. She pushed me hard all the time to do my school work. She was hurt bad when I said I wanted to quit school and join the Army."

He frowned. "Her dream was to buy a corner grocery store so she could make some more money and have a few days off once in a while. Maybe when I get through here, I can earn enough money to help her, pay her back for how hard she worked for me. If I get killed, she can use my insurance money to buy that store. Maybe that's why I won't mind if I get it. Then she can buy that store and have a better life. That's how I can help pay her back."

He picked up his binoculars. "Oh! Oh! Here come Krauts. Lots of them. They got tanks too. Going to be a big one. Bring up ammo boxes. Put grenades on your belt. May need them."

We never seemed to be able to finish a conversation.

Everyone knew that eventually this kind of guts would get Dunn killed. It was near a town called Lohr in Western Germany that he met the bullet with his name on it. Our armored column had gone into the mountains to bypass Lohr.

Traveling through a valley, we were ambushed. They used a *Panzer-Faust* (German bazooka) to knock out our leading halftrack and turn it into a blazing funeral pyre. Snipers opened up on us from the forest that lined the road. Rifles were ineffective against the armor of our half-tracks, but if the Germans got close enough to use more of their bazookas, we would be picked off like sitting ducks.

Word passed back asking for volunteers to root out the German snipers and clear the woods so the armored column could bypass safely. This is what armored infantry is for. Dunn was on his feet volunteering. I followed. Our detachment came out from behind the armored vehicles, worked our way into the woods and spread out in a skirmish line. Dunn and I were assigned to be the scouts. We knew what to do. Slowly and cautiously, we worked our way into the forest. We knew roughly where the rifle fire had come from. But when we approached, we found only empty foxholes. The Germans had retreated after a single volley of fire.

We turned and traveled along the hillside, parallel to the road, to search the forest ahead of the column to insure there would be no further bazooka fire. The forest floor was clean. Underbrush was harvested for firewood by the local peasants. We moved speedily through the woods. Dunn and I worked in perfect teamwork. We had done this many times. First, he advanced while I stood with rifle ready to cover him. Then he took a guarded position and covered me while I advanced. Then I leapfrogged past him for an equal distance. In this seesaw method we covered a lot of ground with as much protection as possible. The rest of our detachment could follow in relative security after we had cleared an area.

We came to an open field about a hundred yards across. A wide gully ran down the hillside with trees dotting the opposite rim. My turn to go forward. Dunn covered me from his position behind a tree at the edge of the field. I ran quickly across the field in a deep crouch to make as small a target as possible, down into

the chasm and up to the fringe of trees bordering the open field. If Germans soldiers were dug in there, I didn't stand a chance. I crawled behind a log and scanned every bush and tree in front of me. Germans were experts at camouflage. They could remain invisible until we were nearly on top of them.

I looked back as Dunn started across the field, then turned my attention to the forest to afford him every protection. Soon he was across the field and dived into a shallow depression about ten yards to my left. He yelled. "Any Krauts?"

I yelled back. "Clear as far as I can see. Guess they took off."

Dunn raised up to motion the rest of the men to follow.

I saw both things happen at once. The blast of a gun kicked up the dirt and leaves at a point twenty-five yards ahead of me, and Dunn lurched forward and fell. He just lay still. I couldn't tell how bad he had been hit. It was impossible to go to him without exposing myself to that same gun. I looked back to where the shot had come from. I couldn't be sure of the exact spot. The German position was so well camouflaged that it was impossible to see. I pointed my rifle at the approximate location and waited for something to happen.

The men behind us came charging across the field — ready for battle. They automatically spread out to form a skirmish line on either side of me. I pointed to the approximate spot from which the shot had come. We pumped a few exploratory bullets into the area. I yelled in my broken German for them to surrender or die. A pause. A few more blasts with our M-1's. Then the roar of one of our Browning automatic rifles from my right.

A high-pitched voice cried out "Kamerad! Kamerad! Nicht schiessen."

"Come on zee out! Hands hoke!" I yelled back.

"Nicht schiessen! Bitte! Nicht schiessen! Kamerad!"

"Come on zee out! You killer son-of-a-bitch."

A movement in the ground ahead of us. A rifle was lifted — pointing straight up into the air.

A long pause. Then it was thrown out on the ground in front of the foxhole.

A tousled boy in tattered uniform, a heavy knapsack on his back, slowly rose up, crouching, hands clasped over his head. His pack had been ripped by several of our bullets. I looked at him. He couldn't be over fourteen. He hunched over — crying. He was certain I would shoot him. Fourteen! Goddam fuckin' war! Of course, I was still only eighteen at the time.

I looked at Dunn's still body. I wanted to shoot this bastard German. The combat rules are clear. A sniper doesn't — shoot — kill — then surrender. No one takes snipers prisoner. Especially after they have killed a buddy.

I jumped up and ran over to the crouching figure. He covered his blond head with his arms and cowered. He looked at me with pleading eyes. I looked around. The other foxholes were empty. I shoved my rifle into his face.

I was going to pull the trigger. "Kraut bastard! Das ist meine kamerad. My buddy." I waved wildly at Dunn's body. Only sobbing answered my yells.

The rest of our combat team came running up. Sergeant Ringeisen pushed my gun up. I wanted to kill this damn murdering son-of-a-bitch but Ringeisen wanted a prisoner for questioning. Ringeisen and I glared at each other. I was being cheated out of my revenge.

I looked over at Dunn. I lay down my rifle and ran over to him and lifted his head. Blood poured over both of us. The bullet had gone in where his Adam's apple should be. It seemed to have exploded — blasted open his windpipe, ripped apart the large blood vessels in his neck. He made an effort to talk, but only red froth bubbled up. Blood poured into his open trachea. Each struggle for a breath only filled his lungs with more blood. He tried to cough, but he only spurted

bright red foam over the front of his jacket and onto my lap. He looked at me. Tried to raise his arm, but it was too much. He moved his mouth as if he wanted to speak, but only hissing, bubbling sounds came out of his ragged windpipe.

His eyes stayed glued to mine. Then he nodded his head ever so slightly and wrinkled his eyebrows. It was a signal that we had talked about many times. He was trying to give me a message for his mother. I held his head and tried to wipe away the endless flow of blood.

Through my tears, I shouted, "I'll write to your mother! I promise! She will know you died a hero! I'll keep our promise!"

I cradled his head despite the torrents of blood until his eyes glazed and his chest finally stopped heaving. The blood stopped spurting and began to congeal. My body wracked with sobs. I lowered his head, put his bayonet on his rifle and jammed the point into the ground. I capped it by putting his helmet on top — it looked like a cross. I sat beside him. How did it all happen?

Soon, the medics came up with a stretcher. We carried his body back to the ambulance at the rear of the column. I washed my hands in a nearby stream.

"Mount up! Move out!" came the order. I rushed back to our half track as the column began to roll. It was three days before I could take off my pants and wash the blood out. My field jacket was caked with blood. Eventually, I threw it away and used a clean jacket we found in Dunn's baracks bag.

I could never forget that last promise to Dunn. The letter would be written. His mother would know he died a hero and she could feel proud of her son.

I started typing. The print kept blurring. I wiped away tears and blew my nose repeatedly.

Bob Quinn

Pvt Robert D. Quinn
39934442
645 West Halliday
Pocatello, Idaho
Nov. 2, 1945

My Dear Mrs. Dunn,

I am glad that you answered my letter so promptly. I did not know your correct address and I was anxious to find you. I owe a debt to your departed son which I can only pay in this way. We always called each other by our last names. I knew him as Dunn. But he told me you always called him Richard. We made an agreement that if one of us was killed, the survivor would write and tell the mother of his friend exactly how it happened. Because of something higher than any of us, it is my sorrowful duty to send this letter to you.

Your son was the bravest man I ever knew. His bravery finally caused his death.

Dunn was killed in action near the town of Lohr in Germany. We were traveling in an armored column when we came under fire. Dunn and I volunteered to lead a combat team out into the forest to fight off the snipers. Dunn and I were the scouts. We were going through a forest. As we approached where we thought the enemy was, we had to cross an open field. After we crossed, Dunn and I were only a few yards apart when a shot was fired. It could have been for either one of us, but it hit Dunn. Why the German soldier chose to shoot Dunn instead of me, only God knows. It killed him instantly. He felt no pain. Dunn died a hero, doing his job as a good soldier. Soldiers always pray, that if we get it, it will be a clean shot and sudden. No suffering. Dunn died that way. In one piece. Not torn apart. The best way.

There was nothing we could do. I held him and cried. I thought about you and promised Dunn I would write to you. We brought his body back with us. He was sent to a military cemetery for burial with full military honors.

Dunn and I talked a lot about our lives before the war. He told me of your struggle to send him to school after his father died. Dunn was deeply devoted to you. His one ambition was to get enough money so you could quit the hard work at the laundry. Dunn talked of his plan to buy a small corner grocery store after he finished school. Then he could support himself and care for you. He described the small store that you two had dreamed of. He told me that, if anything happened to him, the life insurance would provide enough money to buy that store.

I know that no amount of money could ever replace the loss of your son, but I also know that Dunn would want you to use the money to carry out his dream of owning a store. That store would be like a tribute to his memory.

Dunn had become as close as a brother to me. No single incident so profoundly and deeply affected me as his death. We were still a long way from Berlin. There was nothing to do but go on — and on — until it was over.

I missed Dunn's dash and daring. But I probably owe my life to him for the lessons he taught me. His death made me become much more cautious. I felt I had to come back to write this letter to you.

It is a quirk of fate that "the brave die young."

To the mother of my best wartime buddy. A true hero.

With deepest sympathy,

Bob Quinn

(I couldn't tell her of his short span of terrible suffering as he drowned in his own blood. I knowingly lied about that part. I knew Dunn would have told the same kind of lie to my mother if I had died and he was writing this letter.)

ASSAULT ON THE SIEGFRIED LINE
THE FORBIDDEN WALL——MARCH 1945

On our front, the Seventh Army broke through the German lines near the Hagenau Woods in Alsace-Lorraine in February 1945, with the 14th Armored Division leading the attack toward the Siegfried Line. A few months before, I had been one of the new replacements in our machine-gun squad, but continued casualties and shortages of replacements had advanced me to be assistant to Richard Dunn, who was our machine-gunner. From weeks of continuous fighting we had become a slovenly group. Muscles ached, clothing muddy and disheveled, faces unshaven, eyes red from lack of sleep, tousled, greasy hair under our steel helmets. Catching a few hours of sleep in the back of our bouncing half-track or curling up in a blanket anywhere between battles. Perpetually short of food and water. Always cold and wet. Often stalled on open roadways with no gas for our tanks and half-tracks. Hoarding ammunition for our rifles and machine-guns. Never enough shells for artillery to give adequate cover as we launched attacks. The farther we went, the more drastic the shortages became.

We were approaching the vaunted invulnerable Siegfried Line near Wissembourg and would soon be facing the greatest battle of our lives. Every one of us had heard about this formidable line. The Germans had built a wall of hundreds of solid concrete bunkers (we called them pill boxes) which were impervious to our biggest artillery. Powerful cannons and machine-guns in the bunkers were well supplied and manned by the best of the German artillery units. They knew every inch of the ground and had prepared a welcome of devastating cross-fire to repel any attack. The shells could rip open a tank or bury a squad of men in the earth. Miles of concrete and steel dragon's teeth, gaping like a savage shark's mouth, hundreds of yards deep, would swallow any tanks trying to

penetrate. Fields were studded with buried anti-tank mines powerful enough to split a tank open like a firecracker-in-a-tin-can on the 4th of July. Smaller "shu-minen" were hidden in the grass to blow the foot off infantrymen crazy enough to attack over this field strewn with death. The Germans were defending their Vaterland and would fight to the death in a Wagnerian frenzy. Hitler had vowed no foreign soldier would ever set foot on German soil except as a prisoner.

It was a monstrous obstacle to overcome. We would soon run head-on into this formidable and impenetrable fortress since we were on the point of the Seventh Army's drive. Our half-tracks and tanks crept up the valleys as we approached the forests and mountains where these heavy fortifications stood. Orders came down to dismount and bring the gear we needed for heavy ground fighting. Truck loads of ammo and grenades suddenly appeared — an ominous sign. Our half-tracks pulled back because they would draw artillery fire and make a target of us all. Heavy machine-gun fire, artillery and mortars searched for us as we sneaked in small groups into the towns along the Lauder River which traced a line on the border to Germany. Soldiers cowered and hunched down all night as the dreaded "screaming meemies" rockets roared in — seeking us out. We hid in shattered homes or hastily dug foxholes and trenches. For days the heavy fire pinned us down. A series of skirmishes were fought. Many nameless villages were assaulted, but the Germans threw us back every time. Night patrols reached, probed, and feinted trying to find a weak point in what seemed to be an impregnable fortress. The order for an all-out attack was imminent. We had to overcome this stronghold to end the war as soon as possible. Each man hoped to live through the next few days and see the end of this war.

Finally, the order came. "Prepare for an all out infantry assault." Our division moved up into attack position and occupied Wissembourg. The Germans knew we were there. All night the barrage thundered in, trying to break our will. It was a warning of the doom awaiting anyone foolish enough to come out of his

hiding place. We dug in behind a rail line and hunkered down to survive the heavy fire, and burrowed ever deeper into the ground. Many times a mortar shell found a foxhole and we heard screams for medics through-out the night. Casualties mounted, but we endured and held despite the violent fusillade. No one slept. Before morning the orders for the attack would come. Many would not survive. Each man rechecked and cleaned his equipment, loaded belts with grenades, and put bandoliers of ammunition around his neck. Dunn and I stripped our machine gun and cleaned it meticulously. Our lives depended on our weapons working perfectly.

I reminded him, "Remember! If one of us gets it, the other will write to his mother and tell her how it happened." We had promised this many times. He knew I was scared.

"Not me. It's not my time yet. I'll know when it's time." Dunn was sure of himself.

Many men wrote last letters to home in the light of burning buildings and gave them to our headquarters unit to be mailed if they didn't come back. Ecumenical groups of soldiers of varying faiths huddled in basements and put their arms around each other to pray.

About two in the morning we were rousted out and men gathered up their equipment. Combat gear and entrenching shovels would be needed. Dunn loaded a belt of ammunition into our machine-gun and carried it at his waist. I followed with the tripod, a box of belted ammo and my rifle slung over my shoulder. I had long ago abandoned the light carbine we were issued. I picked up an M-1 rifle. It was heavier to carry, but it was more accurate and had power when needed. It also was better for mounting a bayonet when we were called to use them.

We dreaded the battle we faced but followed our orders like zombies. Our company pulled back, headed into a wood nearby, and moved in absolute darkness and silence along a narrow dirt path. Only the silhouette of the soldier in front was

each man's guide. In the darkness it was hard to find our footing and men cursed quietly as they stumbled along. After several hours we came to an open field and were quietly ordered to spread out in a skirmish line.

Now was the time. Sergeant Rangold came down the line checking us. "Fix bayonets!" he whispered huskily. "Knives and bayonets! Don't shoot! Can't let them know where we are. The first man who pulls his trigger and gives us away, I'll yank his pecker off." Rangold stopped and pushed his face into mine. "Do you understand, Kid?" I was a new recruit and untested on a frontal attack, so they watched me. I could not fail them now.

Bayonets meant it was going to be bloody, hand-to-hand, and to the death. Bayonets meant take no prisoners. I felt cold and clammy. The thought that I must kill or be killed in the next few hours made me grip my rifle hard. I struggled to recall the lessons from basic training when we trained with the bayonet. That training could mean my survival in the next few hours. Dunn strapped the machine-gun to his back until after the initial assault. A rifle and the bayonet for this attack.

Suddenly artillery shells roared in. Thundering just over our heads and shells were exploding about two hundred yards ahead of us. We threw ouselves to the ground. Sergeant Rangold came running down the line. "Up! Get up! It's ours. Everybody up!" We would be advancing in a "rolling barrage" of our own cannon fire. The cannonade landed a few hundred yards ahead of us and two hundred yards behind. Our job was to move at a measured pace. The barrage would lift up another hundred yards at predetermined times. We were to move up as they lifted the curtain of fire. That meant we must keep going, or our own artillery would walk over us. It was well planned. The exploding bombardment just ahead of us made the Germans keep their heads down. We heard that our shells had a proximity fuse that exploded close to the ground and detonated the mines buried in the fields over which we must attack.

"Move forward!" The screaming trajectory of the fusillade could not have been more than fifty feet over our heads. The ear-wrenching roar of the volley passing so close was deafening and agonizing, but it was our shield. When our path took us over a mound or small hill, we were afraid the slight rise would put us up into the path of the incoming friendly fire.

"Move again! A hundred yards!" Any minute we expected German flares to go up and silhouette us against the sky for enemy machine-guns — but the flares did not go up. "And another hundred yards!" The rolling barrage was relentless. Occasionally there was an explosion along the skirmish line as someone stepped on a shu-mine and lost a foot. These casualties were left for the medics close behind us. I was overwhelmed with awe being in the center of this exploding juggernaut — absolutely under the control of a rolling curtain of fire. "Move forward! Another hundred yards. MOVE!!!" We moved quickly.

Suddenly there was a town ahead of us silhouetted against the first light of dawn. Then the artillery stopped. There were about five hundred yards of open field with three bunkers ahead of us, but they were silent. Our artillery had made the Germans keep their heads down. They knew that no one could be out there with such heavy shelling coming in. And then there were the mine fields. The Germans felt secure.

The attack started across the open field. It was too dark to see where I was running. I couldn't look for mines so I ran as fast as I could and trusted to luck that our artillery had cleared the mines, but there were many explosions and soldiers with bloody stumps where legs had been, were dropping all around as we charged across the fields and into the edge of the town. No machine-guns found us! Then the bunkers were behind us! We stormed into the first row of houses and were upon the Germans before they knew it.

And the battle for Germany was on. We were fighting on their soil! It was house-to-house. It was man-to-man. It was to the death!

Five of us hit the first house in our sector. The top floor had been blown off and burned in the bombardment. We searched the rooms on the first floor with bayonets ready. I pulled open a cellar door and ran down the steps. It was still dark but light was beginning to filter in through a blown out window. In the dim light two figures could be seen in bed. They rose up as I came down the stairway. One reached for a rifle standing by the head of the bed. I remembered my bayonet practice. "Long thrust, Ho!" I aimed for the neck just below the chin as we had been taught. The bayonet went in. It didn't feel like the bales of straw we had used in practice. Suddenly blood was spewing everywhere and I recoiled in horror. The figure was writhing in the bed as blood spurted out of his neck and all over me. By now I could see dimly in the darkness, that the other figure, was a muscular woman in a night gown, so I pointed my bayonet at her and ordered, "Don't Move!" I couldn't remember the German phrases we had learned to use in these situations. She couldn't, or wouldn't, understand me. She came at me with her bare hands. I hesitated to use the bayonet again. "Horizontal butt stroke, Ho!" My basic training came back and the butt of my rifle smashed her face. She reeled back, and then struggled toward the rifle across the bed.

I was acting only from my combat training. She reached across the blood-drenched bed for the gun, "Short Thrust, Ho!" But the bayonet only went into her side and not a lethal spot as we had learned in basic. Her struggles, with my bayonet buried in her, nearly tore the rifle out of my hands and I was relieved when she pulled free. Still she clawed for the weapon across the bed. I had enough. Get it over! She couldn't be left behind us with a gun. Holding my rifle at hip, I pointed the muzzle and pulled the trigger. BLAM! The gun jumped and the blast filled the small room. Blood in a thin red spray blossomed out behind her and smeared the wall at the head of the bed. She twitched a few times and then stopped struggling.

I reeled back a few steps, stumbled on the stairway, sat down on it and puked all over. I fought to control my rectal sphincter. The bloody, smoking rifle lay across my lap and tears were streaming down my face. "Was this what I had trained for? Was this what they wanted me to do in war? Kill women?"

"Hey, Kid, what's going on down there? You had orders not to shoot!" Sergeant Rangold's voice. I would catch hell now. Reinforcements from upstairs poured down to see if I needed assistance. "J-E-E-S-U-U-U-S! K-A-A-R-R-I-I-S-T! What a mess! Good job, soldier!" and a pat on the shoulder from my sergeant. It was the first time he had addressed me as anything but, "Kid" or "Private Quinn." Gun fire was popping all around us, so my shot had not been the first one.

"Let's move out. Intelligence says there are over 250 more homes in this town that we have to take. Let's head out across the street."

I didn't take off the bloody bayonet until evening. I cringed when I looked at it, but other soldiers stared with awed respect. Gradually the abhorrence faded as I realized I had passed the initiation rite of a warrior. My buddies would never called me "The Kid," again.

The machine-gun proved to be a heavy handicap and was soon left behind. A rifle, a pistol, a bayonet, a belt of grenades, these were the weapons for fighting for a house, for a room, for a basement. The killing! The dying! The hate! The fear! The aggressiveness that meant winning! The wariness that meant survival! The viciousness of both sides — friend and enemy! No one took prisoners. It was impossible to guard prisoners and fight, too. There was no turning back. It was win — or die. Retreat was impossible. Our escape was cut off unless we captured the steel re-enforced concrete bunkers of the enemy behind us. We desperately needed reinforcements and ammunition. The fighting went on viciously for many hours. Anyone who moved was a target. The civilians were herded at gunpoint into the basements of the homes to protect them.

By late afternoon the outcome was still in doubt. Our arms were aching from clutching rifles and bayonets so hard, the constant alertness, the pounding heart, the fear in each house we entered — each doorway — was taking its toll. We were tiring. Our dead buddies lay beside German soldiers in the streets. Many houses, no one was sure which side was in there. Bandoliers of ammunition we had carried with us in the morning had been discarded. Belts had been full of grenades when we attacked, but only a few remained. Our casualties mounted. We had faced death and suffered as our buddies died, but the town was nearly ours. Victory was at hand, but we had become too weak to withstand the counter-attack which was bound to come. And we were alone in Germany.

The German "pill boxes" had been silenced, but enemy soldiers still held them, and they were a constant threat. Protected by our guns, Army engineers crept up to the steel doors of the bunkers. The doors were too heavy to blast open, so the engineers welded them shut. Air vents on top of the bunkers were found and buried with dirt. Then engineers shoved "bangalor torpedos" or phosphorus grenades into the openings of the concrete face of the fortresses. They went off with a dull muffled thud. One by one the bunkers were turned into sealed tombs.

With the bunkers silenced, and our troops controlling the town, the engineers were able to wrap packs of explosives around the concrete dragon's teeth. After the explosions shattered a path through the concrete, bulldozer-tanks pushed mountains of dirt over the splintered stumps of the pulled teeth. Soon our tanks roared in behind us. Reinforcements and trucks of ammunition poured in. By nightfall the town was secure except for a few straggling snipers.

Dunn and I retrieved the machine-gun and set up on-the-point at the end of the town for an expected counter-attack. We had only a few boxes of ammunition. Two ammo bearers had not made it. There had been no sleep for 48 hours. Eyes glowed red, faces were masks of dust streaked with rolling sweat, and a few tear

tracks. Mud caked our brows. Arms sagged and it was hard to hold my head up under the heavy helmet. But no one slept that night!

The Germans, stinging from the invasion of their Vaterland, mounted a vicious counter-attack about midnight. Hundreds of German soldiers charged across the fields, into the streets where we had struggled so violently just hours ago. The new battle was fought in the eerie light of our remote searchlights which were miles away but beamed to light the hazy, powder-smoke laden sky above us. Flares shot up every few minutes. Our outpost took the brunt — but we held. The machine-gun was red hot and our ammo was nearly gone before the battle ended. They retook a few houses, but in the morning we drove them out. Americans held German soil.

The next day we were sent to guard a German ammunition dump just behind the lines. We studied and learned about the German armaments. We tossed German concussion grenades into the pools in the nearby streams to blast the fish and we filled gunny-sacks with floating stunned or dead fish for the next meal. We were "attacked" by several wild deer and had to shoot them in self defense. We had fresh venison for several meals. The pause to resupply lasted only two days.

"Attack!" No more rest. The enemy was on the run and we must not let them regroup and set up defenses this side of the Rhine. In a few days we blasted our way thirty miles into Germany. Several sharp and violent battles were fought as our army reached for the Rhine River. Tanks shooting it out. Burning steel fortresses. Bodies littering fields of attack. Truckloads of ammunition being rushed to support them. Men charging across open fields. The smoke, the litter, the destruction, the dead bodies of war were everywhere. Then, "Attack again!" Our armored division pushed the enemy before it, deeper into his own soil. Each village was a series of house-to-house fighting in which skill was measured by emerging alive.

At the end of a furious tank and infantry battle we charged into a town and rushed out to the other side and found ourselves on the bank of a wide, muddy river. The main road led to a large bridge which been blown. The bridge's twisted and disjointed skeleton was partially carried downstream by the swirling water. The town we had captured was named Germersheim. We stood on the banks of the famous Rhine River and stared with frustration at the roiling muddy water separating us from the enemy. Soon artillery from the hostile side of the river fell around us and we scattered to hide in the buildings. German cannons chased us whenever we exposed ourselves.

Rapidly the German defenses collapsed west of the Rhine. We spent a few days mopping up and taking thousands of prisoners, but the river had to be crossed before we could think of going home.

A breakthrough. There was a bridge over the Rhine to the north. Our half-tracks came rumbling during the night into the side streets behind our building. Orders came to mount up and prepare to move out. It was still black night as we piled into our half-tracks and pulled out in a column. We made a fast and furious trip along the west bank of the river to Worms. The engineers had thrown a pontoon bridge across the Rhine in darkness. Long lines of troops and armor waited their chance to cross. Finally, we headed down the muddy road to the edge of the river. The pontoon bridge floated across the river, secured by long cables holding it in place while the heavy loads threaded their way toward the opposite shore.

It didn't seem possible that this fragile bridge of boats could be strong enough to hold our loaded half-tracks and ponderous tanks. Our vehicles slowly threaded down the approach and chugged slowly out onto the bobbing bridge. We held our breath, but it proved to be strong enough. As we rolled across the bridge, it sagged and bobbed from the weight of the heavy vehicles. Everyone dreaded the flares that could find us in the deep water where German artillery would have an easy shooting

spree. If we were hit — or the bridge broke — our heavy equipment would instantly drag us to the depths of the black water.

For some reason there was a momentary pause of the convoy in the middle of the bridge. Our armored column was lined up like sitting ducks in a shooting gallery if the German 88's found us. Yet, everyone got out of the vehicles — walked over the edge of the bridge — stared down into the dark water — unbuttoned our flies — and pissed into the river. It was the act we had bragged about and promised ourselves for many months.

We were glad when we felt solid ground beneath our vehicles. If we were hit, we would not founder and become one of the bodies floating down the Rhine. And then we were across the river and into the heart of Germany. It wouldn't be long now. We knew this was Easter Morning, the first of April.

31

PART OF THE GAME

Sgt. John Ward braced his back against the circular ring over the cab of the half-track on which the fifty-caliber machine gun was mounted. He fingered the twin hand grips of the heavy black machine gun and glanced into the rear of the armored personnel carrier. The men in his remaining machine gun squad crouched low with the muzzles of their rifles projecting over the steel-plated side of their vehicle. Each face covered with several weeks of a dirty, unkempt beard. Deep set hollow eyes peered warily into the trees. Their heavy grimy field jackets, fatigues unlaundered for weeks, and filthy, muddy worn combat boots. Ponderous netted helmets, with dangling chin straps, topped their head like dark-green steel turrets. Barton and Finch were behind the number one gun and had it pointed toward the forest beside the road. Finch was well over six feet tall and Barton was a wiry five feet and a few inches. They were often called "Mutt and Jeff." Zawisky and Collins had their rifles with a shell in the firing chamber, safeties off. Ready.

Behind his van, a long winding train of other half-tracks, trucks, jeeps, tanks, and scout cars snaked back forming an armored column. He could not see the end, because today their platoon was on the point. Sgt. Ward's two machine gun squads were the fourth vehicle from the front. No, he remembered, now it was the third half-track in the line. He turned and looked at the still flaming ruins of what had been the first rifle squad's vehicle fifty yards ahead of them. It lay on its back, sending a tall column of black smoke into the air. Under it, live bullets and shells were exploding and popping as the flames reached the boxes of ammunition. With the half-track on its back, the armored sides of the vehicle kept the bullets inside and muffled the explosions. It sounded like a popcorn popper.

It had been half an hour since the loud, unexpected whoomp of a German Panzerfaust, a German anti-tank bazooka, had blown a sheet of flaming gasoline all over the interior of the first rifle squad's vehicle. When it was certain that no one

was still alive in the half-track, a tank crept up to the flaming vehicle and nudged it off the road and pushed it over on its back to protect the following vehicles from the deadly fireworks of burning ammunition.

A moment later Sgt. Ringeisen came running from the headquarters half-track calling for volunteers for a combat patrol. The column was stalled until the forest beside the road was cleared of snipers and any more Panzerfausts. Three of Ward's men had jumped over the side of their track with their rifles and followed Ringeisen and a knot of volunteers as they melted into the dark forest. Tom Woods went because "Killer" Diller and Tom were from the same hometown. Ben Diller had been in the first rifle squad. Dunn went because he enjoyed the excitement of a patrol and wanted to show off for the Kid's benefit. The Kid followed Dunn like a puppy. He idolized Dunn and would dare any risk for a grunt of approval.

Ward had wanted to call the Kid back. Dunn knew how to take care of himself, but he'd be taking unnecessary chances if the Kid was around. Kid hadn't learned much about caution. Dunn was a poor example of it. Tom would be okay. He had plenty of combat experience and was careful without being too cautious. Tom consistently refused to become a number one or two gunner on either team. He knew machine guns were marked targets in combat.

They waited, listening, barely breathing. Every sound had a meaning. Suddenly a loud "crack" from the forest, like a beaver slapping it's tail against the water. It was the characteristic snap of a German rifle. Then a minute of silence. That meant some American soldier was laying dead or dying in the forest. The single shot followed by silence meant a German sniper and he had plenty of time to pick his target. These German snipers were deadly accurate. Ward shuddered. The minutes dragged on.

Suddenly the silence was split by the excited yapping of an American carbine and the banging of half a dozen M-I rifles, then the deep throated roar of an automatic rifle. Ward relaxed. The battle was over. He had been there before and knew the details as certainly as if he had been on the scene.

After twenty minutes two medics, with Red Crosses on their helmets and arm bands, came out of the forest carrying a litter with a half-covered form on it. They trudged past Ward's position and he saw it was Dunn. There was a gaping bloody hole where his Adam's Apple should be. Burke, the platoon medic on one end of the litter, looked at Ward and shook his head. The medics plodded on with their grisly burden toward the ambulance further back along the column.

Soon the patrol appeared at the wood's edge and moved in a knot toward the line of armored vehicles. The Kid shuffled along, his eyes on the ground, about ten yards behind the main group. Tom Wood walked beside him, not saying a word. Tom was tall and broad shouldered. A big farmer from the hills of Tennessee. His beard had a tinge of gray on the jowl. *Tom's a hell of a good soldier. I hope he kept the Kid from getting too close a look at Dunn.*

He noticed with surprise that there was a German soldier with his hands clasped behind his head in the knot of men approaching. No one expected them to bring in a prisoner.

The patrol split up to return to their respective vehicles. Tom hurried over and climbed over the side of the half-track. "The Kid was right next to Dunn when the Jerry shot him," he said, loud enough for the men in the track to hear, but low enough so that the dejectedly approaching figure wouldn't hear. "He tried to give Dunn some sulfa bills and a drink of water. The water just ran out of Dunn's neck. Then the Kraut surrendered and the Kid tried to shoot him, but Ringeisen wanted a prisoner for questioning." Ward winced when he heard the violent effect it had on the Kid. Something like that could make a man useless for combat for weeks.

The Kid knelt by the stream beside the road and washed as much blood as he could off his hands and tried to rinse the red stains from his field jacket. Then he turned and glared at Sgt. Ward. "That son-a-bitch, Ringeisen, wouldn't let me shoot the bastard." His voice cracked with anger. "No one takes snipers prisoner. They can't just kill somebody and then surrender." He turned and glared back along the column toward the headquarters vehicle.

Pvt. Quinn had come in as a replacement fresh from the States a few months earlier. His face was still clean and smooth, his clothing held a slight aroma of mothballs and a "barracks-bag press." The older battle-worn men called him "The Kid" and took great sport in teasing him with pranks and telling him impossible tales. Quinn learned to take the bait and in a half serious, half humorous way, upbraided them for smoking, drinking, loose swearing, and the vulgar ways they talked about women. It amused the men to goad the Kid into tirades against the things of which they had become so cynical. It became a game they played with many variations.

Now, Quinn's pale face was encrusted with dust. His field jacket and pants were still wet with congealing blood. He looked like a high school kid in an oversized field jacket and baggy fatigue pants. His head was lost under the big steel helmet he wore. His hands shook. Ward wondered how much was fear — how much was shock. *Why the hell don't they leave these babies home with their mothers? One guy like this can drive us all psycho.* The other men avoided looking at the Kid.

Sgt. Ward had a new problem to solve. Who would take over Dunn's machine gun? Usually, after a gunner was killed, the assistant gunner moved up to fill the position, but it wouldn't work this time. The Kid was inexperienced and not qualified to fill a lead combat position. He'd moved up to assistant gunner rapidly because casualties had been heavy at Oberhofen and the Siegfried Line. Many of

the older men didn't care to be a gunner and refused the assignment because, then they became a marked target in combat. Tom Wood was the logical man for the job, but he'd said "No" several times. Ward hoped he would not refuse now.

Barton and Finch had handled the second machine gun together for several months and he hated to break up a team that was working well together. Barton tired easily and Finch was a little too cautious at times, but they were dependable under fire. Dunn and the kid had been the first team because they were both young and had a lot of endurance. No assignment was too dangerous for them. They took too many damned chances, but they'd been the team which held the roadblock at Oberhofen until the rest of C Company pulled out. Losing Dunn had split the best team in the battalion. Barton and Finch would be the number one team now.

"Mount up!" The shout came rolling forward, called out by men in each vehicle in sequence. The soldiers, strung out along the column, stamped out small fires they'd built on the roadside to warm coffee, or heat a K-ration tin, and scrambled up into their vehicles. Motors roared and coughed as the column became alive with noises and action. A scout car bumped down the road toward the head of the column and moved ahead to act as reconnaissance.

The Kid climbed silently over the mine rack and sat on the gas tank near the machine gun which he and Dunn had used. His face a mask, eyes stared fixedly at the floor.

Ward moved to his accustomed place inside the circular mount of the bigger machine gun. He turned so he could watch the Kid from the corner of his eye. *He's thinking, Damn it, it's not good to think after something like that.*

The half track was crowded, but the men gave the Kid a wide berth. Seating arrangements had become traditional. Dunn and the Kid sat next to each other behind the mount of their thirty-caliber machine gun. No one was ready to move into the empty area where Dunn once sat. The Kid turned and checked the

ammunition belt from force of habit, knowing the belt would be clear. Dunn and the Kid had always kept their weapons in perfect condition. The name "Shirley" had been painted on the casing of the gun, but now it was cracked and scorched from heat and weather. Ward had forgotten who painted the name on the gun, or whom it meant, but it was on there before Dunn had taken it over. Perhaps it had been Mallory or Johnson or.... The names were almost forgotten to Ward now.

Ward had to make a decision and get his two teams organized before the next combat. He knew the Kid expected the job. Ward dreaded facing him if he assigned anyone else to the machine gun.

As if reading his thoughts, the Kid moved into position behind the gun, checked to be sure it was half-loaded, adjusted the sights, and raised the muzzle of the gun to cover the forest area.

He's only making it harder for himself.

The Kid stared into the woods, his face blank, his eyes unblinking, his teeth clamped together. The rest of the men in the vehicle were restless and felt the tension of the struggles going on. They only mumbled to each other and no one spoke to the Kid.

One damn guy like that in the squad can drive all of us psycho. I'll have to put an end to it somehow.

Ward glanced back up the column and saw Burke, the platoon medic, walking toward their half-track. He had a bag with him. Ward groaned inwardly. The game was about to begin. The same terrible farce that they had to play over and over. They all knew the rules. Ward braced himself for the lead role in their pitiful play for dignity.

Just as Burke reached their half-track the shout came cascading down the line, "Move out!" The vehicles in front of them began to roll and the long column moved again. Burke hopped up on the mine rack just as Stankiewitz, the driver,

ground the gears and gunned the motor. Burke eased himself into the half-track as it began to jolt slowly forward at the snail-like pace they maintained while going through forests.

"He was dead when we got there. Nothing we could do." Ward watched the Kid's jaw muscles tighten, but he gave no signs of hearing. "He drowned from blood flowing into his lungs." Then Burke added, "It probably was one of those soft nosed dum-dum bullets the Kraut snipers use sometimes." Ward blanched as he remembered the wound in Dunn's neck. Those bullets explode when they hit and tear everything apart inside.

"I brought Dunn's watch, and wallet and things. I didn't want the jokers who bury him to get them. I knew he'd want you fellows to take care of them." Burke handed over a wallet, a watch, a pen, a ring, and a few trinkets. The first move of the game had been made. It was Ward's turn now.

"Hell, Burke, this is your watch isn't it?" Dunn had won the watch from Burke playing poker a few weeks earlier.

"Well, I gave it to him as security for money I owed him, so I guess it was his watch."

Ward handed Burke the watch. "Nuts to that. It was just for security. We know that Dunn wouldn't hold you to the debt now. Hell yes, it's your watch."

Burke took it a little guiltily. "Well, I didn't want to say anything, but as long as you all understand." He slipped the watch on.

"Well, I guess I'd better get back to the ambulance and fix up my aide-kit." Burke dropped off the slow-moving half-track and stood waiting for the ambulance to reach him.

Ward relaxed a little. The first step had been played without a mishap. The Kid hadn't moved. He knew the game had to be played. Everyone expected their buddies to play this game. If any of them were killed, his buddies would split up

his property. His personal things would be sent to his family. Still, Ward always felt like a scavenger. The game gave a cover of dignity to the division and made the men feel better about receiving their share.

Ward counted the money in Dunn's wallet. "There's about forty dollars in German occupation marks," announced Ward resuming his role. "Did Dunn owe you fellows anything?" One by one the men named off small debts Dunn owed them. Everyone took some. Not to would make the others feel guilty. Soon there remained only ten dollars of which no one claimed a share. Ward flicked a glance at the Kid, who remained silent. He wished the Kid would take a little to ease the strain on the rest of the men.

This fool Kid is ruining everything.

Ward put the rest of the money in his pocket. He wished the others hadn't left so much, but he could use it to buy beer rations for the squad. The wallet with the pictures in it would go to Dunn's mother, but he knew the money would disappear "enroute." The ring could get through, but the mechanical pencil wouldn't, nor would any trophies. It was this situation which forced them to play the game.

"I'd like to keep Dunn's pistol until we get to the States so I can send it to his folks," broke in Zawiski.

Damn it, that's breaking the rules.

Everyone knew the pistol belonged to the Kid. Certain things belonged naturally to certain men. The Kid and Dunn had been together when they captured the Jerry officer wearing it. They had flipped a coin and Dunn had won the toss. Ward couldn't refuse Zawiski point blank without some support from the Kid. That would destroy their hard-sought veil of honor. The Kid didn't move. The men shifted about as the pistol was passed from Dunn's pack to Zawisky.

Slowly, piece by piece, the possessions and trophies — which they affectionately called "loot" — were parceled out without further incident. Finch got

the hunting rifle. Evans took the Iron Cross that Dunn had stripped from a full colonel. There was a new field jacket in Dunn's B-bag. Ward wanted the Kid to have it since his own jacket own was still caked with Dunn's blood. It would have to be cleaned and there was never any laundry this close to the front. Ward glanced at the Kid again. He sat staring off into the forest.

Damn Kid.

Ward put the field jacket on his seat so no one would touch it. It would get to the Kid in a few days. The things no one wanted were piled in a corner to be thrown out.

"I'd like Dunn's Nazi flag to take home to his folks," broke in Collins.

Ward's mouth went dry. He had forgotten about the flag. No one thought of it as just Dunn's flag. It really belonged to both Dunn and the Kid. Ward remembered seeing Dunn and the Kid crawling across the roof of a four-story building toward a flag pole for this swastika emblem. The building had been burning and they were still trying to clear snipers out of a house across the street. Dunn had set his heart on having a Nazi flag and the Kid was crazy enough to follow him. When they came down, their hands were burned and Dunn's hair was singed, but the flag was unharmed. The Company Commander had threatened to break Sgt. Ward for not keeping his men under control. Ward, in turn, gave Dunn and the Kid a violent dressing down.

"I'd better hold on to it until I get a chance to mail it to his folks myself." Hell, he was breaking the rules himself, but he wasn't going to see the Kid lose that flag. Even if he didn't want it now, he would later.

The men sank into a numbed silence to hide their charged emotions. No one was talking. It was their defense against the intense boredom of being cooped together inside the half-track. The Kid shifted position once or twice, but he kept staring at the trees slowly marching by. Ward avoided looking at his sullen crew.

After about half an hour, Tom started rifling through his bag until he found a pack of cigarettes. He silently lit his cigarette and puffed a few times. Then he passed the pack over to Ward, who took one and put it in his mouth. Tom offered one to Barton who was sitting on the cramped bench. One by one they lit up.

A pause...

Then Tom reached over and tapped the Kid on the shoulder, "Want a smoke, Kid?" This was another, more pleasant game — one in which the Kid had made the rules himself. The men delighted in playing some variation of it several times a day. It never seemed to grow old. "Come on, Kid, last time around," Tom gave him his cue again.

The Kid shifted uneasily, then began his lines slowly, mechanically, "No thanks, I don't smoke. I want to stay strong and healthy." He turned slowly. The grim mask began to relax a little. His eyes dropped and lit on Barton's slouching figure with a smoking cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth. Mechanically following the game, the Kid reached out and roused Barton with a shove of his foot. "Look at this stunted runt. This is an example of what the demon nicotine can do to you. If you want to grow up to be a big strong man like me, you'll give up smoking." He was beginning to feel the spirit.

With mock indignation Barton drew himself up to his full five feet two and three-quarters inches in the swaying half-track. He was playing the game with gusto. "Runt or not, I can still whip your ass." With that he grabbed the Kid and pulled him down into the bottom of the half-track. Barton had learned his art in the streets of Jersey City and the Kid was no match for him. As they rolled and scuffled in the well of the half-track, the rest of the squad perched on the gas tanks and egged them on. It always ended with Barton sitting on the Kids chest, puffing on a cigarette, and blowing smoke rings into his face. The Kid racked with faked fits of coughing.

Ward turned to watch the road ahead. He breathed a sigh as he listened to the steady hum of good-natured banter going on behind him again. He smiled as his men laughed and joked with each other again. His problems were over for a while.

"Hey, I almost forgot." He turned to the men again. "Quinn will need an assistant gunner." Ward was trying to get away from calling him "Kid" all the time. "Tom, how about you helping him out?" He could see the Kid's grin spreading and his eyes sparkling.

"Why sure. What ever works." Tom was laconic. "I get tired of just carrying ammo boxes all the time." Tom's eyes caught Ward's in understanding.

Ward turned around feeling personal pride in his squad. *After a week or so, Tom will have taught that Kid all there is to know about machine guns and combat. He'll teach the Kid a little caution which he never learned from Dunn. They'll make one hell of a swell team. Besides, the Kid is supposed to get his share in this damned game."*

A grin spread on his face as he heard the Kid speaking in an authoritative voice. "Okay, Tom. You're my assistant now, so you'll have to take orders from me. Understand?" Ward could tell from the suppressed laughter in the Kid's voice that a new game was starting. He was always setting himself up so the men could tease him.

Ward felt relief that his choice was working so well. He heard Tom answer, "Okay, Kid. What's your first order?" Ward had known Tom would say that. It was part of the game.

THE LIFE SAVING PACK

The Seventh Army was rolling across Germany with the Wehrmacht in full retreat. The shattered Germans could offer only sporadic resistance. After breaching the Siegfried Line and crossing the Rhine River, we drove rapidly into the rough mountains of central Germany. As infantrymen, we had no idea where we were. Our world was what we could see ahead of us and around us. Each day was a battle of it's own, each encounter full of death and hatred. The war was nearly over and survival became our paramount goal.

The furious drive had taken us miles behind the German lines and we kept attacking. Our combat group moved as rapidly as scanty gasoline supplies permitted, usually about 15 to 25 miles a day. We were always miles ahead of our supply lines. At night we would hear the supply trucks fighting to get to us through the villages we had already conquered. We hoarded our ammunition and meager gas supplies. K-Rations were our only food."

We were moving rapidly across a series of rolling hills trying to keep the German Army from regrouping to make a stand. As long as they were kept off balance, they were not an effective resistance force. Occasionally, we caught columns of German tanks and fleeing infantry. Then a short, fierce fire-fight raged. We always overwhelmed them because they had no time to dig in or form an effective line of defense. It was not always easy, because the Germans were tenacious and fought bitterly. We had learned to be alert at all times.

We were operating in small combat groups of twenty to thirty tanks and half-tracks. A half-track is a personnel carrier and infantry men ride in the back of the half-track to keep up with the fast moving Sherman tanks. A half-track is a large truck with heavy wheels in the front for steering, but it has tank treads in place of the rear wheels for traction on soft ground. A fifty caliber machine-gun was mounted over the right front seat and thirty caliber light machine-guns are mounted on each side of the half-tracks if we were moving. We took the thirty caliber machine-guns with us when we dismounted to fight on foot.

The sides of a half-track are armored with half an inch of steel for the protection of the infantry men riding in it. On the outside of the armor were racks carrying mines. Just inside the armor were the gas tanks. We sat with our feet and supplies in the center of the truck, with our backs resting against the gas tanks.

A half-track is not a fortress. The armor was some protection from small arms fire, but it not built to withstand a hit from heavy artillery. In fact, the gas tanks at our backs were a source of danger to us. If an artillery shell slammed into the side of the vehicle, it would explode the gas tank and spew flaming gasoline over the inside the truck. Anyone inside was doomed to a fiery death. Too many times we had seen an entire squad cremated.

Our combat unit was moving toward an important crossroad. Our approach to the village was a road that ran along the crest of a ridge which left us exposed. Some German artillery had set up across the valley and zeroed in on the route we must use to attack the town. Their cannons were well placed. highly accurate and surprisingly effective.

Three Sherman tanks led the advance into town. Suddenly artillery fire began roaring in. One tank was hit, but it was not damaged and continued its attack. Six half-tracks were following in a line behind the tanks. Ours was the

second vehicle. As we watched, the half-track ahead of us was rocked as a shell blasted off a front wheel. The damaged truck careened off the road, hit a telephone pole, knocked it over and it tumbled onto the road. Our track was about thirty yards behind and the falling wires fell across our truck. There was no electricity, but the wires were stringy claws raking across us.

We were under fire and had to get off the road. But the wires were dragging across the top of our rig and we were struggling to keep clear of the wires and keep our guns and equipment from being pulled off the top of the half-track. Don Finch, trying to keep his equipment clear of the wires, grabbed his pack and slung it over the armored side of our carrier so it was suspended on the outside. We never put anything on the outside of our vehicles. Everything should be stored inside or in a large rack on the rear.

Within half a minute after Finch put his pack outside the half-track, we took a direct hit. An artillery shell slammed into the pack and detonated. The blast vaporized it. Fortunately, the pack cushioned and absorbed much of the force of the explosion. The force of the explosion ripped a large gaping hole in the steel armor. The gasoline tank contained mostly air so it collapsed and did not rupture — the gas cap spun humming in the air. We knew what would have happened if the shell had hit directly on the armor — we would have been sprayed with flaming gasoline and become frenzied, struggling, dying torches.

A thirty caliber machine-gun mounted at the site of the impact, was blown up in the air about ten feet, then slammed down on the shoulder of Louis Barton, one of our squad members. His shoulder snapped and we lost him for the rest of the war.

Don Finch was sitting nearest the blast. His helmet was torn off, his eye brows and hair were singed and he received minor burns on his face, but no serious injuries. His rifle had been pointed over the side and the explosion

ripped it out of his hands. The rifle landed inside the half-track and he recovered it. He carried the rifle during the battle in the village.

That evening, when Finch was cleaning his rifle, he found that his gun was bent near the tip. He showed us a curve of about fifteen degrees in the end of the barrel. If he had pulled the trigger, the bullet would have jammed when it tried to exit the barrel. This would have made the breech explode and torn his face apart.

The blast tore the mine rack off the side, but the mines did not explode. The track was ripped off the drive-wheels. Stankiewitz was driving and he fought for control. We lurched forward about fifty yards, to get out of the line of fire, and pulled off the road. Everyone piled out gathering their weapons for the expected sharp fight ahead of us. We spread out and crouched down beside the roadway until the tanks were ready for a coordinated assault on the town.

About ten tanks came roaring up behind us. They swung into a skirmish line along the ridge to give counter-battery fire at the German artillery. It took only a few minutes to eliminate the German threat. As soon as the enemy artillery fire was suppressed, the tanks lined up on the field and faced the town. Small arms fire from the edge of the town began snapping at us. Our infantry gathered behind the line of tanks and we launched an attack on the village as a team of tanks and infantry. The fight was sharp and vicious. By now we were experts at house to house fighting and the battle lasted only about thirty minutes. We suffered a few wounded, but no more GI's were killed. The Germans took some heavy casualties before they began surrendering. We later learned there was a school for military cadets there.

We rounded up our prisoners and found they were all young teenagers in tattered uniforms. (Listen to who's talking. I was still only eighteen years old at the time.) We herded them into the church to guard them until we could figure out what to do with them.

In a short time, German women came streaming out of their houses and gathered around the church where we were holding our prisoners. The women began crying and beseeching us not to harm the prisoners. Our captives were sons and brothers. We reassured them that the prisoners were safe. At this stage of the war it made no sense to do unnecessary killing. We were moving so rapidly, we usually disarmed the soldiers and turned them loose. We couldn't do anything else. The country behind us was full of German soldiers wandering around without weapons. Most of them had given up the war and were trying to get home as best they could.

After the town was secure, we walked back to our half-track to retrieve our equipment. The crippled vehicle sprawled at a crazy angle beside the road, wounded and abandoned. We could see the gaping tear in the armor where it was hit. We marveled that the gas tanks survived the impact. Finch's pack had evaporated and only a few rags and straps could be found. No one mourned the pack. It had stood between us and a fiery death.

Near the shattered track stood a sign in Gothic script naming the village. The name was branded in my memory forever. LANGENLIETERN. I can still see that sign.

We knew the artillery shell that hit us could not have been the dreaded 88mm. Even the pack would not have saved us from an 88. It had probably been a lower caliber cannon.

We retrieved our packs, duffel bags, weapons, and souvenirs. We would double up with another squad until we received a replacement vehicle. We affectionately patted our mortally wounded half-track. We would never see this dear old friend again. Soldiers develop an affection for their vehicles, much as old cavalry men became attached to their horses.

LIFE SAVING PACK

Bob Quinn

We went back to look at the half-track that had been two places in the line behind us. It had also taken a direct hit, but they had no pack to help absorb the blast. Their gas tank had exploded in a fiery shower of blazing gasoline. No one got out. The vehicle was black and smoking and full of dead and still smoldering bodies. These had been our comrades a few hours ago. The medics were busy in the village tending to the wounded. The dead would have to wait. We sickly realized how lucky we were to have escaped this fate.

In my whole life, I have never had such a lucky escape from death.

STRANDED IN AN ENEMY TOWN

The war was nearly over. It was the middle of April 1945 and the German Army was in full retreat. The Fourteenth Armored Division, as part of the Seventh Army, had breached the Siegfried Line, fought across Germany and crossed the Rhine River. We fought through Frankfurt and Aschaffenburg and then turned north. We battled across the mountains near Fulda and then swung south toward Nürnberg following the Autobahn. For a country boy from Idaho, the Autobahn was an impressive display of German engineering.

The war was nearly over and the sporadic fighting was less and less. The character of the war was changing. We rolled down the autobahn with occasional sharp encounters with SS Troops who were fighting a rear guard action. The German strategy at this time was to delay our advance until they could build an impregnable fortress in the Bavarian Alps. They believed that, if they could hold out long enough, when the allied forces from England, France and the United States met the Russians coming from the east, they would start fighting over the spoils of war and forget about the Germans.

As the army rolled south along the Autobahn toward Nürnberg, we fanned out to occupy strategic communication and transportation centers along our flanks. We were assigned to a small detachment to investigate and secure a small village in the mountains to the east of the Autobahn. Our task force of two tanks, three half-tracks and a reconnaissance car to check out the small town and occupy it if there was no trouble.

Our armored salient headed down the narrow paved road which wound from the autobahn toward the village. As we approached the vicinity of the village we became cautious. Sergeant Ranghold had our squad dismount and we moved in assault formation up the side of a hill to reconnoiter. Our task force waited behind us in the forest. We emerged at the top of a ridge looking down on the town. There was no visible activity.

Then, as we watched the town through our field glasses, a strange series of events happened, which 50 years later I still do not understand. We saw three American 3/4 ton trucks coming out of the village driving west toward the Autobahn. The road would bring them near our location. The three trucks had drivers in American uniforms but they were filled with German soldiers who had their weapons with them. They were American trucks with American drivers so we could not call for artillery or tank fire until we verified if they were friend or foe. Since the trucks were filled with armed German soldiers, we had to be cautious. The trucks continued slowly towards where we were hidden. We had to identify them and learn their intentions. Sergeant Ranghold beckoned me to follow him and we ran down through the trees and positioned ourselves in the open beside the road.

The drivers of the three trucks saw us and stopped about 200 yards away. We could see the German soldiers in the back of the trucks pointing their weapons toward us. Everyone was waiting to see what the other side was going to do. A fight was about to begin and we were sitting ducks. We were about to run for cover, when suddenly, our reconnaissance car appeared out of the forest behind us. We knew our tanks were behind him. It was decision time.

When the trucks saw the reconnaissance car, they began backing to turn around in the middle of the road. The recon car pulled up beside us and was radioing for the tanks to fire on the trucks. I ran up to the recon vehicle yelling that these were American trucks driven by men in American uniforms and we should not fire on them until we knew for sure who they were. By now the trucks had turned around and were speeding back into the town. The officer in the recon car decided to chase them to identify them to see if they were friend of foe. He yelled at me to crawl up on the back of the car.

STRANDED IN AN ENEMY TOWN

Bob Quinn

There was no room for me inside. The recon car was smooth on top but there was a flat surface over the engine and a number of handholds. The driver battened down his hatches and began chasing the trucks with me hanging on. I fought to hold on to my rifle and helmet and still maintain my precarious grip on the back of the swaying car. The road was rough and I hung on for dear life.

The fleeing trucks sped through the village with us in hot pursuit. The streets were narrow and winding and I was having more and more trouble clinging on. We roared through the village and were soon out the other side. The trucks were now only 300 yards ahead of us, and raising clouds of dust.

As we burst out the other side of the village, there was a cemetery beside the road. Behind the wall of the cemetery was the muzzle of a German 88mm. This cannon had killed many of our buddies, shattered countless tanks, and struck fear into every American soldier. The driver screeched to a halt and made a 180 degree turn. Reconnaissance cars were not equipped to deal with a German 88. Their job was to reconnoiter — not fight. The driver's duty was to get back and give his report. Combat units would do the fighting.

In his haste, the driver must have forgotten I was on the back of the car. He tore through the town. Sharp turns caused the vehicle to skid and sway. I was clawing at the hand holds, but soon lost my grip, tumbled off, and rolled into a pile in the middle of the square. My field jacket and winter clothes acted as padding as I bounced over the cobblestones. Fighting instinct made me cling to my rifle. My helmet went clattering across the cobblestones rolling and bouncing and clanging until it hit the side of a building. The fleeing car disappeared in a plume of dust. I was alone in the center of the town square.

STRANDED IN AN ENEMY TOWN

Bob Quinn

Combat experience had taught me that survival depends on fast reaction. I jumped up, went into a crouch and zigzagged toward a small alleyway beside a building, ready to fight. My buddies would come and get me out of this if I could hold out. Across the square were two large hotels with red crosses painted on the side. The windows were full of German soldiers in uniform — watching me. However, they were not pointing weapons. As I peered around the corner of the building at them, I could see that most of them were covered with bandages and many had splints on their arms. The hotels were apparently being used as temporary hospitals for the wounded. I watched them. They watched me. No one was shooting.

Minutes ticked by. The tension grew as I waited. A rotund man wearing a white apron emerged from a large house beside the square. He ran toward me waving a white flag yelling, "Nicht schiessen, Nicht schiessen! Kamerad! Nicht schiessen!" They were surrendering the town to me. They wanted it to be an open city because of the wounded soldiers in the makeshift hospital and I was the first American soldier they had seen.

I cautiously came out of the alleyway and approached the man waving the white flag. His apron meant he was probably the local baker. My rifle was pointed at his stout belly. He sputtered over and over that he was the Burgermeister. I understood only a few of the words, but I had seen this process many times since we arrived in Germany.

I waved toward the German soldiers and the hospitals and asked if they had any rifles. The Burgermeister answered with a vigorous, "Nein!" He waved for me to follow him and led me to his house which I recognized was also a bakery. I followed him cautiously into the house with my gun at his back. His front room was full of stacks of rifles. More were in his bedroom. He insisted

the soldiers were unarmed and these were all of their guns. I was cautious. I was still in a naked vulnerable position.

We were all souvenir hunting by this time, since the war was nearly over. I asked, "Haben Sie Pistole?" He looked at me and answered, "Ja, Ja." Then he reached under his bed and pulled out a large wicker basket. It was full of pistols — a combat infantry man's dream come true. There must have been twenty or thirty pistols in the basket. This booty became more important than the rest of the village. It was so heavy I could hardly lift it. I started lugging it out into the square. I would fight for these pistols.

The reconnaissance car had roared back to our unit. Sergeant Ranghold could see the outside of the car was empty and they realized that I had been left behind. Immediately everyone mobilized. In a combat unit, loyalty to your fellow soldier is an overwhelming obligation. The word spread throughout the unit that "Quinn's still in the town. We got to go in and get Quinn."

The two tanks led and three half-tracks trailed as they roared down the road into the town. All guns had shells in their chamber and safeties off. They stormed into the town square and the tanks and half-tracks deployed to confront the German soldiers in the hotels. Everyone was wary and expecting a battle. It was tense. Fingers were on triggers. Narrowed eyes peered down ready gunbarrels. Who would fire the first shot?

At that moment, I came out of the doorway carrying my basket of loot, helmetless, rifle slung over my shoulder, oblivious of danger. All eyes turned toward me. Immediately the war was forgotten, the hunger for souvenirs became the dominant call for action. Tankers came piling out. Half-tracks emptied immediately as the infantry men charged toward me and my hoard of pistols.

STRANDED IN AN ENEMY TOWN Bob Quinn

The watching Germans must have thought American soldiers were crazy. Soldiers abandoned tanks and half-tracks to chase me down the small lane. About thirty armed soldiers pursued me as I fled with my treasure. They surrounded me. I climbed on top of a dung pile arguing plaintively that these were MY pistols. But I had to share.

The rules about trophies had been pretty well established. We shared all loot. The first man got his choice, then everyone divided up the rest. I dug into the basket of pistols to see which one looked the most interesting. Near the bottom, was a Luger pistol in a beautiful case appearing to be in excellent condition. I pulled it out, clutched it to my chest, put it inside my field jacket and then handed over the basket to my rescuers who promptly began grabbing up the pistols that were left.

It was a crazy war. I walked out of the alleyway into the town square. Sergeant Ranghold spotted me and began yelling and berating me in typical "Sergeant yelling at a stupid recruit language." He told me it was crazy to have crawled up on the recon car. He told me how stupid I was and how lucky I was to be alive. He told me repeatedly that I would never survive the war because of all the crazy things I did. It was a routine that Sergeant Ranghold and I had repeated many times. It didn't bother me. I could feel the pistol inside of my field jacket clutched to my chest. At that moment, this was one of the most valuable things I owned and was worth the risk I had taken.

Finally Sergeant Ranghold got tired of yelling at me and he told me to go find my helmet. It took me a few minutes of searching to find my battered helmet. It was bent and scratched from clattering across the cobblestones. Again Sergeant Ranghold castigated me for the condition of my helmet and for not taking better care of my equipment. I knew better than to answer or talk back.

We never found the 88 seen in the cemetery. It had disappeared — or maybe we had only seen a broken tree stump. We never learned who rode in those trucks or who controlled them. I still wonder about it to this day.

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Twenty five years later I visited Germany with two of my children. I took them down the Autobahn below Fulda and found the still remembered roadway stretching out to the east. Many changes had happened. A new highway had been built to the town, but the old road was still there to follow. Nearby, a camp of American soldiers and an armored division with hundreds of tanks guard the Fulda Gap. The town had more than doubled in size, but the town square was the same. Where there had been two German hospitals, there was now a very beautifully decorated Gasthaus and a hotel. It was then that I first learned the name of the town. And the Luger pistol is still one of my prized souvenirs to remind me of the time I was stranded in an enemy town.

$359

Just after the shooting had stopped in Germany, I had $359 stolen from me by one of my wartime buddies. I'll change his name — but everything else is exact.

Ross Collins and I came in as replacements for the heavy combat losses suffered by the 14th Armored Division and were assigned to the machine-gun squad. Ross was from Montgomery, Alabama and was outspoken about racial prejudices typical of the south at that time. He bragged about his membership in the Ku Klux Klan. He hated Negroes and made fun of them and bragged about the whippings and beatings when he worked for the Highway Patrol in Alabama. His job had kept him out of the draft for several years, but eventually he was called up and became one of the replacements. Everyone had a nickname in our squad. At first, they started calling him "Rossie," then it became "Rosie."

The attrition rate for machine-gunners in combat was rapid. Within six weeks, everyone over me was killed or wounded and I was gradually "promoted" to the number one position. I was only eighteen and Rosie was about seven or eight years older, but the sergeant assigned me to the number one position without explaining his reasons.

Rosie was difficult to work with. He drank heavily and complained about everything. Many times I found myself alone in a fox hole or in an outpost where the job called for two men. Rosie explained that he must have gotten lost or perhaps he misunderstood directions. A machine-gun squad was a very close knit group of five people. We ate together. Slept together. Were with each other night and day. We made adjustments for each others personality problems just to get along. It was one of the necessities of war.

$359

Bob Quinn

I had gradually accumulated a wallet stuffed with money. I always seemed to be in places where souvenirs were found. Over a period of four or five months I had collected nineteen pistols which were highly prized as souvenirs. Since I could only carry a few of them, I sold the extras to tankers who were especially hungry souvenir buyers. I did not smoke or drink and everyone wanted to buy my beer and cigarette rations.

Every soldier had a deck of cards in his knapsack and continuous poker games went on night after night when we were out of the battle lines. I had grown up with pinochle, bridge, hearts and a dozen different card games in my home and I had acquired a natural card sense. If I played, I usually won. This added to the growing contents of my wallet.

Our currency wasn't in dollars. When we arrived in France, all of our American dollars were taken from us and we were issued Occupation French Francs, and then Occupation Deutschemarks to use as money. But I hid two American five dollar bills in the bottom of my wallet. This was a souvenir of "back home" and rarely showed them to anyone. My Occupation Deutschemarks gradually increased until I had the equivalent of $359.00.

I made no secret of my money. Men we trusted with our lives, we should trust in all other matters. After the war ended, however, things began to change. We weren't close as we had been during combat. There was not the hard discipline and sharing interdependence for everything that we had in battle. We wandered around the country, formed friends in other units and some of the tight bonds were gradually relaxed.

We were stationed on the Inn River in Kraiburg near Munich. One morning I found my wallet was missing. I had laid it on the chair when I went to bed the night before. I searched the room, the bed, my backpack but the wallet and money

couldn't be found. Since I had always been careless with my money, everyone was certain I had left it some place and it would turn up. No one had brought German girlfriends into the house. Word spread about the missing money and everyone began to notice things and pay attention to each others affluence.

Three days after the money disappeared, a friend came to tell me that Rosie had shown up in a nearby village and had lost over $300.00. Everyone noticed this because he had lost all of his money a few days before and was broke. They felt that I should be aware of the fact that Rosie had suddenly acquired a lot of money and lost it in one evening.

I had reported my loss to my commanding officer, so I went to him with the information and brought the witness who had seen Rosie losing heavily in the poker game. Rosie was called in to the office to explain his sudden riches. He claimed he had won the money in an earlier gambling session, although he couldn't remember where the game had been. The captain felt we needed more proof.

Rosie had mailed a letter home the day after I found my money was gone. In a combat unit, all letters were censored by an officer. The captain pulled the letter out and insisted that Rosie open it in our presence. Rosie was reluctant, but he had no choice. When he opened the letter, there were two five dollar bills which I immediately recognized as the ones I had been carrying in my wallet. Rosie had written a letter to his wife explaining that he had won the ten dollars in a poker game so he was mailing them home to her.

He had no explanation for the possession of the two five dollar bills. The captain asked if my name was written on the money or if I knew the serial numbers and of course I did not. But everyone in the room knew who had taken my $359.

$359

Bob Quinn

The war had just ended. None of the officers wanted further problems and the captain was reluctant to press charges. The captain asked for legal advice from battalion headquarters and the recommendation was not to prosecute. Rosie was transferred out of our division with orders never to come back to Kraiburg.

I never saw Rosie again. There was no way I was ever going to recover my money and I had to kiss it goodbye. I was still only 18 years old at this time. This was the most money I had ever owned and I had dreamed of putting my money away for a college education.

I continued my dream of going to school. Because of the GI Bill I was able to go on to Stanford University and then to graduate school at Cornell. Eventually I settled in Hollister, California. I tried to forget the $359 but, at times, I had the urge to go to Montgomery to confront Ross Collins, but I realized my anger might get me into more trouble than I could handle.

Twenty five years later!!

One day in 1970 I received a letter from Montgomery, Alabama.

Dear Bob Quinn:

I don't know if you are the person I am looking for or not. I contacted the 14th Armored Division because I wanted to find you. The only thing I could remember was that I had a wartime buddy in the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion, C Company in a machine-gun squad with me. His last name was Quinn and he was from Salt Lake City. Yours was the only name they could come up with.

I am now doing the Lord's work. I am a Born Again Christian and want to repay all of my old debts. I remembered that I borrowed some money from you when we were in Germany but I can't recall how much it was. Please give me information about yourself so that I can be certain you are the person I borrowed the money from.

If you can tell me what the exact amount was, I will try to repay you. Please write to me at this address.

In the Lord's Name

Ross Collins

P. S. Everyone calls me R. C.

I responded:

Dear Ross Collins: (We used to call you Rosie).

Yes, I remember you very well. You borrowed some money when we were in Kraiburg, Germany about the 25th of May in 1945. You and I were in the same machine-gun squad. Our platoon sergeant was named Ranghold and our squad sergeant was named Ward. Our half-track driver was named Stankiewitz. Soon after we started our offensive in France toward Germany I was made the number one gunner and you assisted me. We fought together to crack the Siegfried Line at Schaidt, Germany. There you used a pound of coffee to buy a bottle of cognac from an old lady. You set it on top of the stove and when our house was hit by a mortar shell, the bottle was knocked off and broke. You became furious at the time and made the lady give you back the pound of coffee. I can remind you of a thousand things we did. Do you remember me now?

The amount that you borrowed was $359.00.

I was surprised to hear from you again. It is wonderful that you want to do the Lord's work. I am very happy that you remembered me and want to repay the debt.

Sincerely yours,

Bob Quinn

Two weeks later I received a Special Delivery Letter

Dear Bob Quinn:

Yes, you convinced me that you are the man that I borrowed the money from. Enclosed is a money order for $359.00.

I am going to make a special request. Please do not write and thank me for the money. I would appreciate it if you did not contact me again. My wife does not know that I am paying my old debts and I don't want her to find out.

If you write to me, she may see the letter. I am using a money order instead of a check because I want this to be the end of our communication.

May the Lord be with you and protect you,

R. C.

I was very surprised to see the letter. I wanted to frame the money order and hang it on the wall, but that would not get my money back. I took it to the bank to see if it was good. I suddenly felt a raw spot in my gut had healed when I held the cash in my hand.

I was not concerned about the change of value of the dollar or interest that might have accrued over the years. I was glad just to have my money back. I could finally forget the $359.

$359

Bob Quinn

In 1978 I received another communication from Montgomery, Alabama.

Dear Mr. Quinn:

R. C. is no longer with us. He had a heart attack and died about two months ago. I was going through some of his papers and found that you had been a war time buddy of his and that you and he kept in touch after the war was over. He must have liked you very much. Your name was among a list of his very dearest friends so I wanted to write and let you know about his death.

He was truly a very Christian man with a strong faith and belief in God. I am sure he has been chosen to serve God in the next world.

Since you are one of his close wartime buddies I know that you would want to know what happened to him.

May the Lord bless and protect you,

Mrs. Ross Collins

EPILOGUE

The horrors of killing and all the suffering of war had a profound effect on my life. It could not easily be forgotten. I came to believe that if people knew each other as fellow human beings, it would decrease the risk of future wars. I started working with the American Field Service and brought young foreign high school students from around the world into my home. Eventually, I hosted a total of twelve foreign students who lived in my home — from six months — to three years.

The first student was from Germany — my erstwhile enemy. Her name was Ingrid Herzog and her father had been in the Wehrmacht and fought against our troops — and been captured — in the battles west of the Rhine near Germersheim, perhaps by units of my division. Ingrid lived in our home for three years and became part of my family. She is now a flight attendant for Lufthansa and lives near Frankfurt. We see each other at least once a year.

My second student was Italian, Mauro Ferrari. His father was a general in the Italian Army, which was also our enemy during the war. Mauro is now a Professor of Engineering at the University of California at Berkeley and I am godfather of one of his daughters.

One student was from Guangzhou, China, whose soldiers fought the United States in Korea. His name is Jun Chang and he now sells real estate in California.

My last student, in 1989-90, was Udo Badelt from Nürnberg, Germany. We made a trip to Germany in 1990 to visit him and his parents. Here are two excerpts from a story I wrote about the trip.

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EPILOGUE

Bob Quinn

.....We went to visit Udo's grandfather, who had suffered several strokes and was crippled. Udo lived with his grandparents to help care for his grandfather when he was not in school. Grandfather Badelt had been a great musician and still loved to play the zither. Though he was practically blind, he could play any tune we requested and was delighted to have an audience to entertain. We sang English and German words to many songs.

I asked him to play "Lili Marlene." It had been a very popular song among the German soldiers in World War II. The American soldiers adopted it and it became one of the most remembered songs from the war. Grandfather father played the music while I sang "Lili Marlene" in German. We were all surprised that I could still remember it in German. It had been forty five years, but I had not forgotten a single word.

...Udo's parents, Martin and Angie, wanted to take me to Munich to show us the beautiful and historic sights. We packed and started early in the morning and drove south along the Autobahn until we reached the legendary city. Martin drove to famous Hofbräuhaus, where, a month before, they had been serving thousands of steins of Bier, singing famous drinking songs, and celebrating Oktoberfest. We had missed the Oktoberfest, but the excitement was still there. We had a glass of German Bier. Then Martin drove us to Löwenbräukeller, a restaurant specializing in Weisswurst where we had a delicious lunch.

Martin parked the car and led us through winding, crowded streets to see the famous Marienplatz. He wanted us to see the famous cathedral. As we walked into the square I had a feeling of *deja vu*. Everything was so familiar. Suddenly, I was back in 1945 and reliving one of my most memorable experiences.

EPILOGUE

Bob Quinn

When the war ended, I was an eighteen-year old country boy who had spent nearly six months in combat, earned the Combat Infantry Badge and two battle stars. We were given passes for the first time since coming to Europe. I wanted to see the big city. I caught a ride to Munich and wandered around the ruined city. Munich had been bombed heavily during the war. Many streets were blocked by rubble from the bombing and I had to pick my way carefully. Buildings that had been many stories high were burned-out skeletons with the sky showing through. Their guts littered the streets. By standing on top of a truck, one could look across many city blocks. I was roaming and not paying attention and became lost. I found myself in a part of the city filled with towering empty girders of buildings that must have been magnificent before the bombing. One massive framework of twisted steel steeples and columns was a cathedral — smashed and burned out. My stomach twisted in revulsion. I retreated down a side street.

Fate was playing with me. Martin had unwittingly brought me to this same long forgotten place. My mind jumped back to forty-five years ago. Almost in a trance, I turned and retraced the same steps of many years ago. Udo, Martin and Angie followed me without asking. As I turned a corner, a towering gothic church, with resplendent circled windows of flamboyant colored glass, filled the sky before me. Organ music issued from the open door through which we saw a service in progress. Still entranced, I walked through the door and stood, engulfed in the beauty. But my mind was looking at scenes formed years before.

One of my most vivid memories of the war was standing in this church, the towering vaulted, Gothic ceiling, caved in by a bomb. Rubble, piled in the center of the church, covered the pews and altar. I had clambered to the top of the debris to survey the ruins. The bombs had wrought horrible destruction — torn the walls bare. Fire had consumed everything that could burn.

EPILOGUE

Bob Quinn

Tears rolled down my cheeks. My companions stood silently — not asking. I stared around, studying every detail, comparing it with my memories. The church was completely restored — no trace of damage — no scars. Large graphic windows glowed in rainbow hues, where before had been empty gaping holes. Walls were bright, covered with pictures and statuettes, where I had seen only barren stone and blackened plaster. An ornate altar, large crosses filled with impaled Jesuses, looked down from brilliant works of art. Light radiated from the arched windows, topping soaring columns of smooth marble. Multifaceted chandeliers, glowing giant diamonds of light, illuminated the areas under the balconies. Before, there had been only naked sky and black shadows.

My eyes gradually adapted from the brightness outside to the dimness in the church. I was attracted to a softly lighted bulletin board near the entry way. It was full of old photographs, pictures taken after the war, reminders of the brutality of bombing. The pictures confirmed my remembrance perfectly. I pointed to the pictures, one by one, and tried to tell my companions of my recollections. Sickening memories were exhumed. I cannot remember when I have been so moved or memories of the war brought back so vividly.

After we left the church, Martin led us to other sights of interest, but I was lost in reverie. It was nearly an hour before I could talk freely about my feelings, my troubled thoughts, aroused by our visit to St. Peterskirche. Angie referred to my reaction with the German word — "*Vergangenheitsbewältigung.*" She said it meant "facing the past and working it out." She added, "It has been a very familiar expression among the Germans for the past forty-five years."