

out three spearheads. While the 10th SS Panzers slammed into the 242nd Regiment of Task Force Linden in the 36th Division zone, and the 7th Parachute and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions led the latest assault upon the 79th Division--also hitting hard at another fragment of the Rainbow Division, the 222nd Infantry--an additional, particularly formidable adversary, the 6th SS Mountain Division, tested the new division commander of the 103rd, Anthony McAuliffe of Bastogne. If the enemy was tired out by his pursuit across the ice, everyone in the beleaguered VI Corps was also on the knife edge of exhaustion, and for two days the battle of the Moder River was perilously touch and go.

But a counterattack by the 410th Infantry of McAuliffe's division on the morning of January 25 cut the road between a German Schwerpunkt and its supporting forces. Late on January 25, the enemy relented. During the next few days, evidence mounted that he was withdrawing to other fronts many of his best formations--the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division, the 7th Parachute Division, the 21st Panzer Division. VI Corps could now begin to catch its breath, while Devers laid plans to reinforce de Lattre with a strong American corps, the new XXI under Major General Frank Milburn, to pull the Colmar thorn at last from his and Eisenhower's side. -- "Eisenhower's Lieutenants"]

Having trained initially as a member of the 12th Armored Division, I had more than a passing interest in the history of the "Hellcats" in battle. The Twelfth had landed in France, at Le Havre, November 11, 1944, and assembled at Luneville on the 2nd of December. Elements of the division first saw combat near Bitche on the 7th of December. But while the 12th was to see action as far south as Colmar (February 3), as far north as Worms (March 18), and cross the Rhine (March 28, at Gernersheim) two days before we did (farther to the north at Worms) the action that most intrigued me occurred in mid-January at Herrlisheim, just north of Gernersheim.

From the History of the 12th Armored Division: "It was in Herrlisheim on January 17 that a major portion of the 43rd Tank Battalion became 'missing in action.' The 43rd, which had lost 12 tanks in the attack on Offendorf the previous day, followed the 17th Armored Infantry Battalion into Herrlisheim. The last contact anyone had with the tank force came at noon on January 17... Fourteen tanks had been knocked out and 15 were listed as missing... The 43rd was [subsequently] reorganized under a new commanding officer."

I don't know what the true story is, but I had heard rumors that when the 12th first came into the line not far from us, one of its tank battalions had fouled up and sustained some horrific losses. The story that I had heard at the time was that most of the crews were out of their tanks and in some building enjoying a hot meal when a German panzer force ripped through town and knocked out nearly all of those lightly defended Shermans. Was this what occurred at Herrlisheim? Or was this something that had happened earlier? Or not at all?

INTERMISSION

Lt. Hamilton was among those who never returned to the company. D Troop's Lt. George Bennett came to us as a replacement. Additional replacements, who were none too happy with the reassignment, came mostly from Headquarters Company. We ran patrols, outposted, and performed much-needed maintenance. We also made a trip back to Ordnance, at Saverne, to have racks and sandbags put on our tanks.

[There are no letters after the one written January 10 from Bouxwiller until the following, on January 26, from Wolsheim. It's likely, though, that there was a letter that preceded the one written on the 26th, for the Company was in Wolsheim, our "paradise" in Alsace, as early as January 21.]

January 26, 1945 (Friday)... [Wolsheim]... Alsace--with the 7th Army... Your January 7 and 9 V-Mail letters came yesterday, also your November 27 package of hard candy and a Christmas package from the Guild Unit at TIME, Inc.

There is not much news, or rather, news that I can tell you about. You'll just have to read the papers, and then wait until I get home to tell you what the papers didn't.

It is really wintry here now, cold and with about a foot of snow on the ground. We are living inside, though, and are not too much at the mercy of the elements.

Friday afternoon... Three more of your V-Mail letters arrived this afternoon--January 5, 12, 14. Mail arrives in bunches and in chronological confusion. I just hope that all of those packages don't come at the same time!***

January 29, 1945 (Monday)... Your January 16 V-Mail came today. Yesterday, the company received quite a batch of mail that had been posted in early November. As for why it should have taken so long to get here, your guess is as good as mine!

You are having your snow and we are having ours. I can't say that we appreciate it, though. This is neither the time nor place for winter sports. Today is quite clear, though, and our Air Force has filled the skies with a sight that is far more welcome than snow!

They are starting to give out passes to Paris, a very few. Here's hoping I get one someday!

Glad to hear that Ken is still in the States.***

One morning I was told to report to the Company CP. Capt. Zielinski opened the door and said, "Come in, Coffee, forget the rank, this is informal." He then introduced me to Capt. Nana, Squadron Intelligence Officer; to a Counter-Intelligence Corps Major; and to a CIC agent dressed in civvies. Capt. Zielinski had submitted my name as a prospect for the 514th CIC Detachment and I had been well enough thought of that this group came around for an impromptu meeting.

Among other qualifications, I had the second highest AGCT

(Army General Classification Test) score in the Squadron, a demonstrated facility with foreign languages, and had recently survived, under extreme physical conditions, where others had not. They were disappointed, however, to learn that I wasn't nearly as fluent in German as I was in French. They were primarily interested in recruiting personnel who could work, if required, independently in the field. They then asked if I would consider working in a headquarters unit, which meant desk work. But I felt that my place was with the men with whom I had trained and fought.

I believe the Captain was looking for a way to reward me. With our recent losses, he had had to fill some tank-commander positions, but for these he drew mostly from personnel who had been with the company from the outset (which was sixteen months longer than I had). He was aware that advancement to sergeant wouldn't mean anything to me financially, since TIME was paying me a percentage of my salary as a military absentee and this would be reduced with any advancement in grade. However, he did call me in again and asked if I would like a commission. They weren't handing out battlefield commissions to PFCs, so this probably meant assignment to the Infantry OCS near Paris. Having no desire to serve with unfamiliar troops as an all-too-expendable infantry platoon leader, I turned him down.

January 31, 1945 (Wednesday)... Your January 18 V-Mail and December 19 package arrived yesterday. The fruit cake is delicious and the package came through in good condition.

There is nothing new here except for the weather; it has taken a change. It has warmed up considerably and now the snow is all slush and standing water. Let's hope it doesn't freeze. It would make a fine mess!

One of our men ran into a fellow from Orange, last name Rocco, who knows Ken. Pretty vague, isn't it?

Bernie [Bodoff, one of my ASTP roommates at OSU] is in the hospital at Monmouth. Recently, the patients there were "entertained" by some Elks from Newark and the Oranges. One of them, Bill McCormick, told Bernie that he would call you and let you know that I am well.***

February 7, 1945 (Wednesday)... Your January 4, 19 and 21 V-Mails and your January 22 air mail arrived within the past three days. Also, Barbara's valentine. I would guess that air mail is coming through as air mail again.

I am trying to contact Dan, hoping that his outfit is in this area. We have worked with quite a few infantry divisions and there is always the chance that I'll run into his. You say Howard Kimm is with the Seventh Army, in the infantry. What division?

So you finally tacked a For Sale sign on the "homestead". I hope it gets results, for the way things stand now it's fast becoming a "white elephant." [I don't need a psychologist to tell me that this news caused some deep-seated problems with me. For many many years after the war, I had a recurring dream of returning home to a house occupied by strangers, or of being

unable to locate the apartment to which the family had moved. About all any of us had going for us in combat was the thought that one day we would return to home and family. For good luck, throughout combat, I carried a front-door key to 403 Hillside Avenue.]***

During our long stay in Wolsheim, I, along with other surviving members of the platoon, was billeted (sleeping on the floor) in a home owned by an elderly Alsatian couple who were unmistakably pro-German. Also sharing the house were a refugee mother and her daughter, from Reipertswiller. They were French, pro-American, and our young Chinese lad, Bobby Jung, was making a play for the young girl.

Among other divertissements, we discovered several large vats of wine in a nearby barn and repeatedly raided the source with five-gallon jerricans. It was new wine, though, and it caused a lot of intestinal distress.

More than once, we were alerted against German paratroopers. We also searched for survivors when a German bomber crashed in the area. Several allied bombers also crashed and we went out on rescue parties.

Trigger, one of our veteran drivers, accidentally sliced open his right arm on a broken bottle and we never saw him again. It was about this time that Gen. Smith (commanding general of the Division) came around to decorate Pappy Johnson, and arrangements were made to have Pappy's son, Jimmy, transferred to the Company.

February 16, 1945 (Friday)... Your January 30 V-Mail arrived several days ago. Your February 2 V-Mail and January 8 package came today. It was a swell package. Thanks.

Spring is here! The weather took a recent turn for the better, with good results. Weather affects morale as much as anything, so we are feeling pretty good.

Yes, Bernie is married. His wife's name is Ruth, and their home is in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Until he went into the hospital, he was able to get home nearly every weekend. They are sending me a package, so by all means send him some cookies. He, too, likes "Toll House."

I haven't heard from Dan yet and I haven't been able to locate his outfit. But I don't think he's very far away.***

Long-range "Alsace Annie," a German 380mm railway gun, was firing (from 30 miles away) on supply installations at Saverne (about 10km to the west of us) every Wednesday and Saturday night. One round hit a C Company, 136th Ordnance, barracks, killing 11 and wounding 13, including one of my ASTP classmates at Ohio State.

Lt. Col. McCollom, who none of us held in very high regard, was "kicked upstairs" to CCA, and Major George W. England, Jr., who had been S-3 of the 48th Tank Battalion, took command of the Squadron.

February 21, 1945 (Friday)... The fact that this is written

on Red Cross stationary doesn't mean anything. It's just stationary the Red Cross passes out to the troops.

Your January 10 package came today, also your February 4 and 8 V-Mails. V-Mail may have slowed down a bit, as your February 7 air-mail letter arrived several days ago.

I don't know whether I told you before but censorship forbids mentioning anything relating to our actions unless there has been at least a two-weeks' delay in the telling. So, from January 21, when we last saw action, and moved back as part of 7th Army's "strategic withdrawal," until two weeks ago, we were in a "rest" area.

A rest for us is nothing more than a long billet in a French village. It gives us a chance to clean up, resupply, bring in replacements if necessary, and learn new tactics in lieu of any that may have failed.

The only thing bad about all this good weather we are now having is mud. But you have to have something. If it isn't mud it's dust, and if it isn't dust, it's snow and ice!

I think all of your packages through January 10 have reached me. Here is a "request" for another: olives (you know the kind), canned brown bread or date-and-nut bread, home-made fudge, and stationary. That Lipton line of prepared soup mixes must be going over big back home. Everyone here seems to get a couple of packets in their parcels.

I am still hoping for a pass to Paris. Our company is allowed two passes a week and they are usually given out by platoon lottery, so no telling when I might get to go.***

February 26, 1945 (Monday)... Your February 11 V-Mail came today, the birthday cards (all three) arrived yesterday and your January 20 package the day before. I also received a very nice package from Val and Doris.

There is nothing much to report from this end. There is no outright optimism about the ending of the War, nor is there pessimism. We hope, though, that the big new drive up north is it!

It doesn't look now like I'll get much use out of the cold-weather gear you sent me. I'm just as glad though. Sure wish I'd had it a month or two ago! I had asked for the slippers with the intention of wearing them inside my shoepacs, but now that it is warmer I'll just use them as slippers.

I don't know just what has caused Bernie to be hospitalized. I do know that he has had trouble with a shoulder he broke in training. He's also had a rash and several other hurts or ailments that have required attention.

I haven't run across any stamps of the kind Bob requested. The only ones we see are the common air-mail variety.***

I went to Division at Dettwiller (a few km NNE of Wolsheim) early in March to serve as General's guard. It was an honorary assignment and the usual procedure was to pull a deserving man out of the line and send him back for a medal and a soft week (I slept on a cot in a barroom where a number of MPs were also quartered), with a few hours a day as personal guard to Maj.

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Gen. Smith. On duty, I either stood just outside his door or rode "shotgun" in his command car or peep.

March 9, 1945 (Friday)... [Dettwiller]... I am not with the company at present so my mail has been mixed up, delayed and, in general, held up. Your latest arrivals, though, are the February 17 and 26 V-Mails, and the 17th and 25th air-mail letters.

Just now, I am a member of the Honor Guard (our commanding general's personal guard). The assignment ends tomorrow, though, and I should be back with the company by Sunday. I only pull three hours of guard duty every 18 hours, so this is more of a "deserved rest" than anything else.

Last night we had real ice cream! It was the first I've had since leaving the States and quite a treat. I had had some "ice cream" back in Marseille, but there it was little more than artificially flavored slush.

We also have a pretty good USO show here--civilians, fresh from the States. And there's a Red Cross club in town, so, comparatively speaking, being assigned to the Honor Guard is a very nice deal.

You ask whether I have seen any action. Plenty! But I don't think it's something I should be writing home about. You'll just have to wait until I get there.

Dan's outfit was pretty close for a while. In fact, we were practically fighting side by side. Due to the exigencies of the War, though, we could not arrange a person-to-person meeting. Now, I believe, he has gone further north, into another Army sector.

I think, before the month is over, I might get my pass to Paris. I've got my fingers crossed!***

March 13, 1945 (Tuesday)... I am still guarding the General, but expect to rejoin the company in a day or two.

I am enclosing a copy of today's "Stars and Stripes." It will probably interest you and Dad. Regardless of the military situation, they usually get it to us daily. There's little scandal or home or civilian news in it, but it does keep us up-to-date on the War, both here and in the Pacific.

Your January 29 package came several days ago and was greatly appreciated. The knit socks are fine but it is getting warmer now, so I don't expect to make much use of them in the near future. Today, I received your February 14, 28 and March 1 V-Mails, also your February 22 air-mail letter.***

When I rejoined the Company, it had moved northeast to Morschwiller and the shells were incoming again. Lt. Reynolds asked Capt. Zielinski for me, as Lt. Hamilton was not coming back, and I joined the 3rd platoon.

Crew of Fox 3-2: Sgt. John Mucha (commander), T/4 Richard Lamberson (driver), Pfc. Jack Williams (gunner), yours truly (bog).

March 17, 1945 (Saturday)... [Morschwiller]... I am back



Fox 3-2 crew (l.-r.): Frank Coffee, author of this memoir (Orange, NJ), John J. Mucha (Sloan, NY), Jack L. Williams (Joplin, MO), Richard K. Lamberson (Niagara Falls, NY).



Waiting in column to cross the Isar, that's Joe Haggerty, TC of Fox 3-3, doffing his helmet. Note the sandbags on platoon sergeant Szymoniak's tank.

with the Company again after my tour of duty (which was more like a vacation) as a member of the Honor Guard. The mail situation has been cleared up, too. Yesterday, I received your February 7 package, February 19 V-Mail, March 4 air-mail letter and March 6 V-Mail. I think that brings us up to date.

Glad to hear that the bank account is growing so. That monthly check from TIME sure helps! Today, I sent you some money through PTA. This (Personal Transfer Account) is a new system to me, but it is said to be quicker and more convenient than sending a money order. The amount transmitted was 4,000 French francs, which should translate to approximately \$80.

I had a letter from Bernie, too, yesterday. He is out of the hospital once more and working as a fixed-station radio operator there at camp.

While "back with the General," I got to see a number of movies, including "Rhapsody in Blue," the first new film I had seen since leaving the States. The picture, a very good one, is based on the life of George Gershwin. Much of his best music (including Rhapsody in Blue, Concerto in F, An American in Paris) is presented in full. Dad will undoubtedly want to see it.

Yes, Ken and I will have a lot of stories to swap--and I've got some good ones! It has certainly been a long time since we last saw each other [December 23, 1942, on the Penn Station, Newark, train platform. He was on his way home for Christmas and I was on my way to Fort Dix].

There is a lot of news developing at this end, but little that I can tell you now.***

THROUGH THE SIEGFRIED LINE

Seventh Army went on the attack again in mid-March. The 36th Infantry Division attacked along the Moder River line and the 14th was to push through the 36th and exploit the breakthrough. We observed the initial preparations from an advantageous hill position: intense artillery fire and then the infantry moving out in waves.

On March 18 we went into action and rolled on through the Hagenau Forest without much opposition. The Germans were making considerable use of horse-drawn equipment and could not move very fast, which meant they made fine targets for our aircraft. The route was lined with the debris of battle, dead enemy and beasts.

While moving up, an officer and an enlisted man from 500th FA went to take a look at Hatten. As they were standing in the street, a little old woman came up out of a cellar and handed them a cigar box. In it were the dogtags of Americans who had been killed and left behind in Hatten. The soldiers had been buried by the Alsations in their tiny cemetery.

Moving north to Hohwiller, we spent the night in a house that had just been vacated by the Germans. Next morning, our platoon went with D Troop to run patrols in the lower Wissembourg forests and scout in the Lauterbourg area for the French. With D Troop's 1st platoon, our two-tank section (Fox 3-2 and 3-3) moved up to try and reach Schaidt through the Bien Wald.

Running along narrow roads and down firebreaks, trusting to luck with mines, we ran into a well-defended road block. Several of the D-troopers dismounted to scout and Major England came up to plan strategy. We were only a two-tank section with light recon units. But Major England decided on a frontal assault to test the defenses at the block.

It was down a narrow road and there was room for just one tank. Fox 3-2 drew the assignment. With dismounted troopers as flank protection, we moved up slowly and then accelerated as we went around the bend. Guns firing, we moved as close as we could to the block, and then withdrew, still firing.

The road block consisted of a long stretch of felled trees, a pillbox, and machine-gun emplacements. It was impenetrable for us. While critiqueing, we came under artillery and mortar fire. Leaving a recon section at the end of the firebreak to observe, we moved northeast to seek a bypass.

We drove down a lane at a 90-degree angle to our original avenue of attack and brought direct fire on the enemy position. I could see defenders moving about as Williams sent shell after shell at the block and I continued to rake the position with machine-gun fire. [Seeing enemy soldier still on their feet in this situation surprised me as, having demonstrated our expertise on the firing ranges back at Camp Campbell, I expected more immediate results from our gunfire.] But then we came under heavy fire, too. Attempting to maneuver in the narrow lane, several of our vehicles ran into soft ground. A frustrating comedy ensued, with tanks pulling out armored cars and then becoming stuck in turn.

All the vehicles were finally freed and we pulled back to firmer ground. Major England had called back for artillery and engineer units so that the block could be cleared. If we could get through to Schaidt from there, it might save a lot of hard fighting through the deeper defenses of the Siegfried.

Late in the afternoon, an almost comic procession came down the road toward our position. It was a French Colonial unit (possibly from the 4th Moroccan Mountain Division) commanded by a white colonel. He was leading the column on foot. A tall man, impeccably dressed, he was carrying a swagger stick, smoking a pipe, and holding a bull mastiff on leash. He could as well have been out for a stroll on the Champs-Élysées. His field weapons were towed 75s, with the strangest collection of vehicles I have ever seen an army employ: an old scout car, a German volkswagen, a charcoal-burning truck, and a sedan. He was also using a few horses and mules. The troops were as motley as their vehicles, and yet, when told what was wanted, they did a superb job of pin-point artillery. A patrol brought back a badly wounded prisoner and he was promised morphine when and if he talked. Bulldozers came up later to work on the block.

A day later, our job completed, we moved to the center of the forests and rejoined the company. Late in the afternoon, all of our tanks fired a full TO (table of ordnance) in a TOT (time on target) into the Steinfeld-Schaidt area, in preparation for a major attack.

[I later wrote up citations for the eight of us who had

participated in the engagement in the Bien Wald. But only the TCs were awarded (Bronze Star) medals.]

Early Thursday morning, March 22, we moved through Wissembourg and into Germany. Our tanks were west of Schweighofen and there we sat for most of the morning. While there we had excellent radio reception and a spectacular view of a tank-air support operation.

A strong tank force from the 14th, was attempting to break through the Siegfried defenses and a large number of P-47s were flying supporting cover, with the air-liaison officer, near the head of the attack force. When the tanks hit a strong point, they would mark it with smoke or phosphorus and, within a matter of seconds, the planes would go in in attack--bombing, strafing, and firing rockets. It was quite a show!

The scene was deceptive, what with the flat open country and the farm houses. From a distance, even the dragon teeth looked too puny to present a problem. But camouflaged pillboxes lay half-hidden in the furrows of the low hills and every inch of that open country was covered by heavy machine-gun and artillery fire. Many of the neat little farm houses turned out to have walls of reinforced concrete seven feet thick and windows that came away to reveal tiered, recessed gunports. And if you assaulted one pillbox from the flank, you came under crossfire from two others.

Orders were to break out and move to the Rhine, to seize and hold any river crossings. We moved through the crumbling Siegfried defenses and the burning towns of Steinfeld and Schaidt and, breaking out, reached Rhine Zabern on March 23.

This wasn't the half-and-half of Alsace anymore; this was all German, and anything German we came to regard as the spoils of war. We were rough with the civilians, especially any male who could be suspected of having recently shed a uniform. There was looting and drinking and feasting.

On March 24, we pulled back to Winden. From there we cleaned out pillboxes, ran patrols, mopped up, and waited for the bridging of the Rhine. Lamberson shot a roebuck and fried up the heart and liver for us.

March 26, 1945 (Monday)... [Winden]... Germany--with the 7th Army... As you can surmise, there is a lot of news, but little that I can relate at present.

Today, I received Uncle Kil's package, Freddie's V-Mail and three of your letters (Easter card, March 11 air-mail and March 13 V-Mail). I think, by now, you know what it means when I receive a "bunch" of mail all at once--we've either moved to a new location or been too busy with higher priorities.

What is being done could never have been accomplished without the Air Corps--and it has been perfect flying weather. We even have aircraft working with us: Piper Cubs spotting enemy movements and gun positions, and tactical aircraft flying close support. It can't last much longer now!

All passes are off for the time being. I don't know when I'll get to go to Paris.***

March 27, 1945 (Tuesday)... [Winden]... Your March 18 air mail and Barbara's Easter card arrived today. Apparently you haven't been receiving much of my recent mail; at least you haven't made any references to what I've had to say in those letters.

I was certainly glad to hear from Jimmy [a short note via a Kriegsgelungenen Postkarte he had mailed to my home address on December 5]. Maybe by now the Russians or some of our forces have overrun the prison camp where he is interned. Since I can't write to him directly, get a form from the Post Office and drop him a brief note from the family. You won't be able to say anything about me relating to the Army, but you can get all that information from the form.

The Germans have a new flag. It's all white! Almost every building in the towns we've been passing through displays a large white sheet, either hanging from a pole or draped across a windowledge, indicating complete submission. The German defenders really left some of these places in a hurry!

We no longer are liberators. When we entered Germany, we became conquerors, and now, very much have our own way. When we remain in a town, we take over any buildings we need for our use and let the civilians more or less shift for themselves. They usually double-up with neighbors or relatives. At present, our crew occupies a four-room apartment with a good kitchen, and a large, comfortable bed apiece.

It's a little late, but Happy Easter!***

ACROSS THE RHINE

We left Winden on the afternoon of March 31 and the entire Division moved in convoy, bumper to bumper, with lights on after dark, on the long cold march [more than 105 miles] that was to take us across the Rhine in the dark of Easter morning, Sunday, April 1, 1945.

We crossed the Rhine on a pontoon bridge south of Worms and then moved through Darmstadt, dispersing to our respective assembly areas. The Division had passed to the control of XV Corps. Moving to Rossdorf, 6km to the east of Darmstadt, we immediately outposted that town.

EAST TOWARD CZECHOSLOVAKIA

We (3rd platoon) quickly went on the attack again and, with the 3rd platoon of D Troop, led a strong task force made up mostly of the 68th AIB and the 48th Tanks. We were passing through the 3rd Infantry Division, moving well ahead of our strength, and began to drift out. Part of our column took a wrong turn, went down an uncleared road, and almost met head on with a regiment of enemy infantry. Now there were no lines, and no one knew where the next battle would be--at a hill, or a ridge line, or a town where a few hundred enemy decided to make a stand.

Moving into one small town, we passed a knocked-out Sherman at the top of a hill. When the town had been taken, the

surviving tankers had called out from among the prisoners the men who had manned the anti-tank gun that had stopped their tank, and cold-bloodedly shot them. This was not untypical. The 3rd Division was burning every town that offered the slightest resistance and this one was completely leveled and burning furiously.

We cut across fields and down a hillside and came to the approaches to Partenstein. The road bridges were out but there was a high railway trestle, apparently still intact, spanning the Lohr River. Trusting that it wouldn't buckle, peeps tried it first, and then armored cars, and finally our light (16-ton!) tanks. We moved on Partenstein.

A hill formation to the left of the road shielded us from the town. But to the right, the road dropped off sharply to the valley below and the river, rising on the far side to a heavily wooded area. We moved cautiously and then the enemy opened fire. If the German gunners had had proper observation and realized the limit of our small force, by strategic firing they could probably have knocked us out. We were able to pull back under cover, however, taking advantage of the natural formation to our left. Recon sent out a dismounted patrol.

We then heard armor moving up in the woods across the valley, to our right. Facing our vehicles [and thickest armor] in that direction, we swept the woods and suspicious buildings with artillery and machine-gun fire.

Lt. Reynolds had gone back "to find out what's going on." It was impossible to bypass the town, so we held our position until engineers could bulldoze a ford crossing of the Lohr. When that was completed, the tank battalion and supporting infantry came up and we moved back. The town of Partenstein was strongly defended and our attacking force was to fight on through the night and most of the next day.

We moved out again in the morning and cleared several small towns without much opposition. If when you approached the outskirts of a town, the civilians ran for cover, that meant a fight. If the civilians put up white flags and came out to meet you, that meant there were no German troops in town and there would be no fight. On several occasions, civilians told us that it was Hitler's order that they, too, fight, and if they refused, they would be shot.

While our small force continued to press forward, we came under heavy fire and lost two vehicles. We took cover. The only road into and out of the small town we were in was open to direct fire. Calling back for artillery, we found that we were too far out. It wasn't until late in the afternoon, when a task force working a parallel route brought pressure on the enemy, that we were able to move on.

We went on to Bruckenau and found the 47th Tanks there ahead of us and moved up to Geroda. Our 1st platoon, with A Troop, had fought its way into Geroda. The leading tank (my old Fox 1-1) was knocked out by panzerfauste and turned over. Lt. Bennett and Sam Alberts were taken prisoner. Later, Major England, an automatic in each hand, dismounted and leading Pappy's tank, led an attack on the town.

Next morning we were off again with 3-D, this time with two TDs from the 636th. We ran into trouble early, maneuvered around it, and then stuck our necks way out and found the enemy on three sides of us, possibly four!

We cleared the town we were in and, with Lamberson and Jones, I started for the Burgomeister's. On the way, we spotted a number of enemy infantry moving up near a mill on the outskirts of the town. I opened fire with my M3 and the others fired pistols. It was enough to convince the Germans that surrender was the better part of valor and they came out slowly under white flags. Lamberson and Jones went forward to disarm them while I covered with my submachine gun. The first white flag was tied to the barrel of a Schmeiser (the so-called "burp" gun; when fired it went burrrip), with the bolt drawn. I got a Luger out of the encounter and we took our three prisoners back to D Troop, where the lieutenant was rough with them and made them observe full military courtesy. He got quite a bit of information out of them. From what they had to say, our situation didn't look too good.

We outposted the town and took a defensive position on a hill to the east. The enemy then shelled the town with nebelwerfers ("screaming meemies") and the civilians were furious, as the first barrage had killed several of the townsfolk and set a number of homes on fire. Many of the civilians we were to come in contact with in similar situations came to have more hatred for their supposed defenders than they did for the Americans.

We now could hear considerable activity to the right of our position, both vehicular and vocal. Making a scout, Jones and I found there were five Panther tanks with several score of infantry in support moving toward the road that was our only avenue of escape. We reported back and a plan of action was quickly worked out.

The two TDs took good defensive positions and S/Sgt. Szymoniak's tank went out as bait. When the lead German tank came into view, Huber, driver of the 3-4, pulled his tank back so fast that Szymoniak, who was on the deck, went flying. The German came on. When he was just where we wanted him, with his gun traversed away from our strength, the TDs opened up and sent nine rounds into the tank. The knocked-out Panther very effectively blocked the narrow road and, with turrets traversed toward the tank, we made a run for it. Szymoniak's tank had been struck and we had to abandon it.

In the next town back, we took up defense positions. When the German tanks came again, the TDs got another one, and we laid down a concentration of fire on the other three tanks and the supporting infantry.

On April 6 we moved to Stangenroth and rejoined the company. Next day, once again as a two-tank section (3-2 and 3-3), we went north with a recon platoon and, covering a lot of territory, cleared some woodland resort areas. We then moved south and into Bad Kissingen on Sunday morning, April 8.

Bad Kissingen, a hospital town and "baby-manufacturing" center, had sent out a delegation to arrange terms to surrender

as an open city. But top brass would have none of that, as Seventh Army wanted to use the city for its new headquarters. The German delegation meekly accepted our terms.

A few days earlier, to the south, on 5 April, CCB had broken out and raced to the Allied Prisoner of War Camp at Lager Hammelburg [Captain Zielinski and our headquarters unit, calling themselves CCZ, had been part of this force] and liberated more than 4,000 grateful men. A week earlier, General Patton, whose son-in-law was among the Americans being held at the camp, had vainly sent a light task force from the 4th Armored on the same mission.

[Task Force Baum had numbered 294 men and included 53 vehicles. Virtually all of the men were either killed, wounded or captured, and all of the vehicles were either destroyed or captured.]

As a consequence of the misguided raid, the German command had diverted units from the north to stop the task force and defend against a strike at Schweinfurt to the southeast. Which meant that the 14th Armored, the northernmost unit of the Seventh Army, met unexpectedly stiffened resistance through Lohr, Gemunden and Hammelburg itself. The 4th Armored Division, in turn, now had pretty clear sailing to the north of us, advancing some 80 miles with only token resistance.

After leaving Bad Kissingen and crossing the Saale River at Aschbach, the 94th (minus) took off as a separate task force and cut south and east as fast as we could go, detouring around strong points. We sought a crossing of the Main River, ran into stiff opposition, and had to hold our position until the 25th Tanks came up and took over.

April 10, 1945 (Tuesday)... [Eyershausen? We had crossed the Rhine and advanced some 240 miles into Germany since my last letter]... This is just a note to let you know that everything is OK. We keep going so, we just don't have time to write. You must realize that by what you've been reading in the papers.

Yesterday, our mail caught up with us--the first since the end of March. Your latest letter is the one of March 25. Both your February 20 and March 6 packages arrived. I don't know when I'll find time to read the [Hemingway and Dorothy Parker] books. It won't be long, though!

About that clipping you sent--we were very much a part of the action mentioned. That was just before we made our final break through the Siegfried Line. It is another story that will have to keep until after the War.

In one of the papers you used in packing, I saw that James MacSporran [who, as a bomber pilot, had been shot down over Berlin] had been listed among the casualties. You hadn't mentioned it. I hope you saw it and expressed our sympathies to the MacSporrans.***

We made a ford crossing of the Main near Lichtenfels. On

the far side of the river, we waited while a quick scout was made for a route, and then moved up and into a wooded mountain area where we had a sharp fire-fight. This is where we heard the cryptic message on the radio: "This is the BBC. R is dead. R is dead." I don't know whether it was from us or the enemy that the BBC wanted to withhold the news that our President was dead. (FDR died Thursday, April 12, at 4:35 p.m. EWT.)

Turning south again, we were picking up so many prisoners now that we had to carry them along on the tanks. A recon section was delegated to act as a guard unit and while carrying prisoners back to them we very nearly got it from a flight of P-47s. The pilots, recognizing that the men atop the tanks were wearing German uniforms, were more than a little suspicious of us. Seeing those 500-lb. bombs poised beneath their wings, we had some anxious moments until we succeeded in moving the frightened prisoners enough to reveal our fluorescent identification panels. [These were color-coded and changed daily, much like passwords, for identification from the air.]

We crossed the north-south autobahn and had cut off Bayreuth and Nurnberg. On the autobahn, we came upon a large column of Swiss Red Cross vehicles [all of which were painted white], captured the German guards and liberated the Canadian drivers. We were way ahead of our support now and, at Tannfeld, captured an OCS school and 200 very surprised candidates who were just returning from a problem, expecting a critique and a hot meal. Two recon platoons were detailed to set up a PW cage at Linderhardt and a total of 1,500 prisoners were sent back to them.

The Squadron now split and reconnoitered in two zones. We were moving toward the Czechoslovak border. Our southern section took 500 prisoners when they drove into the surprised town of Pegnitz.

CREUSSEN

[The 94th Cavalry is credited with playing a large role in the drive south, in the shifting, dissolving battle southeast through Germany.]

On April 14 we moved into Creussen. Fifteen miles to the east, a training center for Panzer troops was in full operation and Major England learned that the school had been sending out sizable task forces of tanks and infantry to strike at the advancing armies. All the troops were called in and Major England sent back a call for reinforcements. We had moved so far and so fast that day that when our main force stopped for the night it was still almost 15 miles away.

It was tucking in its tail that saved the 94th. That and the call for reinforcements. Col. Hudelson sent up C Company from the 62nd AIB and a platoon of the 25th's medium tanks. The 94th was deep in the heart of enemy territory and the enemy was not yet dead.

Our platoon set up an outpost and took over a neat little house near the edge of town. There was a lovely young girl

there with her family. She and her parents were leaving the house and she was weeping as she feared that we were moving them out in preparation to destroying it. I gave her a fresh handkerchief for her tears and attempted to reassure her in my inadequate German.

At Creussen we had freed 600 slave laborers who had been making anti-aircraft weapons and rifles for the German armies. In the evening, a few of us went out to their camp and danced and sang and celebrated with these deliriously happy people. This was a select group, as they were doing precision factory work. Many of the females were young and attractive, either Czech or part of the Service du Travail Obligatoire, the French labor force that the Vichy government had sent to work in German war factories. We had paired up and were all set to stay the night, when a group burst in with a report that there was a large German patrol in the area. There were just seven armed Americans at the camp; two, unfortunately, too partied-out to be of much use. It was a tense situation.

We knew that our first duty was to find out more about the patrol. If it was a strong patrol and moving on the town, things could get pretty rough. We agreed that the enemy had no real interest in the laborers and felt that it would be relatively safe to have them hide the two soldiers who were now sleeping off too much alcohol until we could come back for them, probably at daybreak. We spread out and took off, sometimes creeping but more often running. We flushed several small enemy patrols, engaged in brief firefights, and made our way back to the comparative safety of the town.

Early the next morning, under a rising fog, two enemy tanks made a run through our end of town and cut out again toward the slave camp. The men at the infantry AT outpost were so surprised they abandoned their position. Sergeants Ruder and Hayes were up at the camp with a peep to pick up the men we had left behind, and were machine-gunned by the tanks.

All Creussen was alerted. Our mediums and TDs were spread thin, but when the next German tanks moved on our positions, they knocked out three. We were surrounded and the enemy started laying in fire. We did not have enough men to handle the situation, so some of the liberated male laborers were armed with weapons they had been making in the Creussen factory and outposted around the town.

E Troop had gone into firing position in the hills just northwest of town and E Troop's assault guns were caught in the crossfire of five German tanks. E Troop knocked out three of the attackers, but lost an M7, an M8 and a half-track before pulling back into Creussen. E Troop had been attempting to hold open a route for reinforcements.

At Gottsfeld, on a road that had been open only an hour before, two of the Squadron's gas trucks, trying to get through to us with desperately needed supplies, were knocked out and the drivers killed. Headquarters Troop commander, the Squadron S4, and the Squadron liaison officer were all taken prisoner.

We learned that an estimated 50 medium tanks and several hundred infantrymen had left the Panzer camp with the specific

mission of retaking first Creussen and then Bayreuth. Our situation did not look promising.

The enemy attacked, attacked several times. We had to call for our artillery, which was just barely in range, and the gunners laid down a concentration of fire just outside our perimeter; a very dangerous tactic at the distance. The weather was perfect, however, and we soon got air support. Together, the planes and the artillery leveled four of the surrounding towns used by the enemy for assembly points and knocked out many of the enemy tanks.

With a small patrol, I went off in the direction of the slave camp and there found a number of dead from the shelling, including a young French woman I had danced and laughed with the night before. [This, for me, was perhaps the saddest and most vivid memory of the War: a bomb blast had slammed her against a concrete floor, so hard that her head had split open from the back and, in death, had spread her face out in a broad heart shape.] Continuing the patrol, we moved up an embankment and observed the enemy. They spotted us and we got into a fire-fight. Among other weapons, the Germans were using flak wagons (four 20mm cannons on a single, self-propelled mount) against us and had plenty of them, as they came from one of the factories in the area.

At night, the Germans tried to fight their way in with tanks and strong infantry patrols and we had to call in heavy artillery, which was pretty well registered now. Col. Hudelson, back in Trockau, sent up a strong tank and infantry force which ran into a large enemy patrol at Gottsfeld, knocked out five Tiger tanks and set up a strong point. The Creussen-Trockau road was opened and patrolled.

The 94th held Creussen and the attacking forces of the enemy had been severely decimated. The enemy continued active, but there were no more heavy counterattacks.

At Creussen, part of our infantry force had been men (the 4th platoon) from a company of Negro Provisionals (all volunteers, who had trained as infantrymen at Compiègne) assigned to the Division on March 26, and they had fought well. German propagandists had been inciting the people against these troops and the propaganda had backfired in a way, for now many Germans had great fear of these soldiers, the "Schwarz SS."

SOUTH TO VICTORY

The Squadron was ordered to CCA, to protect the command's left flank as it moved south on the autobahn. On April 17, Squadron left Creussen and moved south toward Velden ober-Bayern.

We were moving in single convoy and then halted and taking a break while a recon unit checked the route ahead. Suddenly we were under fire from a pair of 88s. As we dove for the ditches at the left of the road, a large piece of shrapnel, nearly spent, dinged my helmet. After the initial surprise, we raced back to our vehicles and broke them in dispersal. An assault unit moved up to engage the enemy pieces as the rest of the convoy scattered down the hill along our left flank.

Several vehicles remained on the road, knocked out by the shelling.

The move downhill took us out from under the enemy's guns, but brought new trouble as we ran into soft bottom and many of the wheeled vehicles became stuck. When the 88s had been silenced by the assault unit, our tracked vehicles spent some time pulling free the stuck equipment, and then we all moved back to the road.

We were in Gnadenberg on the 18th and I picked up a number of folding cameras and Nazi dress knives. I had acquired a fine 7.65 Mauser at Velden (found in a suitcase in a factory basement) and, now that the War seemed to be in its final phase, we were much more conscious of souvenirs. It was SOP for the first units into a new town to instruct the Burgomeister to order the townspeople to turn in all cameras, guns and other weapons. If you remained in that town long enough, you might get to pick up a fine camera or handgun. Shotguns, hunting rifles and the like, we simply ran over with our tanks.

To Hersbruck and a concentration camp on the 19th. At Hersbruck we said goodbye to two fine Czechs we had carried with us from Creussen. As we were no longer headed toward their homeland, they thought it best to leave us and make their way on their own. We outfitted them, appropriated a pair of bicycles for them, wrote out safe-conduct passes, gave them a small fortune in what we then thought were worthless German marks, and wished them Godspeed.

To Roth and a castle and an apartment house.

To Hilpolstein (21-25) where, on the 23rd of April, we were assigned to the Third Army. It was at Hilpolstein that Barringer proudly showed off his loot. That kid had enough treasure to start an antique business!

April 21, 1945 (Saturday)... [Hilpolstein]... We are still a long way ahead of the mail--and the news reports. The latest from you is your March 27 V-Mail. I don't get much time to write now, we keep going so.

This is [written on] a captured German typewriter and I am having a bit of trouble with it as there are several variations from our standard keyboard.

I have gotten hold of a pretty good camera and lots of film, but film handling is rather complicated here. Everything has to go through a film censor and that can take a long time! Someday, though, there should be some pictures for you.

I can tell you now how I got that German Luger I referred to several weeks ago. We had finished clearing a town and two other soldiers and I were on our way to the Burgomeister's to direct him to order the townspeople to turn in all weapons. Across a broad field we spotted a German soldier. He saw us and tried to get away. The three of us fired at him and he dropped into a millstream. We then fired a few more rounds and called to him to surrender. He or another soldier came out from behind a stone wall. We then sent him back and he returned with two more prisoners-to-be. We disarmed them and from one of them I took the aforementioned Luger.

These long dashes made by us and other fighting units aren't made with the ease the news reports would have you believe. There is always some resistance, and sometimes it's fanatical.

Virtually every time we advance a few kilometers now, we free a few thousand more slave laborers (both skilled civilians and farm workers taken from other countries by their German conquerors). Many of these people have been waiting five years for us and that is a long time; under the sadistical German yoke, even longer!

We have passed through some of the "baby-producing" centers, too. One of our crew can speak Polish and we are able to get a lot of information from some of these liberated people. One Polish girl told us, "Yes, I have had three babies. My sister has had five. I have never seen them. The Government ['party' is what they call it] takes them at once." One town was reported to have seven thousand of these babies!

We have several hundred colored soldiers with the Division now, in an attached unit [Seventh Army Infantry Company No. 4, Provisional], and they are making a real name for themselves. Every one of them volunteered for this assignment to combat duty. Most of them had been serving in rear-area quartermaster units.

We have been in many of the German centers of education and culture and have learned a lot--mostly about the German abuse of same.

I haven't been able to get that package off to Freddie yet, there is so much red tape to go through, and then there aren't the facilities needed when you keep moving. I'll get a package off to him soon, though.***

Moving out of Hilpolstein on April 25, Lt. Reynolds was behind the wheel of a very sporty German touring car. He was caught, though, by Col. Hill, Division Chief of Staff, and got a royal chewing out.

On the autobahn going south, the Germans had built hangers into the bridge overpasses, and were using the autobahn as runways for their jet planes. Cutting out cross-country and moving through a large military airfield, and seeing the destruction there, we realized well what had led to this example of German ingenuity.

Hirnstettin on the 25th, Kosching on the 26th, Mehring on the 27th and we were on the Danube. At Mehring, we partied with several young Polish girls and let them loot the cellar, sharing the pink champagne they found there with them. The artillery was still incoming, and often at night we were bombed and strafed.

We crossed the Danube in the rain at Ingolstadt and, in a suburban area where we had halted on the far side, Pappy discovered a subterranean wine storage area filled with select reserve supplies for the German Officer Corps. Artillery had broken open several of the huge storage vats and the wine we waded in was above our knees. We sampled the shelved bottled varieties, made some quick choices, set up a conveyor line, and passed cases of champagne, schnapps, liqueurs, and gin out

to our happy comrades. As the Recon Troops passed through town, we passed a case to each crew. We had large racks on the backs of our tanks and, by a judicious sacrificing of some of our gear, were able to stow the contents of as many as six cases about each vehicle.

At Meilenhofen on the 28th, several of the enemy infiltrated the company area during the night but were quickly taken prisoner. Moving to Ergolding, we fired across the Isar River on Landshut on the 29th and 30th. We saw our first rocket tank in action--a truly formidable sight when the 64 rockets were sent off.

On the morning of April 29, CCA was set to jump off at 06:00. At one minute before that hour, a strange group entered CCA Headquarters: a German major, representing the Commander of the Moosburg Allied Prisoner of War Camp; the senior American and British officers in the Moosburg Camp; a Swiss Red Cross representative; and Col. Lann of the 47th Tanks. The German major brought a written proposal from his commander asking for a neutral zone surrounding Moosburg, with all movement of troops in the general vicinity to halt while representatives of the Allied and German Governments conferred on disposition of the Allied POWs in the area. The German proposal was rejected and the party was given until 09:00 to return to Moosburg and submit an unconditional surrender offer--or receive the Division's attack at that hour.

German SS troops moved outside the city and set up a defense perimeter. They opened the fight. By 10:30, the SS were lying dead in the fields and along the roads, and American tanks were roaring through the cobbled streets of the ancient city. Once the sharp, pitched battle put up by the SS was over, the German defenses crumbled. Division prisoner total for the day was 12,000.

Official estimates of the total number of Allied prisoners freed in the Moosburg area was 110,000, including more than 10,000 Americans, a great many of them officers. Scenes of the wildest rejoicing greeted the 14th Armored's tanks as they crashed through the double, 10-foot wire fences of the prison camps. Many of the POWs had, under horrible conditions and at great risk, only recently been marched away from the oncoming Russians to the east, and there were not only Americans but Norwegians, French, Brazilians, Poles, Dutch, Greeks, Rumanians, Bulgars, Serbs, Russians, New Zealanders, South Africans, Australians, British, Canadians--men from every nation fighting the Nazis. In the outlying areas there were additional thousands of slave laborers. All combined to give the 14th Armored Division the most incredible welcome any such unit had ever received. The tanks continued on though, as we were making every effort to keep the enemy from moving into the redoubt area to the south.

That night, streams of Allied prisoners roamed through the streets, newly freed and not quite sure what they wanted to do. They broke into liquor--schnapps and champagne and cognac and wine--in cellars and wine shops and kitchens and warehouses. They took food--chickens and pigs and lambs and geese, potatoes

and eggs and hams and bread. They found clothing. Ex-POWs and ex-slave laborers and ex-concentration camp inmates, soldiers and civilians, young and old, men and women, from all nations, drunk and sober, crying and laughing, they roamed the streets that night and reeled along the sidewalks, singing, shouting, kissing, wearing tall silk hats, carrying stoves, geese, paintings, crossbows and sabers. There was rape that night and pillage, and plain and fancy robbery, and the German civilians hid.

We moved west to Moosburg to cross the Isar. There General Patton sounded off once again. From War As I Knew It, by Gen. George S. Patton, page 318: "May 1... We then drove to the Isar River where the 86th Division was effecting a crossing at Freising, and then drove downstream toward Moosburg. On the way we came to the 14th Armored Division which was crossing, and I noticed that all the tanks were covered with sandbags. This was very stupid. In the first place, it made the soldiers think the tanks could be hurt; in the second place, it overloaded the machinery; and in the third place, it provided no additional protection. I ordered their removal at once."

That's the General's story.

We were held up on the approaches to the pontoon bridge crossing the Isar River when a motorcade came up on our left, sirens screaming. The large placque with four stars, the jeep loads of Third Army and Corps officers, the starred-helmet and the ivory-handled pistols made it easy to identify the General. He dismounted at the bridgehead and kicked around at the debris, made some appropriate remark to a subaltern, and looked over the convoy. He glowered. (I snapped a series of pictures with my recently acquired Robot camera, which I had received in trade from another GI for my Luger.) The General saw something he didn't like. We had already passed, but he walked up to a tank not far behind our's, poked at the sandbags, and then very bluntly told the crew, "You boys are yellow." He moved back to the next tank, which was stark, unsandbagged and, with a sweep of his arm, commented, "Now, there is a good crew!"

If we could have offered rebuttal, we would have had a lot to say, as would a great many other tankers. Sandbags had saved many tanks, and many more lives. We certainly didn't consider them to be any protection against the 88, which was also the General's argument, but we were protecting ourselves against panzerfauste, the German bazooka. The warhead of the weapon, in a frontal assault, almost always spent itself against the sandbags. We certainly did think the tanks could be hurt! And that few hundred pounds of bagged sand we had stacked against the sloping fronts of our 16-ton tanks was hardly "overloading the machinery." As for that brave crew, the tank was a new one, a replacement, and we had been moving so fast we hadn't had time to have it sandbagged!

As a further slap in the face, we later learned that in February Patton had ordered all Sherman tanks in his army to have an additional 2½ inches of armor plate, salvaged from wrecked tanks, put on the forward hull of the tank--now a Sherman could take a direct hit from an 88 and survive.



General George S. Patton (who had only recently received his fourth star) joins our column, appears to be asking directions to the nearest bridgehead from a lowly GI.



Patton (center) looks us over and sees something he doesn't like. I thought it might have been my taking his picture, since combat troops were denied the use of cameras where the exposed film might fall into enemy hands, later learned that it was our use of sandbags, a common point-force practice.

Passing through Moosburg, I tried to make contact with James Coccia, a high-school classmate and close friend. He had been shot down as a bomber pilot and I had information from back home that he was being held in a Stalag in the area. I didn't have time though to make more than a few cursory queries. We gave away some of our dwindling supply of champagne (I wonder what would have happened had General Patton nosed around in the racks on the back of F Company's tanks!) and a number of pistols, binoculars and other enemy equipment that the repatriated men sought as souvenirs. We moved through Moosburg and headed south toward the Inn River, stopping at Geislbach on the night of May 1.

The next day was one of those days, of which there were many, when every day we seemed to live the full life. Szymoniak woke us at 05:00, after a runner from Squadron had come to alert us for an early jump-off. We each fried three or four of the usual eggs, carved slices from the large round loaves of German black bread (more often than not now, we were living off the land), and drank some more of the good champagne. There were empty bottle and corks all over the room, mostly from the night before.

Our platoon didn't jump off, but our two-tank section (3-2 and 3-3) was called out to ride herd on several hundred enemy B Troop had picked up during the early morning hours. The War was in its final days and most of them had walked in as a body to give up. We learned from the radio that, on May 1, Admiral Karl Doenitz had proclaimed himself Fuehrer, announcing that Hitler had fallen at his post in the chancellery.

We spent some time in a beerhall that was serving as the Troop CP, and there a Tech from Squadron told us about a liberated British soldier who had liquidated two SS men that a small combat patrol didn't wish to carry along. We knew, too, that many of our liberated soldiers, Air Corps officers especially, were doing their persuasive best to go along on combat patrols with our units, and several of them had lost the life that was now so much more precious to them. We picked up two infantrymen who were to go back to Division and went to pick up the prisoners.

The troops were letting former slave laborers search the prisoners and to keep most of what they found of value. We told the Germans, "Hitler kaput," but the news, if it was news, didn't really seem to interest them.

We set out, one tank at the front end, the other at the rear of the column, slowly at first and then with one of us setting the pace on foot, and then hurrying because it was cold. Two ME 109s skimmed the ground less than 200 yards ahead and then came back to look us over. It was an interesting situation, one that could have challenged a roomful of academicians.

Haggerty (TC of the 3-3) fired a couple of warning shots at civilians who tried to question the prisoners. He also made considerable fun of a fat boy who couldn't keep up, calling him "Superman." We then passed two of our own knocked-out tanks and got a little rough. Mucha fired just over the heads of two prisoners who had the temerity to step out of line, and

then we set a really fast pace. The Germans were dropping all excess gear.

We reached the Division area, where we turned our prisoners over to an MP detail and parked our tanks in the center of the town square. We were pretty cocky; we were combat troops and, to us, this was strictly rear echelon. We grabbed several bottles of champagne and moved into a nearby house. It got very noisy. There was an attractive young woman there, but she had a young baby and we were extremely respectful toward her. She cooled the champagne for us under running water.

The two infantrymen we had carried with us had come in for some champagne and they told us their story. They had been taken prisoner and were being escorted to the rear by a guard. A German captain came along on a bicycle, killed the guard, and surrendered himself to the two Americans.

We left there around noon, returned to Geislbach and found the Company gone. To catch up, we took off across fields and over flimsy bridges, finally stopping at a farmhouse as we had to blow the gas lines on one of the tanks. There were a number of Polish laborers there and the younger women very quickly had three pans of eggs frying on the stove. The older women began cleaning chickens. We drank more champagne and shared a little with some goslings.

One of the young males had told us about a "bower" in the area who had recently threatened him with a pistol. We took a tank and went to the farm in question and raised hell, shooting up the "schnapps (liquid fertilizer) wagon." Mucha soon had the German up against a wall, with a .45 under his chin. The badly frightened farmer quickly handed over a rusty antique pistol. We threw a basket of eggs and some loaves of bread onto the tank and took off, picking up a useful-looking generator along the way.

We were looking for the column again when we picked up a pair of German soldiers and then an English ex-POW who was herding a single prisoner. We gave him our two and told him to take them to a PW cage he had told us about.

We soon came upon the English version of a PW cage, with hundreds of Germans milling freely about a farmyard. We stopped and put the English straight, crowding all the prisoners into a large barn. The prisoners protested, but we fired a few shots at the roof and there was suddenly plenty of room. We convinced the English of the economy of this, as it would require a much smaller guard and would free a great many more to go out and round up additional Germans. This all seemed very droll and there were a lot of thick British accents and talk about fair play. We distributed some more champagne and drove off to a chorus of "Thanks awfly, cheps."

We had a report now of where the company was and started moving in that direction, which just happened to be back through an entire Armored Division. We finally broke away from the convoy and cut across a field. The generator fell off our tank and we slowed down and got stuck in soft bottom. We then had to sit there for several hours until a tank retriever could come and pull us out.

Rejoining the platoon, we billeted in a pleasant house on the outskirts of Steeg. We drank some more champagne and then Haggerty and I wandered off to a Gastwurtschaft where we had seen some attractive female DPs (displaced persons), but didn't make much of a hit and wandered back to our billet. Mucha had a very pretty Polish girl with him and we gave her food and clothing. The woman of the house kept coming back, trying to get into the house for her food and clothing, most of which was now gone. Some of the boys were making a play for the blonde next door, who for a while kept up a giggling "Machine kaput." Lump-lump (Lamberson; so named for a Red Skelton character he liked to imitate) got sick during the night, but not so sick that he couldn't make up a song about it: "Seventeen trips from the bed to the window and nary a drop on the floor." He had finished the last of the champagne.

May 3, 1945 (Thursday)... [Steeg] Germany, 3rd Army... I have quite a batch of your mail here, through April 22. It is almost impossible to write these days, we keep moving so. For all we know, the War could be over [V-E Day came five days later].

I hope this letter doesn't become too incoherent. I have been drinking champagne for the past four days. We ran across a huge German cache of the bubbly stuff near Ingolstadt. Each tank drove away with at least six cases. It is some of France's best and would probably be worth 20 (this typewriter doesn't have a dollar sign) dollars or more a bottle back in the States. That's a lot of champagne and that's a lot of money! I think we have cause to celebrate though!

It hasn't all been clear sailing. 'Not very long ago, when we were spearheading a drive, we were cut off and surrounded by 50 enemy tanks supported by lots of German infantry. Our air force, artillery, and tank destroyers succeeded in knocking out more than half of the enemy vehicles and a task force managed to break through, bringing us relief. No, it hasn't been as easy as most would think! The stiffest resistance in these waning days has come from SS troops.

One of the greatest rewards for our efforts has been the freeing of thousands of prisoners of War--representing America, Russia, England, France, Canada, and the many other allied nations. That, in itself, has been a wonderful experience. What we have brought to these men can never truly be expressed. Some had been waiting five years for us. Once again we heard the stories of Crete, Norway, Dunkirk, Benghazi, Tobruk, Greece and the other scenes of the great battles--victory and defeat. I have talked with many American airmen and other soldiers, many from New Jersey. I have always gone forward with the hope that one of them would be Jimmy or one of several other close friends who have long been prisoners of War. You can't realize the depth of the gratitude that these men express to us.

A short pause for more of the bubbly...

It is good to learn that someone is taking an interest in the house. I hope you can sell it. It will mean a lot of work though, especially when you come to my belongings. If you do

pack up and move away, box everything of mine, including the many magazines, tearsheets, souvenirs and the like. It will be a lot of trouble, but it means a lot to me.

Your March 27 package came today; the packages sent by the Miles and the C.V. Dodds haven't arrived as yet. This is the first time there has been a jump in sequence. But those packages, too, will come in time.

I have several good cameras now and have been taking lots of pictures, including a sequence of 4-star General Patton, in action! Send me some 35mm film if you can.

Tell Freddie I haven't been able to get a package or a letter off to him yet. In time, though, he will receive something to be prized.

My best to all and to our new family member-elect, Maria.***

Steege was as far as we were to go. On May 4 we turned back and moved to Maiselburg, where we stayed (and I finally got off a package to Freddie), sharing a farm with former slave laborers, until we moved to Landshut on May 7. At Landshut, our crew and Haggerty's shared a house with the very friendly Hilda. We slept on the second floor; she slept, but not always, on the third.

Our champagne gone, we needed something with which to celebrate the victory. Williams and I set out with a couple of infantrymen who had use of a 6x6, and we spent most of an afternoon in our quest. We eventually located an abundant supply of an alcoholic fluid (possibly buzz-bomb juice) near Regensburg. It was at Landshut that we realized the end of the War.

On May 10, we went to Ergolding to guard the airport. German planes had been coming in with German officers and their families, fleeing from the Russians in the east. We guarded the airport and the RAMPS (recovered allied military personnel) were heading toward home in C-47s.

We were in Moosburg from May 12 until May 27. There we guarded a winery, which some Russians had stupidly blown up, and then a creamery.

May 16, 1945 (Wednesday)... [Moosburg]... Your latest is the May 8 V-Mail.

I just finished writing a letter to Val and Doris. Their package arrived a few days ago. I've also, in recent days, received packages from the Miles, Ruth Bodoff, and the T.K. Dodds, as well as two from you. Thank you all!

We are currently set up as security guard in a town where, not very long ago, when distance was still measured in dead Germans, the 14th Armored Division freed 110,000 Allied POWs. Our outpost is along a quiet road beside a cool stream and near a winery. The house our crew is occupying is new and quite comfortable. So we don't have many complaints.

There is a girl here from East Orange! Her name is Judy Biekert. She and her mother came over here in '38. She claims they stayed a little too long and just weren't able to get back. They came here from Berlin and are now trying to get to Lisbon and arrange for commercial transportation back to New Jersey.

She is 21 today and seems to be a nice kid, but for all I know, the family could be die-hard Nazis. You can't tell with these people. They lived on William Street. Maybe you or some of your friends knew the family. [I was born in East Orange; my mother came from an old East Orange family.]

It is hot and it has been hot, so in a little while I'm going for a swim.

Rumors are Heinz-like and our immediate future is uncertain. My points are fewer than 50 [at a time when 85 points were needed to get out], so it looks like CBI.***

It was about this time (mid-May) that we began to hear strong rumors that the defeated German armies would join with us and we would immediately go on the attack against the Russians. Apparently General Patton, who believed we would have to fight the Russians sooner or later, was promoting such a plan.

May 22, 1945 (Tuesday)... Moosburg, Germany... Your latest is the May 13 air-mail.

As you can see from the above "dateline", censorship has been relaxed a bit. We are now permitted to tell where we are and where we have been.

Barbara would like it here. Our platoon is now guarding a cheese factory. They took us off the winery detail a few days ago, maybe because we drank up all the wine. There is plenty of good cheese here, as well as cream, butter and fresh milk. We, of course, get our share.

We are supposed to move to another town, so at present we aren't working to a fixed schedule. We have a lot of free time and I've been doing a lot of swimming as well as some horseback riding (We are in the cavalry!). I find I really need the exercise. The physical hardships of combat--being confined to a tank for days on end, irregular hours, and sometimes no food--can sure run a man down. It is cold and rainy today, though, so I will get my exercise at the typewriter.

The long clipping that you sent me about a 7th Army Recon Squadron in Germany, "Venison Frontline Style", was not about us. The clipping about Lowell was certainly interesting. He should have a fascinating story to tell, especially the details of his escape.

Before we came to Moosburg (for the second time) we spent several days in CENSORED. You should be able to locate it on a map. There we had the job of guarding, or outpostting, an airfield. The Army was using the field to fly out many of the thousands of American and British ex-POWs ("ex" courtesy of our Division) in this area. We had our tanks positioned among the airplanes and near the flight strips and it was all very interesting.

The day before we took over the airport guard, a large number of German planes landed there. The crews and passengers were Luftwaffe pilots and their families "escaping" from Czechoslovakia and the Russians. Many of the airmen deliberately "crippled" their aircraft as they landed, others were only too glad to be in the hands of the Americans. It was an unusual

sight, too, for it was eight in the evening and the sky was still filled with American planes landing and taking off. The planes with the black crosses and swastikas milled about in the sky and caused great confusion and consternation as they came in for landings, without the proper exchange of landing signals.

In reply to your suggestion that I send certain people novelties from "over there", the Army's non-fraternization policy is very strict and, among other things, forbids commercial dealings with the Germans. So, except, for rifles, helmets, and the like, there will be no souvenirs to send until the Army sets up some kind of souvenir shop. Of course, there is a very good chance that I will get a week's furlough to Paris, Brussels or Nice sometime within the next three months. I should be able to send some nice things from there.

I have only two guns left now. I sold some and traded my Luger for a very fine camera. The Luger would have been a good souvenir, for several reasons, but the exchange was so much in my favor (at least to my reckoning) that I couldn't resist it. We have heard rumors that we will be allowed to take one gun with us when we return to the States, so I might get home with one [my 7.65 Mauser].

Well, Ken has certainly been having a hectic time of it. For a kid who wants to get to where the action is, he appears to have wound up in the wrong outfit. I don't mean the Marines as a whole, just his particular Squadron. He's a lot better off in Arkansas, though, than he would be on Okinawa.

When I get home, remind me to tell you about the "run-in" we had with General Patton as we approached the pontoon bridge to cross the Isar River and enter Moosburg for the first time. It is quite a story, but censorable.

Well, that's three pages and enough for now.

P.S. Your April 16 package just arrived.***

On May 27, we moved to Pemmering.

May 28, 1945 (Monday)... Pemmering, Germany... I just received your May 20 V-Mail. I hope you weren't too disappointed [The family had gone to a local movie theater to view a newsreel or Army short in which Claire Spain, who had been a classmate of mine, had thought she had recognized me giving the commands in a parade or drill-practice sequence]. When you saw the footage, you must have realized it wasn't me. Or did you? We saw the film here and others in the audience made the same mistake. There were several who broke the silence with, "J.... C....., there's Coffee!" Anyway, they say "The Enchanted Cottage" [the feature the family saw] is a good picture.

As you can see from the dateline, we moved again. This is a small town, very small, near Haag, east of Munich. This is our assigned area for the time being and I know we are going to grow pretty tired of it.

Censorship has changed, too. Our mail no longer is censored by our company officers. It is spot-checked by Base. More freedom is permitted and geographical locations can be given.