Forgotten Memories of World War II

by Sam L. Resnick, 399-D

Sam Resnick was a member of Mortar Platoon, Company D, 1st Battalion, 399th Regiment. He states he wrote this in honor of his granddaughters, Claire and Zoe

It seems to me that memories do not come in a continuing chronological sequence, one recall following upon the other. They do come as separate events, some linked together by a common place or timeframe, evoked and jarred into reality by some present-day happening, place, face, or word, or else specifically called forth from our memorable memory bank. Why do we recall certain events and not others? Some of these recollections appear trivial, other of major import, yet we remember them all as vividly. It seems to me that even some insignificant memories are truly significant, although we do not know how they fit into or effect the total scheme of our life, nor can we objectively explain their "recallability."

Are these memories actual events, or mere figments of our imagination, perceptions fueled by often told stories so that we have adopted them into our real world of memory to be recalled and repeated as if they are true?

Further, how much of our memories have retained their originality and how much have we embellished and seasoned to our taste in the retelling? Do we hide in the recesses of our mind the bad, the horrible, and the unacceptable, or do these readily become available but are suppressed as we choose not to bring them forth?

Yet as I think back on my World War II experiences, the amusing ones come forth easily for the retelling, but yet the others are there. I know them well, and can bring them out when desired, as I have now.

These memories, forgotten memories, are here put down as I strive to elicit them in whatever context they are; boring, humorous, trivial, or recognizably emotionally important. I offer you vignettes of tragedy, fear, anger, sadness, sorrow, and festering rawness on one side of the scale, and on the other, smiles, snickers, laughter, and the wonderful feeling of just being alive.

Fort Bragg and the 100th Infantry Division

Basic training at Fort Bragg left me with few memories, although I can picture some of the events. I do remember the interminable heat, the red clay of North Carolina, and the difficulty of digging a foxhole in that clay.

I recall an incident at Fort Bragg that must have had an effect upon my trust in newly-appointed officers. The memory is vivid and bitter. We were to make a night march, using maps and compass to reach a designated spot. The night was pitch black and we had to hold onto each other and follow the GI in front blindly with trust. At one point we reached a stream, a deep stream. The lieutenant in charge ordered us to go directly into the stream, which we hesitatingly did not knowing how deep or cold it was. And of course it was both—icy cold and we were actually up to our necks. That was bad enough, but since we still had a way to go after we crossed the stream, we were absolutely furious being cold and wet throughout the rest of the march until we finally made it back to our barracks early in the morning. What a night! A few days later, a couple of us had occasion to go back to the area of the crossing and, lo and behold, we found that there was a small bridge crossing the stream not more than one hundred yards away. Oh, were we angry! That lieutenant, presumably with a map, never had the foresight to check up and down the stream for an easier crossing or a bridge.

The "Wave"

One impression I have of the voyage over was that of the "Wave." Picture, if you will, a group of about seven GIs sitting along a fifteen-foot trough, which constituted the toilet. There were no individual booths—God forbid—and so this communal trough was our toilet. Picture also the rolling of the ship and the waste material going from one end of the trough to the other as the ship rolled. You can imagine the

consequences if one did not rise up when your end of the ship and the contents of the trough dipped to the low end of the roll. And so in consonance with the roll of the ship, the men at the trough did the "wave," the forerunner of the present-day wave seen at sport stadiums.

Some fourteen days later we arrived at Marseilles, but since the port and docks had been destroyed and we were the first ship to land there, we had to disembark through a half-sunken ship climbing through the decks at a forty-five-degree angle until we reached shore and solid ground. As soon as we had settled and everyone was accounted for, we started our trek north into the unknown land, our hearts filled with frightened anxieties.

Incident One: The First Casualty

After landing on October 20, 1944 in Marseilles, we proceeded northward to our staging area somewhere in this strange land. During this night trek through the unknown roads, towns, and forests, the blackness was black, no moon, no street lights, simply nothingness but muffled voices and occasional curses of the stumbling GIs. We marched tired, weary, hungry, with our fully equipped backpacks. Our ever-present burdens, into the void, trusting only the one in front whom we could not see. We moved along, trying to imagine the road we were on from the sound of our feet on the ground, reaching for and touching the pack of the one in front for assurances, sometimes forming a chain, a linking of humanity, by holding onto our handkerchiefs. Every hour or so, we stopped for a break, dropping to the ground, feeling on either side of us for the assuring bodies of our buddies. Whether we closed our eyes to rest or kept them open made no difference, since we could see nothing. Suddenly, from the stillness of the night, we heard a frightening scream, which faded into a sudden thud, followed by painful moaning. Had we encountered the enemy and was one of our guys knifed or strangled? Fear started to swell within me, but it was soon calmed when word was passed down along the line that one man from our company had been sitting on the railing of a small bridge and, leaning back, had tumbled to the dry creek bed below. Despite the fact that someone was hurt, I was relieved. This was our first war casualty, a portent of many more to come.

Looking back now on that event, as well as our trek northward from Marseilles, I realize that a new sensation was developing within me and one that would continue during the war—FEAR. Sure, I've had my normal everyday fears up to that time, fear of failing in school, fear of getting punished, fear of falling, and other fears which I can now label as small fears. But another fear was developing—a fear of the unknown, the blackness, the strange noises of the woods—the snapping of a twig, the rustle of the leaves, and even the stillness of the night—the thunder, the bark of guns, rockets, and bombs and the terrifying scampering to hide like animals from them. Every little shadow, every little bush or branch that moved in the breeze was a crawling German. It was a fear that was constantly lingering in the background, ready to assume monstrous proportions and take over my very emotions and behaviors. The well-known fight or flight survival concept plays an almost total role in the behavior patterns at the front, in combat. Fear was to be my constant companion, day and night, together with fatigue—a worthy and complementary companion. Later on they were joined by hunger, the constant hunger pangs. Yes, I ate raw potatoes, soup made from grass and water with a sprinkling of salt and pepper, also snails thrown onto a fire so they got burnt and stringy and pulling them from their shells was like cleaning my nose. I managed to swallow them with crackers.

Incident Two: The Lady on the Radio

After the long night march from Marseilles, we reached our staging area in some woods, near some town in southern France. Prior to our leaving the States, tight security had been imposed. Our uniform patches were removed, letters were censored, identifying marks removed from all vehicles and equipment; nothing remained to indicate what division, regiment, or company we were.

One evening sitting around in the dark listening to the radio from a staff car parked nearby, since we were still far from the front, we heard our favorite American music and popular songs. It was nice, I thought getting that from the states or from England. Abruptly the music ended with the announcement by a sweet-voiced woman, "The men of the 100th Division are welcome to France and I hope that you have a good night's sleep on the outskirts of the village of (name not recalled) because you will need all of your

strength tomorrow." We were frightened in those woods, in the darkness, with all of our security, with the protection and precautions of the US Army, we had fooled everyone including ourselves, but not the lady on the radio, Axis Sally. We were to hear from her quite often and each time, it demoralized us a bit more, although at times she did let us know where we were and where we were going and against whom we would be fighting—some solace after all, something to diminish the dreadful, unknowing fear. We were sure that others knew where we were even though we didn't know ourselves. We felt helpless in the clutch of an unseen and unknown enemy.

Incident Three: Lucky Strike—Cigaret
We left the staging area to go into combat heading north to Rambervillers, LaSalle, and Raon L'Etape, only twenty-five days from the time we left the States—some kind of record, I think. One night we slept in an abandoned farmhouse and settled for the night. We received our guard duty schedule and passwords as every night. The passwords were composed of two words, the first to be stated by the challenger and the second word by the one challenged. That night, the code words were "Lucky Strike" and "Cigaret." Whitey was on guard duty from 12 AM to 2 AM in front of the house and he had a machine gun. Another was at the rear, similarly equipped. We settled down on the floor, feeling fairly secure and comfortable in our shelter and sleeping bags. Suddenly the stillness was shaken by the yelling of "Lucky Strike—Cigaret" and a burst of machine gun fire. We all awoke and dashed toward the front of the house. Looking out we saw nothing and there was no noise or movement. We chided Whitey about his challenging passwords, since he said both, his nervous and premature shooting and returned to sleep. The next morning, we awoke to find the challenger to his position was a stray cat.

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by Sam L. Resnick, 399-D

Sam Resnick, 399-D, wrote of training and the voyage over to Europe in the last installment of his remembrances. We catch up with him now in the south of France.

Incident Four: Silk Handkerchiefs

Somewhere through the towns and villages of southern France, we paused now and then to stay at an abandoned house overnight before moving on and into combat. We hadn't encountered any Germans yet, but could very definitely hear the big guns in the distance. In one small town, we came across an abandoned silk linen factory. Many of the Frenchmen (or Alsatians) had left when the Germans were there and the factory was one of those left to Fate.

We stared in wonderment at the bolts of silk and yards and yards of material and there was no one guarding it, it was free for the taking. We were like children let loose in a toy department, grabbing whatever suited us and there was enough for everyone. This was our first loot, the spoils of war, and we were the victors. Nobody thought that this belonged to the French and not the Germans, that we had not even fought in the war yet so we weren't victors of anything, and perhaps this was simply stealing. We ran out with our bolts of silk cloth, boxes of silk tablecloths, silk handkerchiefs and anything else we could carry. We held on to the material, scrounging around for boxes and other packaging material so we could send the stuff home within the next few days, but that was not to be.

In those next few days the American Military Government came into town to establish a municipal government and to see that all functions were started up again in the town. They, of course, soon became aware of our stolen property and we had to return what we had stolen. I sneakily managed to keep several boxes of silk handkerchiefs, hoping to send them home at some later date.

One thing the GI is usually short of in combat is toilet paper. In fact, very little existed even when we arrived in towns. They all resorted to cut up sheets of newspapers or catalogs, or whatever, any paper will do. And what happens when even paper is not available and there are no big-leaved plants nearby, well I had no choice but to use the beautifully patterned silk handkerchiefs. Oh, what a waste of silk, but oh, what a luxurious feeling. I don't believe the Kings of France had it that good! I gloried in that sensuousness for a few days.

Incident Five: Shu Mines

We kept chasing the Germans through southern France in the Alsace-Lorraine region of the Vosges Mountains. In a wooded area on the outskirts of the town of La Salle, we ceased our advance to rest for the night.

As is usual whenever we stopped, we started to dig in, that is, start digging foxholes, no matter how frozen the ground or how rocky it was, we still dug so we would have somewhat of a cover if shelling started. It was also dangerous to be on the road because that is more frequently shelled and various vehicles, theirs and ours, go whizzing by. We naturally, therefore, slowly, tiredly ascended the slope of a hill, in the dark, feeling and stumbling along, sensing obstructions and going around them until we reached what we perceived to be a safe distance, perhaps some 150-200 yards up the slope from the road.

We started digging into rock and gravel to make a shallow hole or depression just enough to be below the level of the ground. The size of the hole that we dug usually depended upon how tired we were and how dangerous we perceived the area to be. This evening, that small depression was sufficient. I slept well under the pine trees and frosty evening sky.

Early in that cold, clear morning, I was awakened by a loud explosion and a piercing cry of death. I lay in my sleeping bag frozen with fear. I looked around and saw the other guys slowly creeping out of their bags staring at each other for an answer, no one spoke a word, the cry again rent the air. It is difficult to describe that sound in the still, morning air, crisp with dew and mist. The sound echoed and echoed along the sloping hillsides seeking help and relief. The word was soon passed along, "Don't move, stay where

you are." Two more explosions rent the air accompanied by more yelling and screaming of pain and agony, a chorus of death. "Freeze, don't move," was the warning again.

We did just that afraid to take a step even where we had stepped before. I sat down on my sleeping bag and try to drown out the sounds of torturous agony. "Medic, medic," came the cries of others. This cacophony repeated through the hills hoping for salvation. Perhaps an hour passed before we were told to follow the path down the hill outlined by unrolled bandages. We gathered up our gear and, stepping as lightly as we could, gingerly followed the path down the hill.

It appears that the slope of that hill had been mined with German Shu mines, we called them "shoe mines," that are activated when someone steps on them, generally blowing off a foot or leg. One of the guys had stepped on one as he moved about in the morning. A medic trying to reach him also stepped on one. Another stepped on a mine, too, had his foot blown off, and fell back landing on another mine. Still others were yelling and screaming from fear and for help and medics were running from one to the other oblivious to the dangers lying under each step. To this day, I don't understand how fate decided who was to live and who was to step on a mine. And how did it happen that a whole company would ascend a slope of a hill in the evening dusk and night and not a single soul would step on a mine? The whole hillside was mined and it was not until the early morning that we felt the cold fear of Death and its shrieking agony. Another night had passed and I was still whole, but I had a nagging question—why do the shrieks of death linger longer in the echoes of the mountains than do the sounds of laughter? And my lesson for the day was—step only in someone else's footprints.

In those same mountains, the Germans also devised a fiendish device. Every jeep was equipped with a long vertical bar with a small notch at the top mounted on the front bumper and rising a few feet above the windshield. Well, when we first used the jeeps they did not come equipped that way until some fatalities occurred. The Germans noticed that when the jeep was loaded with GIs, those sitting on the rear side seats were pretty high up. The Germans strung thin wires across the roads between two trees so as to decapitate us as the jeep rode by. After a few such incidents, all jeeps were fitted with this "wire catcher" to snare the wire and cut it in two before it did any damage.

Incident Six: One Pull Does It

Most of us, because of the cold, greasy food and the lack of sanitation facilities, or at the very least, washing facilities for our hands, developed the GIs, otherwise politely known as dysentery. It was difficult to cure and some of us had it worse than others, but most had it to some degree.

My turn came one day with a sudden, painful surge. I did not even have time to unbutton and lower my pants and winter long-johns before the big splash.

It was winter, snow was on the ground and it was extremely cold with blustery winds. We were dug in somewhere in the woods near the town of Baccarat, near the front line, or perhaps it was the front line. Clothing supplies are not available out there on the front and another pair of long-johns and pants could only be obtained back at regimental headquarters in the rear. There was no way to get there except to walk or wait for the next morning when a jeep was scheduled to come from the rear. I chose to walk since I couldn't do without pants in those winter days.

As I walked back through the woods toward the rear, in the silence of winter, I wondered what the hell I was doing there in the middle of winter in a foreign country without any pants covered only by my winter coat. What a war! After an hour or so I arrived in town and asked directions for the whereabouts of the regimental first aid station and the supply depot. Needless to say, I was quite a sight to the German populace who stared, smiled and then snickered. Just who is this strange character with a long coat, carrying a rifle but no pants? My goose-pimpled legs and everything else exposed were almost frozen when I reached the hospital.

I was made warm, given blankets and doses of paregoric to stem the GIs. Underwear and pants came in the next day so I was able to return to my unit.

It was then that I discovered the bonding that is built up during wartime. I felt the need to go back as quickly as I could, my buddies needed me.

The paregoric diminished the number of times I had to go, perhaps five times daily and two or three nightly. As a result of that I had to be creative in the time I had to drop my pants when the urge came. What I did was to hitch or buckle my pants and long-johns together so that one pull and they both went down together, an enormous time saver. I happened to have one of the worst cases in the platoon and so was elected to carry its toilet paper. I didn't mind that at all since I always had paper when I needed it.

Some weeks after my return from the hospital, with a small diminution of my dysentery, one of my friends, Leondro Sivieri from Philadelphia, approached me with a home-made remedy. Why he had not mentioned it earlier, I don't know, but nevertheless I was willing to accept anything to stem the liquid flow. He suggested that I take two hard-boiled eggs, cut them into four pieces each and then dip them into vinegar, and eat. I followed his directions and waited to see the results the next morning.

News of this remedy had spread and when I went into the outhouse in back I was followed by several of the guys, waiting anxiously, but not as anxiously as I. The sun was bright outside but inside the outhouse it was dim with a sharp streak of sunlight knifing the dimness. The catalog hung nearby on a rope and the place smelled awful. I spread some sheets of paper around the rim and sat down.

In but a few moments of waiting, I knew the answer. With my pants down, I flung open the door of the outhouse, stepped forward and raised my hands, "I S_T SOLID, I S_T SOLID!!!!" I cried. I remember taking a bow amid the cheers and applause of my friends and retreated back into the dimness to finish up. To this day, whenever the runs appear in the extreme, I still resort to that old remedy and it works. Some of my friends can attest to this as well.

July 2001 Association Newsletter

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by Sam L. Resnick, 399-D

Incident Seven: Lucky Me

Many days of combat, walking, digging, followed by guard duty and sleepless nights, tired, weary, sick, hungry, and oh, what the hell. One evening near Bitche, we started to bed down for the night on the slope of a hill. The ground was frozen and it was impossible to dig a hole even two inches deep. We, therefore, kept our sleeping bags on the ground and crawled into them for a much needed sleep. Soon the whining of shells and the barrage of explosions made us dash to the bottom of the hill to take cover in the ditches on the side of the road. We did this once, twice, and then a few more times. This was crazy. We couldn't keep doing this in our weary condition. Too exhausted to care anymore, I simply said, "the hell with it" and stayed in my sleeping bag to get some sleep. I rigged up a poncho above me between some tree branches so as to keep off the dew and drizzle.

The cold morning woke me and I squeezed out of the sleeping bag. There were several shrapnel holes through my poncho and a few feet away, I saw a large unexploded shell, partly buried with its nose in the ground. I was afraid to move for fear of setting it off, but quietly and softly as I ever I was, I gathered up my stuff, moved away from the area and then took a good long breath.WOW! How lucky can one guy get?!

Incident Eight: It Can't Work This Way

Although I was attached to the Mortar Platoon of Company D, the heavy weapons company, we were frequently on temporary assignment to the rifle companies at the front due to their high casualty rates. On one such occasion, I was picked to watch over a large open field with a rising slope from the second story of a deserted barn. It was an important area and I alone had to guard it, day and night.

The machine gun corporal set up a .30-caliber machine gun for me, gave me a few cursory instructions on how to operate it, since I never had any instructions in its use, and left saying that he would return the next day. For two full days, tired and bleary-eyed from straining to see or hear the enemy if they approached, imagining all kinds of movements in the dark, crackling branches and footsteps on the soft grass, and fighting to stay awake, I sat with my "great protector," the .30-caliber gun, waiting for my replacement and wondering whether they had forgotten me. They did, but on the third day, the machine gun platoon sergeant showed up and was much concerned that I was there alone and for almost three days.

He first checked over the gun and said in his harsh angry career-soldier growl, "What the hell is the matter with you, don't you know this gun won't fire the way you have it set up?" I said no and that I hadn't touched anything since it was first set up for me. He relieved me and told me to get back to my platoon, which I readily did. I should have been given training. I thanked somebody that the Germans never did come my way.

Incident Nine: No Trace

Still around the town of Bitche I again was assigned to a rifle company. One bright sunny day, things were rather quiet, that is, no shelling and no direct confrontation with Jerry (the Germans). We were standing and sitting around having a bull session. Suddenly we heard the shelling start coming in. After a few months of combat, we were able to differentiate the shells by their sounds, we could tell what kind of shell, whether it was from a mortar, artillery gun, SP (self-propelled gun), or from a German *Nebelwerfer,* a rocket gun which fired several, perhaps a dozen, large-diameter shells, probably twelve inches or more. These rocket shells were called "screaming meemies" and we could hear their terrifying screeching sounds several seconds prior to their explosion. They were certainly a demoralizer. Well, to get back to the incident.

We heard the shells coming in and they sounded like they were from large artillery. We dove for cover the moment the shells were heard. We ran, we jumped, we scampered, and tried to find protection amid

the broken branches, scattered foxholes, and depressions in the ground. Our bodies hugged the ground curling up to reduce our exposure. Some shells hit the trees, exploding all around us sending shrapnel whistling through the air. Other shells managed to get through without hitting a tree and exploded on the ground. When the shelling stopped, we arose, checked ourselves, and came together again to survey the damage.

Sergeant Tony did not show up and an intensive search on the ground and in the trees did not turn up a piece of cloth or a part of his body. He simply was blown away, nothing remained at all but the memory of his voice and conversation a few minutes before.

Incident Ten: I Could Have Killed Him

I was again up with one of the rifle companies, this time at the very edge of a small wooded area about a few hundred yards from a fortified bunker farmhouse, Freudenberg Farms. The farmhouse overlooked our whole area and menaced our movement in that area. I was assigned to the very edge of the woods just as it became dusk. Movement there in day time would have certainly been fatal since we were clearly visible.

Two of us were assigned to the foxhole which, we were told, was the place where two GIs had been killed the night before, and we were their replacements. I noticed the dark splatterings of blood around the hole and I was terrified. I must explain the foxhole. It didn’t deserve to be called a foxhole for it was but a small depression in the ground approximately one foot deep, two feet wide, and three feet long and both of us were supposed to squeeze down into that shallow grave. I was sure the Germans could see us trying to get settled down for the night. I asked Woodie for his knife so as to dig a little deeper, to make the hole slightly larger, so that we could crouch down a bit more, minimizing our exposure.

Woodie was the only one in the platoon that still had his originally-issued knife. He polished it daily and did not use it to open cans or cut wood. It was his security and his alone and was to be used when he so chose. Of course, he wouldn’t lend it to me and he wouldn’t use it for digging. How stupid can he be! Didn’t he know that two guys had been killed here the night before? And the Germans can probably see us even as we argued. It was difficult to argue in a whisper and our voices rose, mostly mine. I made a grab for the knife and we struggled for a moment and then he held it pointed toward me, threatening to use it if persisted. Stupid, stupid guy!! I could have killed him then and there but I needed to have him with me, I couldn’t have been alone in the hole.

I took off my helmet and, crouching as low to the ground as possible, scraped the ground quietly and slowly scooping up handfuls of dirt and rock and piled them in front of the hole facing the farmhouse. I dug through the night, angry and exhausted. Before the morning light came up, we were evacuated from our position, probably by some wise and clever sergeant. I was much relieved, but my hatred for Woodie was never abated. He treasured his knife more than his life. I, too, felt that a knife was the tool of life and to this day I still carry one with me at all times, albeit a much much smaller version that fits on a key chain and contains a small scissor.

We all had been issued shovels and knives, but during combat with its surprising moves, running, stopping, crouching, falling, hiding, etc., they generally got lost in the melee, left behind, or thrown away. The same was true of gas masks which we were issued.

After a few months of lugging that extra weight around, we just simply threw them away, deciding to take our chances if gas was used. As a matter of fact, I threw my mask away but kept the holder for accessories or food that I needed more urgently and more frequently. Life was too immediate, too sudden, too unknown to consider a future possibility of a gas attack, and so we shed many of the issued items. But as for my knife, it probably got lost or left behind, I never would have thrown it away.

Incident Eleven: Clothes Washer?

It was near the town of Bitche, part of the Maginot Line. After much combat, we eventually did take the town and crossed the Maginot Line. This incident relates to one of the forts on that line called Bismark Kaserne. The fortress was several levels underground with huge tunnels interconnecting to other forts,

huge enough to contain railroad cars. When we took that fortress, we very cautiously explored the place, but did not venture too far off since other parts of the tunnels were still occupied by Germans.

At one basement level, in what seemed to be a laundry room or kitchen, I discovered a washing machine. Boy, was I elated, since now I could do all my dirty laundry that I had been carrying along for weeks, or was it months. Anyway, I got my clothes, found some soap which I shaved into small slivers into the tub, and dumped my clothes in. I was proud to be the first one to spot the machine and when I pressed the start button and the water came pouring in, I sat down in satisfaction. I heard the usual sounds of a washing machine, water coming in, draining out, tub spinning. It was a joy.

About a half hour later when the machine stopped and I lifted the lid, my joy turned to utter surprise and dismay. I lifted the clothing up and I saw torn and shredded pieces of cloth, no piece of clothing was whole or recognizable. I was amazed and angry at the stupid washing machine, that's the Germans for you. They probably fixed it so we Americans would have our clothing ruined if we ever overran the caserne. I lifted the last piece of what remained, I believe, one of my undershirts, and noticed the bottom of the tub for the first time, it was rough, intentionally, like very coarse sandpaper but made of metal. Lo and behold, it suddenly dawned on me what that machine was, it was a potato peeler!!!! The potatoes bounced around the bottom and their skins were thoroughly scraped off and then rinsed ready for cooking.

What a jerk I was. How would I explain to the supply sergeant that I needed a whole new set of underwear and fatigues? It would have been hilarious to watch and I'm glad no one saw me. To this day, I automatically touch the bottom of a washing machine every time I use one.

Incident Twelve: The Retreat

In December 1945, the Germans made their big push, they counterattacked. We had our mortars positioned just below the crest of a hill near the town of Bitche and had been there for over a month. Our foxholes were large and almost comfortable by foxhole standards. The tops were covered with large logs, rocks, and dirt and tilted a bit to allow for water runoff. Inside, the interior was covered with soft pine branches, with shelves carved into the sides for candles, utensils, and other equipment. This one-room apartment was deep enough to allow us to stand up in it as well as sit up on the raised portion constituting our bed. We even had a little drain well which was deeper than the rest of the hole to allow for excess water to drain off. For a better foxhole, always dig a drainage hole. All in all, it was dry, roomy, and, above all, could probably withstand a direct hit of a mortar shell or small artillery shell. I was satisfied and comfortable, although I still had to stand guard duty every night for two hours and it was no fun in winter.

One night, the 117th Reconnaisance Squadron stationed at our right flank and responsible for that area, withdrew without telling us and so our flank was completely exposed. About mid-afternoon of the next day, the Germans came through the valley and the hillside behind us and opened up with everything they had, bazookas, rifles, machine guns, and God knows what else. I could see the bullets hitting the ground around me, making little spurts of dirt kick up as they dug into the ground inches from me. I fell flat and hugged the ground hoping they wouldn't see me but, of course, we were all clearly visible and they had taken us by surprise. Few of us had our weapons with us.

They were laying around someplace, after all it had been very quiet for some time and who would have suspected a German breakthrough. As I lay flat, I saw others diving behind wooden crates which formerly held the mortar shells we used. I thought, how senseless, those crates wouldn't stop anything, what kind of protection was that? Why are they all diving behind the boxes? My foxhole was too far away and there was none other close to run to. I just wanted to be one with the earth and sink in as deep as I could but being on a slope, I was an easy target. I tried not to breathe. The shooting soon stopped and I turned around and saw them, dozens of little men scurrying through the woods across from me and more kept coming, attempting to encircle us. We left everything there, all the comforts we had set up during our brief stay, our mortars as well, and just grabbed our rifles and ran. I was confused, is it possible that we were retreating, the American Army? Where was everybody, all the big guns, equipment, men, why were we abandoned?

On the road back, I saw that our company was not alone, hundreds were retreating, confused, lost, and unbelieving. What happened? The lieutenant in charge of our platoon was young and inspired by duty, interrupted my questions and told us to go back to get our mortars despite the fact that the area was now overrun by Germans. We all refused at first, but then at his insistance, and with his hand on his pistol, we all turned around and headed back. Those retreating looked at us as if to say, "Are you guys crazy?" We ran back, grabbed our respective mortar components, in my case it was the barrel, another took the bipod, but the baseplate was frozen in the ground and could not be removed. They were still shooting at us, making the circle even tighter. We managed somehow to evade them and safely joined up with the rest of our company walking toward the rear. I walked dejectedly, frequently glancing behind me. Sergeant Hall, I remember, grabbed a jeep and started to go back to pick up a .50-caliber machine gun. Despite the fact that we pleaded with him not to go, he went anyway. We never saw him or his jeep again.

About one month later when we had recovered from our confusing retreat, consolidated ourselves, and renewed our advance, we returned to the same area. And there were our baseplates as we had left them, still frozen into the ground.

On with the War

My six or seven months in combat is not, of course, completely detailed by the preceding incidents, nor do they encompass my total experience. They simply serve, I hope, to provide a sampling, a taste, of what it was like and the emotions involved. During these days it was combat as usual. How does one describe combat days in common, usual terms? Mostly I was with the 81 mm mortars and generally behind the front lines below the crest of a hill.

Frequently I was sent up to reinforce the rifle troops which always had large casualties. There was a constant routine in combat, although always different; shooting, being shot at, diving for cover, digging in, staying awake for guard duty, rushing, and waiting. We were always cold, dirty, tired, weary, sleepy, frightened, hungry, thirsty, and frustrated and angry at not knowing where we were, where the Germans were, where the front was, where we were going, and the seeming stupidity of our officers who bore the brunt of all this anger. We lived like animals in the ground and felt more like them than humans. I remember on Christmas Day 1944, I was up with a rifle platoon when we got a treat from the kitchen jeep which drove up to our area that day. Normally, we ate cans of C rations and anything from the kitchen, hot or cold, greasy or dry, powdered or not, was welcome. This time we each got one cold hamburger which was most satisfying. We also received two small pieces of chocolate, like those from a box of chocolates. I slowly savored those chocolates and made them last as long as I could. I wanted nothing else but one more piece of chocolate, just one more, but there were no more. In the dead of winter, in my foxhole, at the front, I cried.

Most of the time, we were cold and hungry out in the woods and forests. We were also frequently wet, for when it rained, it rained for days. The Army had issued us a raincoat, probably one size fits all because mine was too short. The bottom of the raincoat ended somewhere just below the knees and if one is familiar with the way the Army trousers were supposed to be worn was that they were tucked into the tops of our boots creating a "blousing" effect just below the knees. And so quite naturally, the rain dripping off the bottom of the raincoat conveniently was caught by my bloused trousers and collected into my boots. It was an horrendous and uncomfortable condition whenever I had to walk. But as luck would have it, after a few months I managed to find another raincoat and I trimmed off some two feet of its bottom. As soon as I got to the nearest town for rest, I found a seamstress who sewed the two-foot bottom onto my raincoat and thus managed to achieve a much longer and satisfactory raincoat. These small accomplishments become exaggerated and take on a much greater satisfaction than they might ordinarily. I was happy and no longer dreaded the rain. There was a cartoon character called "Big Stoop" in, I believe, the cartoon "Smilin' Jack" and that's how I looked, but I could care less since I was comfortable.

We always looked forward to "taking" a town, for there would be food and we could sleep under a roof. Down in the cold dampness of the cellars, especially in the farm towns, we would find homemade wines or ciders *(apfelsafi),* potatoes *(kartofel),* chunks of bacon *(speck)* which hung from the rafters, apples, and eggs. The eggs were stored in huge jars of "waterglass," a preservative, sodium silicate or

potassium silicate, which would preserve the eggs for months. And when we were lucky to come across a chicken farm, we had fresh eggs. I found to my dismay, that getting eggs from a sitting hen is no small achievement. After having my hands bloodied by pecking hens, I had all but given up until one of my friends from the Midwest showed me, the city slicker, how to outwit the chicken. By slow and stealthy movement I was able to slide my hand under the warm body of the hen and retrieve one or two eggs, always leaving at least one. One day I remember feasting on a dozen at one sitting—it was great.

From the company, regiment, and divisional books written after the war which I have, I gleaned some town, as well as some individual, names. As I understand it, the 100th Infantry Division, of which I was part, spent 146 consecutive days in combat, evidently the greatest stretch of combat duty of any division.

Some of the towns in which we had fought and taken were: Rambervillers, La Salle, Raon L'Etape, Moyenmoutier, Baccarat, Salm, Schirmeck, Oberhaslach, and close to Strasburg, then on to Sarrebourg, La Petite Pierre, Wingen, Goetzenbruck, Lemberg, Bitche (our longest battle period and the Maginot Line breakthrough), Rohrbach, Zweibrucken (and the Siegfried Line), Thaleischweiler, Neustadt, Meckenheim, Ludwigshaven, Mannheim (bitter battles in these two latter towns), Friedrichsfeld, Ginsheim, Heilbronn (on the Neckar River and the site of a furious battle and continuous shelling to prevent our crossing), Sulzbach, Backnang, Winnenden, Bad Cannstatt, Stuttgart, Esslingen, and our resting place at the end of the war, Vaihingen.

At the end of the war, we all started to be concerned about "points", that is, the criteria of selection for getting back home. Points were based, as I recollect, on age, length of service, medals, and maybe one or two other criteria. Since I was young, with less than two years service and only a Bronze Star, Combat Infantryman Badge and Presidential Unit Citation to my credit, I was not to get home soon. After a month or two relaxing, and regaining my humanness, I was assigned to the 78th Division, Military Police unit, which was going to Berlin, an exciting adventure.

Holiday 2001 Association Newsletter

Forgotten Memories of World War II

by Sam L. Resnick, 399-D

Incident 14: Hey! Watcha Doing?
We had recently taken a town and moved into a small farmhouse during a dark, dark night in a pouring rain. There was no moon and the doorway entrance was at ground level. Woody had gone out to get his bedroll from the jeep trailer parked right outside the doorway. Leandro Sivieri inside the farmhouse suddenly felt the urge to relieve himself and stepped to the dark doorway. He simply directed his stream to the right side, of course not knowing Woody was out there. Within a few minutes, we heard Woody exclaim, in his high-pitched squeaky voice "Hey! Watcha doing?" Sivieri realized that someone was out there and turned to his left, continuing his stream. Woody, realizing too, that someone had pissed on him, walked around the trailer to the other side, where he again was the victim of that dreaded stream. He came running into the doorway dripping from the rain and smelling from urine yelling at Sivieri and I doubled over with laughter. What a classic scene! Especially because it was Woody and his "squirrel-like" features and behaviors that made it even funnier.

Berlin
The 78th Division relieved the 82nd Airborne Division and my recollection of the MP unit of that division, insofar as my contacts with them are concerned, is that they all left Berlin as wealthy GIs. The black market was wide open in Berlin, cigarettes which cost $2 (or was it $4) in the PX could be sold on the black market for $200. Other items such as candy were being sold for $5. There were no restrictions on sending money home nor how many cartons of cigarettes could be bought at the PX. I personally saw one individual with several stacks of $100 money orders, 3 or 4 inches high.

Thousands of dollars were being transferred home weekly by many of the MPs. They had had a good life in Berlin and with their loot were happy to be going home.

Upon the arrival of the 78th, tight restrictions were imposed on all financial dealings. Only the amount equivalent to one's salary could be sent home, only two cartons of cigarettes could be bought weekly at the PX, only one sheet of stamps could be bought at the Post Office and other restrictions of a similar nature were imposed to keep black market dealings down among the troops.

It was very satisfying being an MP. It meant power, authority, and unrestricted movement among the soldiers and German civilians. Generally, our work consisted of patrols around the city, especially the nightclubs, bars, and other likely trouble spots. We had jeeps and could go anyplace we wanted, although we did have our scheduled routes. At times, we participated in four-power patrols with the French, British, Russians and Americans and these were generally amicable and fun. The Russians were always impressed with medals and loved to drink. They also loved Mickey Mouse watches and would pay exorbitant black market prices for them. You see Mickey Mouse had red hands (or gloves). I had a fairly nice room in an apartment complex, ate well, and was very satisfied with the situation and position. On weekends, however, to keep up some semblance of military order, we were made to do close order drill in the streets—that is, march up and down—to the·snickers of German civilians in the area. This seemed stupid to me, to make guys who had risked their lives in combat, lived with death, and now had to march in the streets, what has that to do with anything? I wrote to the *Stars and Stripes* griping about this and within a month or so, the order was rescinded and we didn't have to do it anymore. I choose to believe it was my letter.

We had a lot of time off, and in the evenings would spend it in our local GI club. We had all the drinks we wanted, we had American and German music as well, a favorite being "Lili Marlene." The music was commonly known in German, France, and the US with somewhat different lyrics. At that time I knew the lyrics both in German and English. After six months or so in Berlin, I had managed to pick up enough German to make myself understood for daily conversations and socializing.

I once had in mind to see if I could get more cigarettes than I was entitled to at the PX, two cartons a week, with the intent of selling them on the black market. I must admit that it did make me stop and think

of the illegality of it all, but it was also very easy to rationalize about our deserving whatever we could get. We had been issued a card with black grid lines on a green background and when we received our cigarettes, the appropriate box was checked off in ink. Now if I could only remove that ink, I would be a winner. I tried erasers of all types, but they only smudged everything. I had a brilliant thought, why not get ink eradicator and simply wipe it clean. I trudged around to the public offices in Berlin trying to get someone to understand what I wanted and to get a supply. Evidently such a liquid did not exist and no one seemed to know what I was referring to. Just as I was about to give up, a German told me he knew where I could get such a liquid and, of all things, it was called *"Tinten Todt,"* or dead ink. He instructed me to take the subway into the Russian sector of Berlin and find a certain pharmacy. Germans readily traveled between zones in Berlin, but soldiers generally did not; I was a bit apprehensive about going. My greed got the better of me so I found the shop, and obtained a small bottle of *Tinten Todt.* I hurried back into the American zone eager to test it out. It did work because it was simply a bottle of bleach. And here I had to travel into a restricted zone to get it. I tried it a few times, but it didn't work well at all since the green lines also bleached out.

As an MP, one of the frequent stops during my night tour of duty was at a nightclub called the "Femina" located near the border of the Russian zone. It was a delightful place modeled after a previous one that had existed before the war and probably also during the war. The club was well lit, each table contained a lamp and a telephone as well as a large prominently displayed number. The idea was that initial contacts were visible and could be reached via the phone lines and thus asking for a dance was an easy affair. If one was rejected, it was simple and no one knew, as compared to the usual way of physically approaching a girl, having her say no, and returning to one's seat sheepishly. All one had to do here was to dial up the number of the girl you wanted to dance with or have a drink with and chat away with gentle persuasion until she hung up or assented. Of course, being after the war, there were many more girls looking for men and it was always a pleasant sight. It was here, too, that frequent fights and disputes arose during the heat of the competition and the consumption of alcohol. Although there were GIs, Britains, French, and Russians, the club was mostly attended by the Germans themselves. My night tour was to visit some of the more difficult areas to show our presence as well as to nip any anticipated troubles and fights and to send drunken serviceman on their way. I enjoyed my time in Berlin tremendously, having many opportunities to visit various sights, officially and unofficially. I did not mind staying there, but I was anxious to get home; I had enough of the Army. I learned that I was to be shipped out in two weeks and looked forward to it eagerly.

No Purple Heart

One day, sitting on a bed opposite a friend who was cleaning his gun, it happened. To clear the gun, he, quite naturally, pointed the gun down at the floor and pulled the trigger. The sound of the shot and the hot searing bullet penetrating my foot occurred simultaneously. I sprang up in pain and started hopping to the first aid station. My friend and others in the room at the time were stunned and sat there in shock. Soon they ran to help me to the first aid station. The bullet had passed through the big toe and imbedded itself into the floor. What a mess! Here I had gone through a goddamn war being shot at by small guns and large artillery, with many, many near misses, and survived. Now a week before my scheduled return, I get shot by a fellow GI. No purple heart now. My foot was put into a cast, I was given crutches and hobbled about for a few more weeks. I did get sympathy and that was nice, but that was something I could have done without. Soon the cast came off; I was rescheduled home and returned on the *Kokomo* Victory ship in April1946.

Back to Civilian Life

My return to civilian life was at times traumatic but manageable if I avoided certain situations. I was discharged from Fort Dix, and soon I found myself walking toward Chester Ave. along Church Ave. from the subway at McDonald Ave. in Brooklyn. As I approached my home, I saw two children playing with toy guns. My senses could not adjust to the fact that the guns were toys and not real and that children played with such things of death. To me, the sight of a gun would mean that I would duck for some cover,

drop to the floor, or pull out my weapon, be it a pistol or rifle, and get ready to shoot. I stopped in my tracks, dropped my duffle bag and squatted behind it, watching the on-going scene play out. I was in a different world, how could this transformation happen? How could this culture be so different from the one from which I just came? Don't those kids know you don't play with guns? How could they make toys and exact look-a-likes of these dangerous weapons? I picked up my duffle bag and hurriedly crossed the street to avoid the battle. I realized I was sweating when I got home. I'd have to avoid that kind of a situation.

Sylvia lived in Brighton Beach and every Tuesday evening they had fireworks which could be seen from the boardwalk. The first time that happened, I dropped to the floor when I heard the explosions, the whistles of the rockets, and the lights of the explosions. From that time on, I never visited Sylvia on Tuesday evening. Similarly, if we went to see a movie and they had sharp sounds of any kind that sounded like a gun going off or a shell coming in, I dropped to the floor, terrified. Any loud sound, even outdoors, caused me great fear and apprehension, even though I realized it was something other than a threat to me. It was a reflex action instilled by months of survival and behavior pattern.

These reactions also caused my eyes to tear and my body to assume an almost cowering crouch, anticipating an explosion. They lasted perhaps a year or more before I could easily accept them without the physical reaction. The emotional aspects I guess took much longer and, perhaps in some small way, still persist. My attitudes toward life and death were surely affected by the war as well as my relations to people. The wounds have healed, but the scars remain.

Omission: In the Holiday 2001 News, Sam Resnick's "Forgotten Memories of World War II, Incident Eight, It Can't Work This Way" the Tech Sgt who came to pick up the machine gun and to relieve him of his assignment was Rudy Steinman, a career soldier who later was awarded a Silver Star and DSC and received a battlefield commission.

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