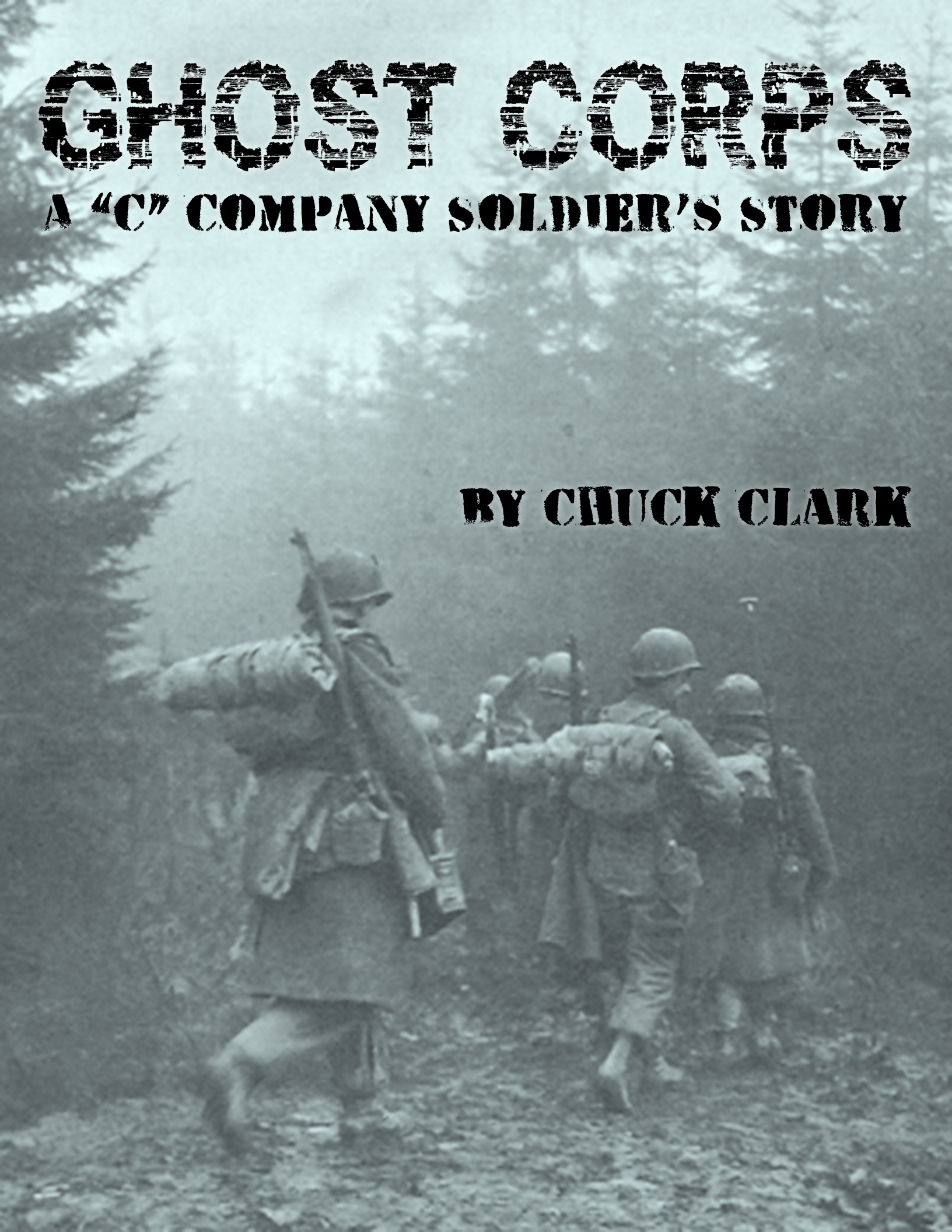


GHOST CORPS

A "C" COMPANY SOLDIER'S STORY

BY CHUCK CLARK

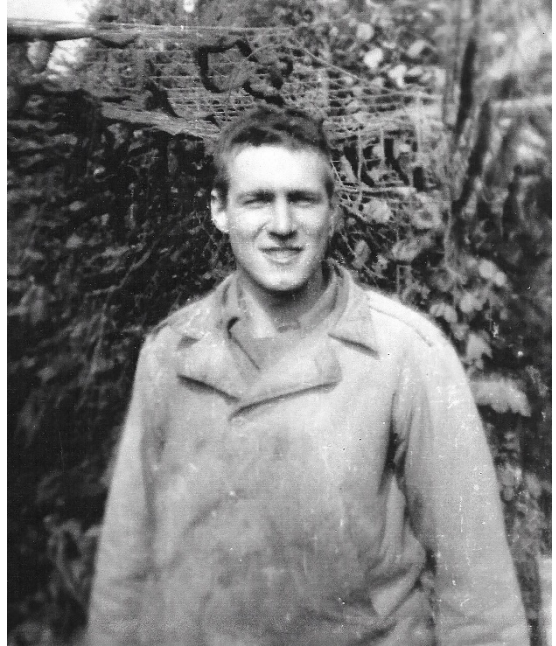


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles B. “Chuck” Clark was born in Elmira, New York, in 1923. During World War II, he fought in Normandy, the French interior, the Ardennes, Germany and Austria as a member of the 69th Signal Battalion, attached to the XX Corps of Patton’s Third Army.

He moved to the Santa Clarita, Calif., area in 1955 with his wife, Ruth. He served on the board of directors of the Santa Clarita Valley Veterans Memorial Committee and was an active member of the VFW, Elks, Masons and the Santa Clarita Memorial Day Committee. He also served on the World War II Commemoration Committee of Greater Los Angeles, which organized 50th anniversary celebrations of V-E Day and V-J Day.

Chuck Clark was named Santa Clarita Valley Man of the Year in 1996 for his decades of service as a community volunteer. Wife Ruth was similarly honored in 1991. Both devoted their time and many talents to local charities, always with a smile. Chuck died in 2001. Ruth followed him in 2011.



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HISTORICAL NOVEL

BY

CHUCK CLARK



DEDICATION

Going to war is a traumatic time in the life of a soldier – being away from your loved ones for so long, the noise, the death and destruction, the loss of friends and the uncertainty that there will be a tomorrow.

This book is dedicated to the many men and women who have served in the military and to those who made the extreme sacrifice in the service of our country.

FOREWORD

During the early years of World War II with the influx of thousands of men into the armed services, many new military units were formed. The infantry regiment featured here was one of those.

This is a story of “C” Company, an infantry rifle company, and its evolution into a top combat unit. The story follows the company’s travels through England, Normandy, the French interior, the Ardennes, Germany and Austria.

It is also a story of the experiences of one of “C” Company’s platoon sergeants.

Names have been changed: those of soldiers, certain towns, and units including the 35th Infantry Regiment. But all of the events in this story actually happened. Many involved soldiers in the author’s own platoon.

CHAPTER ONE

Todd Simms had just gotten home after spending the day working in his father's hardware store. He could see the look of concern on his mother's face as she handed him an official-looking envelope that had just arrived in the mail. Todd knew what it was, and he wasn't surprised. He was expecting it.

It had been a year since the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war. Many men had lined up at the enlistment stations, and the government was drafting men by the thousands. Todd would wait until they called him.

Opening the letter, he saw it contained a "Greeting" from Uncle Sam. The letter informed him that he had been selected in the draft. He was to report to the induction center in Rochester, New York, on December 15 for an examination, and if accepted, he would be given time to get his affairs in order before reporting for duty.

Todd had no doubt he would pass. He was twenty-five years old and in good shape. He had been active in sports in school. In his last two years of high school he had joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, so he had some idea

of what the military was like. Upon graduation, he thought about going to college but decided he would get more experience working in the hardware store. Someday he would take it over from his old man.

Todd's hometown was Linden, a picturesque place in upstate New York with a population of about 10,000. It had the usual main street that ran through the center of town, lined with shops. The rest of town consisted of shady streets. Surrounding them was a rural farming area. There was no industry in Linden. A lot of the work force commuted to the city of Rochester, about thirty miles to the north.

The Simms' home was a large, white, two-story house in the residential section of the main street, with a big lawn. The house and town were typical of those in the eastern states.

On the appointed date, Todd drove to the induction center in Rochester. He was given a quick examination and asked some questions.

Told he was accepted, he was sworn into the U.S. Army with a group of other men. He was instructed to report back to the center on January 3 for transport to a reception center at Fort Niagara, New York.

On the third, Todd's parents drove him to Rochester. After saying his goodbyes, he boarded a bus along with about forty other recruits. As Todd stowed his bag in the rack above the seats, he noticed he would be sitting next to a young, nice-looking blond man whom he recognized.

He put out his hand. "Hi. I'm Todd Simms. I remember you from Linden High."

"Hello. I'm Denny Duncan. I was a freshman when you were the quarterback on the senior varsity team. I remember your picture from the wall in the ROTC room. I was in the ROTC in my last two years of school. Does your family own the hardware store in town?"

"Yeah, I've been working there. My father expects me to take over when he retires. It looks like we are off on a big adventure."

"Yep. We're in the Army now. My father was a little disappointed that I didn't join the Marines, but I wasn't ready. He is a retired Marine colonel. It's too late now. At least he won't have to keep explaining why his boy isn't in the service."

"At one point I thought about joining the Air Corps," Todd said, "so I went to the recruiting office, and the guy asked me if I had two years of college. He said if I did, it would be

easier to get in. I couldn't see the logic in that. Going to college didn't make them any smarter than me, and what would taking business or agricultural courses have to do with being a pilot? The whole thing kind of turned me off. So I decided to keep working in the store."

The bus finally reached Fort Niagara at about 3 p.m. As the men got off the bus, they were met by a three-striped sergeant who formed them into a group.

"Men, I'm Sergeant Lewis. While you're here, you will be my responsibility. You look like civilians, but you took the oath, so you are now in the Army."

He continued: "The first thing we will do is take you to the dormitory and show you how to make your cot the Army way. Then you can freshen up. At 5 p.m., you will hear a bugle, and you will fall out in formation for retreat. After that, we will take you to the mess hall to eat. The rest of the evening you are on your own.

"Starting tomorrow, you will be busy, so get some rest. In the morning you will hear the bugle blowing reveille. Make your cots, get dressed and cleaned up, and fall out in front of the dormitory.

"That's it, men. Follow me."

As they were getting ready to go, Todd noticed another bus arriving. It was met by another sergeant. Todd learned that two or three buses came in each day, but there was always room, because every day a couple of busloads of men shipped out. He also learned they would be there about a week.

In the morning, following reveille and breakfast, they lined up to get their new clothes, shoes, uniforms and toiletries, and a duffle bag to carry everything in. Then they retired to the dormitory, where they tried on the clothes and were taught how to arrange their uniforms on racks and how to organize their footlockers.

The next thing was to line up for military haircuts. The rest of the week they got their shots, filled out questionnaires designed to tell whether they had any special skills or military experience, took IQ tests, and were taught how to salute, come to attention and fall in formation. All of this, to teach them how to be soldiers.

Fort Niagara was an old, historic fortress, and over the years, the outer part was modernized with two-story buildings. Located north of Buffalo, it sat on a bluff overlooking the junction of the Niagara River and Lake Ontario. Todd and Denny had become good friends, and Sunday was

a day off, so they explored the old fort with its log cabins and cannon emplacements.

A week later, as they fell out for reveille, Sergeant Lewis informed them that after breakfast, they were to report to the front of the dormitory. When everyone had reassembled, Lewis made the announcement.

“Men, tomorrow you will be shipping out. As I call your name and where you are going, form groups.”

Todd finally heard his name. He would be going to the 35th Infantry Regiment at Camp McCord, Mississippi. He also heard Denny’s name called. He was going to the same place. Denny looked over at Todd and gave a thumbs-up.

When everyone’s name had been called, Lewis instructed: “Tomorrow, after breakfast, fall out with your gear all packed. You will be transferred to Buffalo, where you will be put on trains.”

Some of the men were going to field artillery, some to tanks, some to the signal corps. As the bus pulled out, the sergeant saluted them and turned his attention to another bus that was just arriving.

CHAPTER TWO

Camp McCord was a new camp, and parts were still being built. The main buildings, such as camp headquarters, the hospital, movie theater, post exchange the church, were all large, wooden buildings painted yellow. The warehouses and motor pools were metal Quonset huts, and the rest of the buildings were wooden barracks of 2-by-4 and 1-by-8 boards, elevated off of the ground. The sides and roofs were covered with black tarpaper.

“C” Company had eight of these buildings. Five were used as sleeping quarters; they held about forty bunks and had two pot-bellied stoves. One had company headquarters at one end, a supply room in the middle and a meeting room at the back. One building held the shower room, latrines, sinks, mirrors and some washtubs for cleaning clothes. The last building was the mess hall. These were connected by wooden sidewalks.

The railroad car carrying the troops from Fort Niagara was shunted into the unloading area at Camp McCord. The men were transferred into trucks and transported to “C”

Company's area where they were met by Captain Swanson and First Sergeant Miller.

“At ease, men. I know you're tired, and it has been a long day. There are a lot of empty bunks, so take one for tonight. There are sandwiches and coffee in the mess hall. We have more people coming in tomorrow, so we will start getting organized. That's all, men.”

More recruits and conscripts arrived the next day. The lieutenants interviewed them and arranged them into platoons.

Simms and Duncan were told to report to Swanson.

“You two have just become part of the team,” the captain told them. “Very few of the new men have any kind of military experience, but I see by your records that you were in the ROTC. So, I am giving you the rank of staff sergeant and making you platoon sergeants.

“Simms, you will have the first platoon, which is under Lieutenant Conrad. Duncan, you will have the second platoon under Lieutenant Haley. I don't have any stripes here, but my clerk has run over to the post exchange to get some. When he gets back, sew them on and help the lieutenants.

“Congratulations, men. On the way out, you might stop and introduce yourselves to the first sergeant.”

As they left the company headquarters, Duncan said, “Boy, will my old man be surprised. I’ve been in camp one day and already made staff sergeant.”

The 35th Infantry Regiment was formed in December 1942, and as soon as “B” Company and “C” Company got their full complement of men, the unit would be activated.

Captain Jim Swanson was a West Point graduate with five years of service. First Sergeant Josh Miller was a regular Army veteran of ten years. As usual with any new unit, a cadre of veteran non-commissioned officers was sent in to help train the new men.

The new arrivals spent the first thirteen weeks confined to camp. They participated in basic training to get themselves into top physical shape and to learn the rudiments of being a soldier. They took part in calisthenics, close order drills, obstacle courses, inspections and hikes. Eventually they were able to take 25-mile hikes with full packs.

One of the worst hikes was an eight-mile slog in pouring rain with full packs and weapons. Even though they had helmets and raincoats, they still got soaked. Mud stuck to

their boots and leggings as they walked down dirt roads, making the trek much harder. When they got back to camp, everyone was exhausted, but the captain had the mess sergeant make some coffee. It helped.

The first order of business was to clean the wet weapons so they wouldn't rust, then take turns in the shower. They had been issued a second set of green fatigues, so they had some dry clothes to put on. There was no place to dry their wet clothes; they were collected and sent to the camp laundry. Boots and leggings had to be scraped and cleaned and set by the stoves to dry. After all of this, the men collapsed in their bunks. Some were too tired to go to the evening mess.

After basic training, they were allowed weekend passes to town. The closest was Gwensville, a typical camp town with bars, souvenir shops and girlie shows. Some men stayed in camp and went to the theater or the post exchange that had a soda fountain, juke boxes, lunch counter and pool tables. Those who were interested in sports could play soccer on the drill field. This became so popular, the men soon challenged other companies.

For the first three months, the men weren't issued weapons because enough weren't produced yet. In the

meantime, they trained with old Springfield and British Enfield rifles. When they finally got new weapons, they were allowed to use the shooting range. No ammunition was issued until they were ready to ship out except for guard duty or the range, and even then, every shell was accounted for.

Swanson instituted a program where every man, whether a cook or a clerk or a driver, learned how to operate every weapon in the company. Even if they didn't go out on the range, at least they would know how to operate it.

Saturday mornings always brought an inspection in the barracks. The barracks had to be scrubbed, and the clothes on the racks had to be arranged just right. Footlockers had to be organized and beds made so tight that a quarter could bounce on them. Everyone had to be clean-shaven and stand at attention beside his bed, wearing a clean, olive drab uniform and polished shoes.

After inspection, the men were free to do what they wanted for the weekend. If they had a written pass, they could leave the camp.

They had learned how to be soldiers. Now they went into infantry training where they learned the nomenclature of their weapons, fired on the range, learned compass and map readings, practiced using grenades and bayonets, and

learned about deployment and coordination with other units. All of this in addition to the regular training.

“C” Company had a complement of 175 men with four platoons: one headquarters platoon and three line platoons. The headquarters consisted of the command post with a captain, first sergeant, company clerk and a lieutenant in charge of the supply and mess. Each line platoon consisted of a lieutenant, a sergeant, a medic, a radioman and two mortar men. The rest were divided into squads of riflemen led by a corporal squad leader.

The key men in the company were Swanson, Miller, Conrad and Simms of the first platoon; Haley and Duncan of the second platoon; and Lieutenant Gerard and Sergeant Carter of the third platoon. Leading the headquarters platoon was Lieutenant Thompson, Master Sergeant Ruen, Supply Sergeant Wilson and Mess Sergeant Collins.

Ruen was well liked by the men. He was older than the rest. To the nineteen- and twenty-year-olds, anyone who was thirty-five – which was the age limit – was old. Ruen was about thirty and had fought as a mercenary in the Spanish Revolution.

Although it seemed a lot of the battalion hailed from New York state, there were men from all over the country:

Washington state, California, Texas, Montana, Indiana, Louisiana and elsewhere. Just about every state was represented, as were many different accents. These were noticeable at first, but after a time of living together, they seemed to disappear.

During their time in camp, the men had to do their share of kitchen police and guard duty. Every day, six men were scheduled for KP. They set tables, cleaned the mess, washed dishes and pots and pans, and peeled potatoes. Four men from each company had to stand guard at night at the warehouses and the motor pool. For punishment, you might get three days of KP.

The mess sergeant wasn't particularly well liked by the men. He was arrogant. It was rumored he had been a busboy at the Hotel Astor in New York City and didn't know how to handle the sudden authority. One day, Private Norton was washing pots and pans, which he had never done in his life, when the mess sergeant got on him for being too slow. Norton finally turned to him and said, "Maybe you were a dishwasher when you came in, but I wasn't." Norton got three more days of KP.

Another day at noon mess, it came to a climax. A couple of the men were complaining about the food, and the mess

sergeant told them if they didn't like it, don't eat. The two men got up and walked out. Then a couple more, and pretty soon the whole company got up and walked out. The officers ate at battalion headquarters, so they weren't there. There was an investigation to find the ringleaders, but nothing came of it except that the mess sergeant was reassigned and his attitude changed.

In June, the battalion went for a week of mini-maneuvers at a remote area in Mississippi by Lake Choctaw. The maneuvers were held at night. Two companies competed against each other, the idea being to capture the other company's command post. There were referees who went with the men and had the final say.

It was a terrifying experience. The area was infested with poisonous copperhead snakes. Eight were found near the mess tent.

One man who had been out all night started to crawl into his tent only to find a snake coiled up on his blanket. Another man who was deathly afraid of snakes had to be sent back to camp, and a man who was swimming in the lake was bitten by a water moccasin. He was sent to the hospital and survived. The men put leaves around their tents so they could hear any rustling.

Nights were pitch black. No artificial lights of any kind were allowed, so it was rough trying to make one's way in the dark into the woods and bushes while on patrol. Patrols were sent out, and if you happened to sneak up on an enemy guard and say, "Bang, you're dead," he was out of it and taken back to camp.

A different platoon was sent out each night. One night, the third platoon went out and waited. Pretty soon, they heard some noise, and an enemy patrol blundered into them. They managed to capture them, and with that patrol out of the way, they were able to capture the enemy command post.

After the week was up, the men were happy to return to camp.

In August, the 35th Infantry Regiment went on maneuvers near Nashville, Tennessee. This time, it was on a larger scale and lasted three weeks. The unit learned how to coordinate with the tanks and artillery and how to camouflage their camps and vehicles. It was Blue Forces against White Forces, the men wearing blue or white arm bands to designate which force they belonged to. There were also a lot of referees.

This time the maneuvers were held during the day, and no ammunition was used. The referees would determine by the position of the troops which unit won. There were also fighter planes that would practice strafing or locating troops, so the men learned how to duck for cover. Some planes dropped small bags of flour, and if a tank or vehicle was hit or if the bags dropped a certain distance from the men, they were considered out of action.

The troops returned to Camp McCord when it was over.

CHAPTER THREE

In January 1944, some of the men had gone to the post exchange or movie when the announcement came over the loudspeaker: "All personnel of the Second Battalion report back to their area at once."

There was some excitement. Everyone thought they were going to ship out. But when they got back to the barracks, they were told they had to tidy up because there would be an inspection the next morning. The men got busy scrubbing floors, washing windows and straightening out their footlockers. They wondered about the sudden inspection. Miller came by and informed them that the regimental commander, Colonel Eker, and some other officers were coming to check on their progress, and there would be a parade the next day.

After breakfast the following morning, the men were told to fall out on the drill field at 10 o'clock and leave their footlockers open.

All companies of the battalion assembled on the field. Soon they were parading past Eker, Swanson and the

battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel James. Meanwhile, some of the other officers were inspecting the barracks. After their noon meal, the men were given the rest of the day off because they had stayed up late with their cleaning.

Two more weeks passed, and Simms had just returned to the barracks after noon mess. He had an hour before they were scheduled to go to the camp theater and watch more training films. Time to relax and write a letter home.

No sooner had he put pen to paper than Corporal Jensen, the company clerk, stuck his head in the door and said, "Sarge, you are supposed to report to the company command post right away."

Maybe I'm going to get out of going to the films, Simms thought. Some of the films were all right, but some seemed to have no relation to the type of training they were doing. After a morning of calisthenics and other regimens, it was hard to stay awake in the dark to watch a training film. The droning voice of the narrator didn't help. Simms thought if they ever gave a test on the subject matter, most of the men would fail.

As Simms walked out of the barracks and headed to the command post, he noticed all of the other platoon sergeants

and lieutenants were walking in the same direction. He caught up with his friend.

“What do you think, Todd?” Duncan asked him.

“I’m not sure, Denny. But you know we have spent a year training, and we’ve been on Tennessee maneuvers, so we are about ready. Maybe this is it.”

Everyone assembled in Swanson’s office. Simms’ words were fortuitous. Swanson made the announcement:

“Men, we have received our orders. One month from today, we will be shipping out. It gives us some time to arrange for all the men to get two weeks’ leave, but caution them that they are not to talk about shipping out. God knows someone is going to tell his wife or girlfriend, but they won’t know where or when. We could confine them all to camp, but they deserve the leave, and to be blunt, this is an infantry outfit, and for some, it may be the last time with their family. The camp’s permanent cadre will come in and take care of the area while they are gone. Enjoy your leave, because we are going to be busy when we get back.”

Camp was a beehive of activity when everyone returned from leave. The men crated up all of the equipment, stenciled on the identifications, serviced the vehicles and transported all of this to the storage area for shipment.

There was much speculation about where they were going. All sorts of rumors were flying around. Some heard it was England, others the Pacific, and someone even said he heard the outfit was going to California to guard the West Coast. It was a period of excitement as their training was over, and they didn't know what was ahead. To some, it was the prospect of going to a new land. To others, it was the sobering thought of what were they getting into.

Ruen had transferred out. Nobody knew where he went.

The day of departure finally came. The troops were transferred to the shipping area of the camp where a train awaited them. As they boarded, Simms finagled a seat next to Duncan. A band played as the train pulled out. The next day, the train pulled into the port of embarkation, New York City.

“Well, now we know where we are going,” Simms said. “I was worried it would be some miserable jungle island in the Pacific.”

The troops gathered their equipment and left the train. They marched through a large warehouse to a waiting ship. It was a struggle because the men were loaded down with full duffle bags, weapons and ammunition.

As they climbed the gangplank, Simms saw the name on the side: *Empire Rapier*. The troops were immediately sent below deck and assigned hammocks. Simms noted the ship was manned by a British crew. He asked one of the sailors what kind of ship it was. He was told it was a liberty ship.

The troops had settled in when an announcement came over the ship's speaker: No one was to go on deck until the ship had left the harbor. This was a great disappointment to some of the men, as some had never seen the New York skyline or the Statue of Liberty. They sailed out of the harbor into the Atlantic without having seen the grand old lady.

CHAPTER FOUR

The trip across the ocean was an experience. For some unknown reason, the ship stopped at Nova Scotia before proceeding to England. February is one of the worst months for any ship to be sailing the North Atlantic. The sea was rough. There were constant storms.

The *Empire Rapier* was armed with two 40-millimeter guns on each side, at the front and back, and also a 90-millimeter gun at the stern. It wasn't a Navy ship, so it had a limited crew. Troops were assigned to man the guns on rotating shifts of four hours. Those manning the guns fared better than a lot of the others because of the fresh air. Many men got seasick. For those who felt up to going to the galley for meals, it was a struggle just to keep their trays from sliding all over the metal tables.

The forward guns were unmanned for much of the time because the waves washed up onto the bridge. The stern rose and fell so dramatically that it was nearly impossible to keep anyone on that gun, as they soon got sick. They finally gave up and manned it only on calm days, which were rare.

Simms wondered why they weren't traveling in convoy. One consolation was that with the seas so rough, the enemy submarines would stay deep. He also wondered why he didn't get as sick as some of the others, since he hadn't done any boating to speak of.

Simms decided to look up his friend Duncan and found him sprawled out on his bunk.

"How's it going, Denny?"

"Todd, I've never been so sick in my life."

"You should try to eat something, even if it's just a slice of bread. You should go up on deck and get some fresh air."

"Just the thought of eating makes me sick, and besides, I can't hold anything down."

It was one of the calmer days, and a lot of the men were on deck when someone yelled, "There's a ship coming behind us!" The men rushed to the railings and saw that the ship was about to overtake them. As it pulled even, Simms heard someone say it was the *Queen Mary*.

The *Queen* was loaded with troops, and many of them were on deck. There was a lot of yelling and waving back and forth. The big ship passed them as if they were standing still. She had been completely painted gray for camouflage

purposes. Simms later learned that the *Queen* was nicknamed “The Gray Ghost.”

As the *Empire Rapier* neared the English coast, a British corvette sailed out to meet them and escorted them to the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, near the city of Glasgow. The troops disembarked and were marched to a waiting train whose cars were smaller than American train cars. Simms wondered how they were going to fit with all of their gear, but the gear was loaded in a boxcar, and soon the train was rolling through the pretty, heathered fields of Scotland and into England.

The men learned they were assigned to the Fourth Armored Division, which was attached to the XX Corps of the Third Army under the command of General George S. Patton.

The train eventually reached Marlborough, a small town in the south-central part of England where the troops unloaded and were taken to a newly built camp outside of town. This camp was similar to the barracks at Camp McCord, except the barracks in England were one story and covered with yellow stucco while the ones in Camp McCord had walls made of 1-by-8 boards covered with tarpaper.

After a few days, a contingent was sent to pick up the vehicles that had arrived in Liverpool.

The troops thought they had finished with training, but they spent the next two months with refresher courses such as deployment and rifle range, and they attended some new classes on detecting and disarming various types of land mines. They also learned how to detect snipers and boobytraps.

The men were allowed passes into town, but with so many units around, there were limited evenings that each unit could go, and then there were only so many passes. Very few went to London or the other cities because of the bombing raids. Marlborough was a nice town with a movie theater, pubs, teahouses, bakery shops and other stores. The people were friendly, and on Saturday nights they would host a dance on the second floor of the town hall. The GIs were able to dance with some of the local girls there.

The USO had set up a club in one of the houses. The men could go there and read or listen to music or play games like ping-pong.

Simms and Duncan liked to go to a pub called The Royal Arms and visit with the local people and have mug of stout beer or play darts, a popular competitive sport in England.

Simms had quite the collection of characters in his platoon. Among them were “Snuffy” Smith, who had a knack for getting into trouble and had done his share of KP; Howser, the rumor-monger; and Stinson and Fuller, the wheeler-dealers and foragers, who could scrounge up anything. In fact, Stinson was so good that the supply sergeant soon had him on his crew. There was also Mason, who had been a reporter for a New York paper, and Billings, who had been a school superintendent in upstate New York. Simms couldn’t figure out why the Army had sent him to an infantry outfit, but that was the Army’s way.

There were a few incidents. It seems Lieutenant Conrad had to go to town to pick up “Snuffy” Smith and Martinez at the military police station. Some major had reported them for not saluting him across a narrow street. Smith complained: “I didn’t know I had to salute across a street.”

An embarrassing incident happened one day. An announcement came over the loudspeaker that everyone without exception from “C” Company was to fall out in front of the barracks. After they were assembled, Swanson said, “Men, the reason you are here is that a lady from town claims she was raped by a GI last night. She is going to look you over, and I hope no one here is guilty.”

An MP captain escorting a woman approached, followed by two more MPs. She checked everyone in the lines. Fortunately, no one was picked out of the “C” Company lineup.

In early May, Simms and the rest of the platoon sergeants and officers were called to Swanson’s office.

“Men, have the company pack up because we are moving out again. What I’m about to tell you is secret, and the men are not to know yet so there are no leaks. Hitler knows General Patton is in, so he probably figures Patton will lead the invasion. But the First Army is going to do the landing, and the Third Army is going to be ‘Operation Decoy.’ We will be moving to a point near Dover on the southeast coast of England, at the closest point to France. We are going to do everything to make Hitler think that is where the landing will be. That’s all, men. Get the men ready to go.”

The 35th Infantry Regiment was transferred to the coast where they proceeded to put Operation Decoy into effect. They put fake landing crafts on the shore, set up tents and inflated rubber tanks and vehicles. The idea was taken from the big balloons in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. They collected anything they could find – empty crates, lumber, empty gas cans and other scrap items – and hid

them under tarps so they would look like ammo dumps. The Fourth Armored Division even sent some tanks to drive around as if they were on maneuvers.

Simms and the men had just covered up a fake dump when someone called, "Attention!" Everyone came to attention as three jeeps approached. Affixed to the front end of the first jeep was a small sign signifying the rank of a three-star general. Up front was Patton with his polished helmet and pearl-handled pistols, and in the rear seat, Eker, the regimental commander. In the second jeep was the battalion commander, James, alongside Swanson. The third jeep carried three GIs and a 50-caliber machine gun.

The general's jeep pulled up beside Simms.

"How's it going, sergeant?" Patton asked.

"Very good, Sir. I hope this does the trick."

"I'm sure it will. One of these days we're going over there and kick that Nazi SOB's ass. What have you got under the tarp, son?"

Lifting the tarp revealed an accumulation of old ammo boxes, crates, old tires and various vehicle parts that Fuller had gotten from the battalion motor pool.

Patton smiled and said, "Keep up the good work, men," and saluted as they drove off. The rest of the officers also smiled and saluted and followed Patton.

"Cripes, the old man himself. Wait till I write my father. I wonder what he was doing here?" Fuller mused.

"Well, you know this is all a fake. He probably made an appearance in case there are any spies around."

At night, they heard the sound of bombers flying overhead, their destination the coast of Africa. Following close behind were some Douglas C-47 Skytrains, the type of aircraft that held paratroopers.

Conrad later told Simms the planes contained dummy paratroopers that were tossed out with lit firecrackers attached to them to confuse the Germans.

The men were in a direct line of the German V-1 rockets that were fired off from France. Nicknamed "buzz bombs," they were pilotless drones that had only enough fuel to reach the English cities. When they ran out of fuel, they stopped and came straight down.

When the men heard them stop, they headed for cover. The buzz bombs had small wings on them, so the British pilots learned that if they flew alongside of them and put their wing tips under the wings of the bomb and lifted, they

could change the course and turn some of them around in the direction from which they came. Some of them splashed in the English Channel.

CHAPTER FIVE

It was the morning of June 6, 1944. Simms had just emerged from his tent when Corporal Snyder rushed up and said, "Sarge, I just got the news that the First Army has crossed the channel and is landing at the beaches."

Simms went to Conrad. "Is it true, lieutenant? They're landing at Normandy?"

"It's true, Sarge. The old man said it's a real slaughter. We are losing a lot of men, but they are on the beaches. I understand we might be going soon. The captain is back at battalion right now."

A week later, Conrad called for Simms.

"Sarge, have the men pack up. It's our turn to go. The battalion is going over in advance of the regiment. We will be going by convoy to Southampton to board a ship."

The battalion boarded the ship, which sailed across the English Channel. As they neared Utah Beach, Simms was standing at the rail with Conrad and Miller. Miller was older than the rest of them. The men affectionately called him "Pappy."

They could see the wreckage of the landing vessels and tanks and equipment scattered on the beach.

“My God!” Simms exclaimed. “That must have been rough. I’m glad we weren’t in it.”

“The captain says we lost about eight thousand men on D-Day. That’s counting the landing troops, glider men, paratroopers, Navy men and aviators. Omaha was worse, and I hear General Bradley was thinking of pulling them off the beaches and sending them in at the British sector. When we land, tell the men to get off the beach right away, because some German planes still strafe the beach. We will be going inland about a mile and setting up until the rest of the regiment arrives. I understand the troops are about ten miles inland now.”

The ship dropped anchor, and the men climbed down rope ladders into landing craft that took them to shore. They quickly went inland and found a field.

The fields in Normandy were surrounded by tall hedges with lanes cut around them. The early troops had a hard time fighting through the brush. When they encountered enemy fire, they didn’t know if it was a sniper or a group of the enemy. The lanes had been mined, so the Allied tanks avoided them and tried to drive through

the brush. But it was so thick that the tank would rise up, and the exposed underbelly made an easy target for German bazookas. Some smart sergeant figured out a way to attach bulldozer blades to the front of the tank so it would plow through, and the infantry would follow.

The first night there, German bombers came over and dropped flares and bombs. Luckily no one was hurt. The next day, they were strafed by a German Messerschmitt Bf-109. Everybody ran into his slit trench or the ditches by the hedgerows. A private from "B" Company was killed when he didn't get to his slit trench fast enough. He was the first of the unit to die in a combat zone.

Fuller got his first souvenir. He found a German Schmeisser machine gun, which the GIs had nicknamed the "burp" gun because that is what it sounded like when it was fired.

When the rest of the regiment arrived, the units went inland to link up with the First Army. On the way, they saw parachutes in trees, in fields and even some hanging from telephone lines. They also saw gliders that had smashed into poles in the fields. There were no bodies, as the Graves Registration Service had collected them. A soldier is issued two dog tags that hang around his neck on a chain, with

his name, serial number, religion and blood type. One of them is taken by Graves Registration for the record.

After linking up with the First Army, everything was prepared for Operation Cobra, the breakout into Normandy. Hundreds of bombers came over and saturated the area in front of the American lines. Some of the planes dropped their bombs short, killing hundreds of GIs including U.S. General Lesley McNair. Some of the men were so mad, they even fired on their own planes.

After the bombing, the troops attacked. Part of the First Army was sent north to capture the port city of Cherbourg, which was needed for unloading supplies and tanks. Meanwhile the 35th Infantry Regiment headed south across the peninsula. "C" Company got its first taste of combat. The men performed well as a unit.

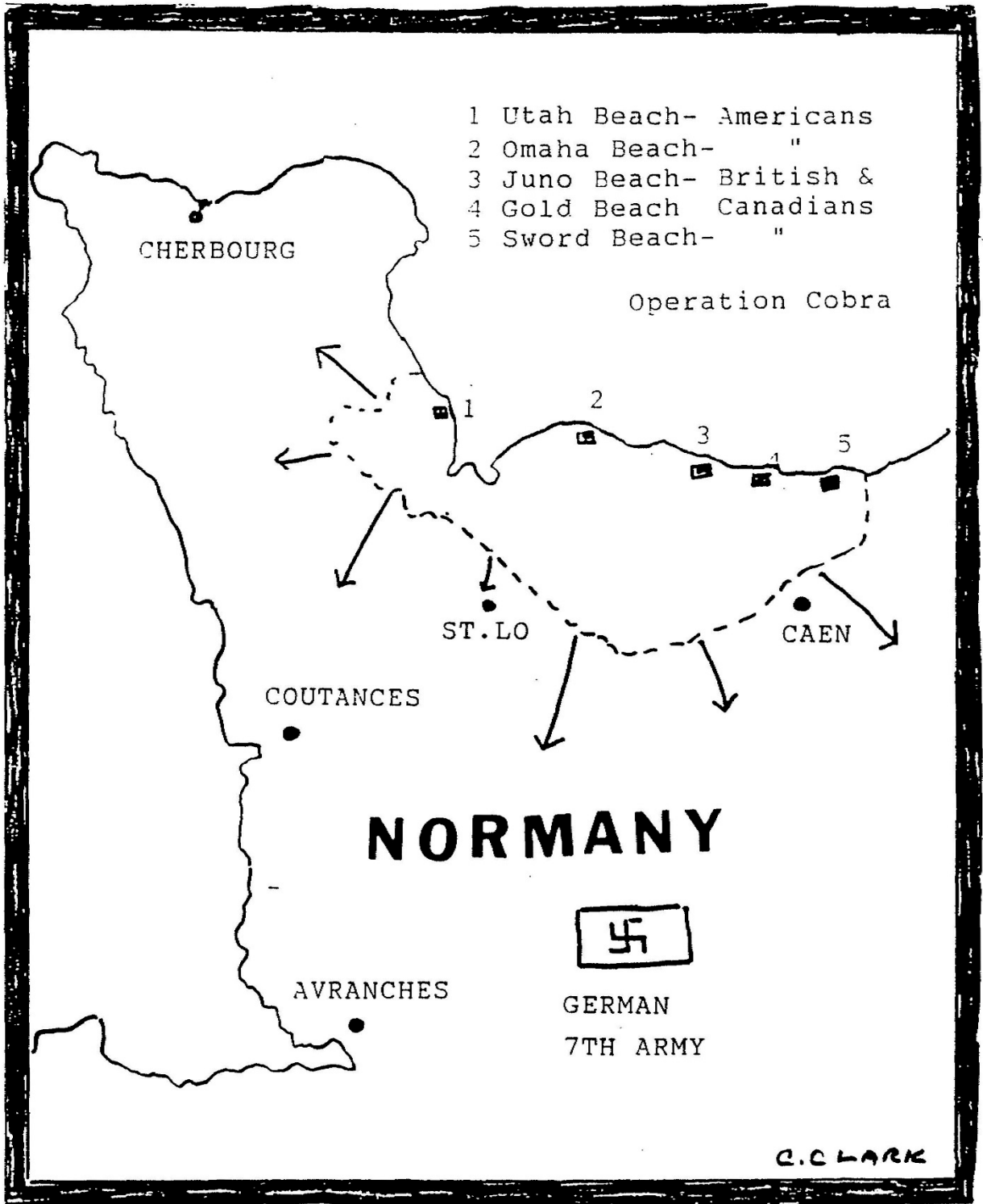
Whenever the Germans retreated, they usually left snipers as a delaying action. Three men of the battalion were killed by snipers.

"C" Company had just gone through the town of Coutances when the men came across a gruesome sight. The area was open and had a road that went down a slight hill with a couple of curves in it. There were about twenty vehicles bumper-to-bumper, and they were all burned.

Bodies were scattered around, and there were even some charred men still sitting in the cabs.

American fighter planes had caught a convoy of retreating Germans. Some of the trucks were still smoldering, but there were no wounded in the area, so some must have escaped and taken the wounded with them.

The company pushed south to Avranches. It was here that the tanks of the Fourth Armored Division caught up with them and prepared to attack the city.



CHAPTER SIX

The entire German Seventh Army was sitting at the bottom of the Cherbourg peninsula with orders from Hitler to hold the area at all cost. After the Fourth Armored Division and 35th Infantry Regiment liberated Avranches, they headed into France and advanced about ten miles when the Germans attacked and tried to cut them off to the sea.

The French Second Armored Division, along with part of the U.S. First Army and the British on the north, together with artillery, bombers and fighter planes, combined to stop the Germans. Meanwhile, the Fourth Armored Division circled around to get behind them. Canadian and Polish units were to circle from the north, but they were stopped and couldn't close the trap.

The Germans fought hard, but they finally decided to retreat and get out of the trap. When it was over, the Germans had suffered some ten thousand casualties; another forty thousand were taken prisoner, and they had lost about five thousand vehicles. But thirty thousand of their men managed to escape.

Patton's strategy was to go around the enemy and trap them, which the tanks did quite often. This created pockets of the enemy, and it was up to the infantry to "mop up" or clear them out. Sometimes the enemy fought hard, and other times they surrendered when they realized they were surrounded. On occasions when "C" Company made good time, they had the luxury of riding in trucks instead of walking.

Sometimes they would walk through towns that the Germans had vacated, and the local citizens would line the streets, cheering the Americans and giving them flowers, wine and kisses. They were finally liberated.

In one town, the men of "C" Company noticed a crowd gathered in the town square. As a sign of shame, they were shaving bald the heads of women who had collaborated with the Germans.

They also noticed some Frenchmen who were wearing the armband of the French resistance, escorting some other men out of town. They knew what was going to happen, but they didn't interfere.

"C" Company was situated in a wooded area just off the road. The men were having their evening chow when a pretty blonde French lady, followed by five Frenchmen,

walked into camp. The woman had a pistol on her hip; the other five were armed and wore the red, white and blue armband with “FFI,” or French Forces of the Interior – the resistance fighters. They had stopped by to tell the Americans there was a German unit in the next town.

They were invited to eat. During the meal, it came out that the woman was Madame Clavel, and her husband was commander of the local battalion of Free French. She was deputy commander.

The French resistance had been helpful to the Allies by furnishing them with enemy locations and other information, and by sabotaging or ambushing enemy troops. During D-Day, they had cut the main telephone lines, preventing the German generals from communicating with their troops and getting status updates. They also blew up ammo dumps, railroads and bridges so the enemy couldn’t rush in troops to counterattack.

The next day, when “C” Company approached the town, the men drew fire. It was a small town with about 20 houses on each side of the road. The first platoon took one side of the road while the second took the other. The third stayed in reserve. If they tried to go down the street, they were fired upon, so they had to take it house by house.

The first platoon managed to get near the first house when a bazooka man fired a shell through the side window. When it exploded, two men rushed up and tossed a couple of grenades through the window. Meanwhile two other men kicked in the back door, tossed more grenades, then entered and cleared the house. The bazooka men would then enter the house, break out a window on the other side and fire a shell through the window of the next house.

This same procedure was followed at each house. At about the fourth house, Private Wendall was charging through the door when he was shot and killed by a wounded German. Snyder quickly threw in a grenade, taking out the German. They had covered about half the town when the enemy decided it had enough and fled in trucks.

As the troops approached the last two houses along the road, they discovered the Germans had taken all of the civilians who remained in town and herded them into the two houses.

“My God, I’m glad we didn’t have to blast those houses,” Snyder said.

The troops were heading toward Paris. The men thought they should soon be able to see the City of Lights. They were disappointed to learn the French Second Armored Division

was going in. The Second had come over as a unit of the Third Army. The Allies had been afraid Hitler would destroy Paris. Hitler actually ordered the German general in charge of Paris to burn the city before pulling out, but the general was an art lover, so he disobeyed the order. The French people in Paris liberated most of the city themselves.

“C” Company veered south of Paris and continued across France.

The tanks had created a large pocket. Sergeant Carter of the third platoon had taken a jeep and three men and proceeded up a road to find the point of resistance. There was a sudden burst of gunfire. Allard gave out a cry of pain, and the jeep was riddled with bullets. Everyone bailed out into a ditch beside the road. They could hear a German yelling, “Amerikaner, surrender.” Allard had been hit in the arm.

“It looks like they got us, Sarge,” Melton said. “There’s no way out of here.”

“Yeah, I guess we don’t have any other choice.”

Carter took out a white handkerchief and waved it above his head. Then they all stood up with their hands over their heads. Germans quickly surrounded them, picked up Allard and marched them to a town about a half-mile away.

It was a small town. Near the center was a wooden building with two large doors. It looked like a garage. The men were ushered into the building, and the doors closed behind them.

Carter decided Allard needed medical treatment, so he started banging on the door. "I want to see an officer!" he yelled.

The door opened and a couple of Germans came in. One of them hit Carter with his fist, knocking him to the floor. Then they left.

Hours later, the men were taken to a building that looked like a town hall. A German captain sat behind a desk.

"Sergeant, you are our prisoners. I speak English, so there won't be any problem with communication. What unit are you with?"

"We will only tell you our name, rank and serial number. But I will tell you one thing you might not realize: This town is surrounded, and the troops will be coming in shortly. If you care about your men, you will give up. I have a wounded man who needs medical attention, and Fritz over there will be tried for brutality to a prisoner."

"I could have you shot. No one would ever know."

“That wouldn’t be wise, Captain. If the troops come in and find out you executed us, those of you who are still alive will be tried as war criminals.”

Carter could see the captain was mulling it over. The captain spoke to one of his men and gestured toward Allard. Carter could recognize the word “doktor,” and Allard was taken out. Then he motioned to the rest of the men, and they were taken back to the garage.

“What do you think is going to happen, Sarge?” Orton asked.

“Well, they can’t take us anywhere because they are surrounded. I don’t believe they will shoot us. My guess is, the captain will send some patrols to find out if I’m telling the truth.”

Allard was returned with his arm in a sling. He had been treated by a doctor.

About four hours later, the men were again hauled before the German captain.

“It looks like you were correct, Sergeant,” he said. “I care about the men in my company, and I am going to release one of your men who will return to your unit and inform them that in two hours, we will assemble at the south end of town, unarmed, and we will surrender.”

Two hours later, the captain ordered his company into the street where they piled their weapons in a stack. With the American prisoners leading them, they marched to the south end of town.

The German troops were surrounded by “C” Company. Carter noticed the German who had knocked him down. He turned to one of the GIs and asked to borrow his rifle. He pointed it at the German and could see the look of terror in the man’s face. The German kept repeating, “Nein, nein.” Carter handed the rifle back to the GI and smiled as he walked away.

The company of German prisoners was taken to a POW camp. Carter later received the Bronze Star.

CHAPTER SEVEN

It wasn't just being in a firefight with the enemy that was stressful to a front-line man. It was also the other dangers they had to face. It could be a sniper, a hidden machine gun, a camouflaged tank, land mines, artillery, or being strafed by an enemy plane.

The Germans seemed to have a passion for land mines. On the Normandy coast, they had planted thousands of mines on the beaches, on obstacles in the water, and in the fields behind the beaches. When they retreated, they continued to plant mines. There were mines that would explode when a vehicle ran over them, and there were anti-personnel mines. One of them was the "Bouncing Betty." When you stepped on it and then stepped off, it would pop up and explode and scatter pellets. It might not kill you, but it would do a lot of damage to your legs or lower section.

Twice "C" Company was strafed by American P-47 fighters. The men couldn't understand that, since they were moving east, unless the pilots thought they were retreating Germans. Their vehicles had a white star on them. Someone

suggested they were captured planes being flown by German aviators.

It was past Paris that “C” Company ran into one of these obstacles, and it was a day Simms would not forget.

The French resistance had reported some enemy personnel in the woods. The first platoon cleared the woods on one side of the road while the other platoons cleared out a larger section on the other side. As Simms’ unit came out of the woods and entered a clearing, there was a burp of machine gun fire. Welby, Jenks and Kendall crumpled to the ground. Everyone dove for whatever cover they could find and managed to get behind some trees for protection.

Kendall was moaning, so Private Flynn, the medic, yelled, “Give me some cover fire! I’ll try to pull him back.”

The machine gun sat on a knoll about fifty yards away and off the road a bit. Evidently it was placed there to ambush any vehicles that came along. As the men opened fire, Flynn and Smith rushed out and dragged Kendall to safety behind the trees.

Simms landed beside Conrad. “It’s too far for grenades, and the mortar won’t do us any good,” Simms said. “They would have to get out of the woods for us to use it.”

He scoured the terrain. He noticed a ditch that ran along the road and ended in a culvert about thirty feet away. Turning, Simms said, "Lieutenant, that ditch looks deep enough to give me cover. Everyone cover me – I'm going to try to make it."

Conrad called to the men. "Snyder, you and Fuller mount rifle grenades. When they shoot, the rest of you men start firing."

As soon as Simms heard the firing, he rushed toward the ditch and almost reached it when he felt a jolt in his side and head. His helmet flew off, and he fell to the ground. He thought, *maybe if I lie here a minute, they'll think I'm dead.*

When the platoon resumed firing, he grabbed his rifle and dove into the ditch. He was hurting, but he managed to crawl near the point where he thought the enemy was hiding. He stopped to rest, because he was in pain, but in a few moments he could look over the edge of the ditch. He saw he was within grenade distance. Removing two grenades from his belt, one after the other he pulled the pins and lobbed them over the knoll. As the blasts went off, he heard a scream. He scrambled out of the ditch and ran to the knoll and emptied his clip into the hole. He needn't have bothered, because the grenades had done their job.

Motioning the men to come forward, he suddenly grew dizzy, blacked out and collapsed.

Snyder was the first to reach him. He yelled, "Medic, Sergeant Simms has been hit, and it looks bad."

Conrad arrived, and then Flynn, who said, "I did what I could for Kendall, but the other two are gone."

"Get busy with the sergeant, Flynn. Peters, get me CP on the radio."

Peters reached Swanson at the command post. Conrad told him what happened. He said he would need two jeeps equipped to carry two litters each, because there were two dead and two wounded.

Swanson ordered Miller to send up the jeeps. Then he told Jensen to collect Simms' and Kendall's gear so they could be sent with them when they were taken to the field hospital.

When Simms woke up, a doctor was standing beside his bed.

"Hello, Sergeant. How are you doing?"

"Outside of hurting, I'm OK. How bad was it, Major?"

"You were lucky. The bullet glanced off of a rib and went out the side. You lost a lot of blood, but it was a clean wound. You should be all right in a couple of weeks. You

also had one glance off your helmet. I imagine it gave you one helluva headache.”

“How is Kendall, Sir?”

“He had a badly damaged leg, so he was sent back to England to a hospital. He’ll probably be sent home.”

After a week, Simms was able to get out of bed and wander around. He visited other patients and ate in the mess tent.

He was reading a book one day when the major came to his bed and said, “Well, Sarge, it’s been two weeks. How are you feeling?”

“I’m bored to death, Major.”

“OK, then, I’m going to release you. But don’t do anything strenuous for a few days. Do you feel up to taking a ride?”

“Yes, Sir. Where am I going?”

“Tomorrow morning you and some other men are going to be transported back to regimental headquarters, and when you get there, you are to report to Colonel Eker.”

The next morning, Simms and eight other men boarded a truck that ferried them to the regimental command post. The headquarters was in a schoolhouse. Simms walked in and saw a sergeant sitting behind a desk.

“Hi, Sarge. I’m Sergeant Simms. I was told to report to Colonel Eker.”

“Hello, Simms. Just a moment. I’ll tell him you’re here.”

The sergeant disappeared. When he reemerged, he said, “OK, you can go in now.”

Simms walked into the office and saluted.

“Sergeant Simms reporting, Sir.”

The colonel saluted back and got up from his desk. He walked around and put out his hand.

“So, you’re Sergeant Simms? I’m glad to meet you. Do you have any idea why you’re here?”

“No, Sir, I haven’t.”

“Well, Sergeant, tomorrow we are going to have a ceremony in the field out there, and we are going to present some medals to a group of heroes. Your captain recommended you for the Silver Star, and you will also receive the Purple Heart. Plus, I have another surprise for you. You are going to be commissioned as a second lieutenant. Do you have any objections?”

“No, Sir. Thank you, Sir. This is a surprise.”

“I’ve been reading your record, and you have had enough experience and training, so I guess we can bypass Officer

Candidate School. Are those the only clothes you have, Simms?”

“Yes, Sir. These were washed at the hospital, but I guess my other shirt was ruined.”

“We’ll take care of that. We can’t have our officers looking scruffy.”

Calling for the sergeant to come in, he said, “Floyd, take Simms to the supply room and tell the sergeant I said to give him some new clothes. Then find a place for Sergeant Simms to billet for a couple of days.”

“Simms,” he said, turning, “after the ceremony, take a day. Then report back to battalion. Captain Swanson has asked for you back to ‘C’ Company. It seems Lieutenant Conrad was killed by a sniper.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, Sir,” he said. “Lieutenant Conrad was a good man.”

“Congratulations on your promotion, Simms. We will see you tomorrow.”

The next day, Simms and forty other men lined up in a field and received their medals. After everyone had been honored, Simms was asked to step forward and was sworn in as a second lieutenant. Eker pinned the gold bar on his collar, stepped back and saluted, then held out his hand.

“Congratulations again, Lieutenant. A photographer has been taking pictures and will see that you get some to send home.”

Later, Simms wrapped up the pictures and the medals and sent them home.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Second Lieutenant Todd Simms hitched a ride to battalion headquarters on a truck with ten replacements. He didn't tell them he had been in combat, because he didn't want to be bombarded with the question, "What is it like?" He learned that two of them had been air cadets, and there had been so many that the program was cut back. The men were given a quick course in infantry training and sent overseas as replacements. Simms felt sorry for them. He hoped they would make it.

As Simms rode along, he thought about Conrad. The enemy snipers especially looked for the shiny bars on the front of helmets. They must have thought that if the leader was killed, the men would be confused. They didn't anticipate the ingenuity of the American GIs. It got to the point where some front-line officers would put black tape or mud over their bars. Patton heard about it and stopped it, saying, "If you're not proud enough to wear the bars, you don't deserve them."

The company commanders were told to recommend anyone they thought would make a good officer. Those

selected were sent back to Officer Candidate School for six weeks. Then they returned to the front lines.

At battalion headquarters, James arranged to have a jeep and driver take Simms to “C” Company, which was now in the village of Latour, about forty miles west of the fortified city of Metz.

Simms learned that everything had come to a standstill because the supply lines were so long that the units had outrun the supplies and gas. The tanks and other vehicles were close to running on empty, so they had to wait until more could be brought up.

As Simms entered the house that was being used as the headquarters, Miller greeted him.

“Welcome back, Lieutenant, and congratulations. It’s nice to see you up and around.”

“Thanks, Pappy. Is the captain in?”

“He’s in the other room.”

Simms entered the room and Swanson rose to greet him.

“It’s great to see you, Todd. Congratulations.”

“Thanks, Captain. I was sorry to hear about Lieutenant Conrad.”

“He was a good man. We are all going to miss him. You will be taking over our old platoon, but there have been a

few changes. Snyder is now platoon sergeant, and Smith is a squad leader. We lost Adams and Kelly, and Billings is no longer with us.”

“Was Billings killed, Sir?”

“No. It seems someone in his hometown got hold of some congressman and asked why a school superintendent was an infantry private. The wheels started turning, and it seems someone had misclassified him. He was sent back to corps and put in military government. That’s a unit that goes into a ruined town or city and helps the people get the place back to normal. He was made a lieutenant in order for him to have some authority, and a week later they made him a captain.”

“That’s great. I always wondered why he wound up with us. Where is the platoon located, Captain?”

“They are in the last two houses on the street. Your quarters will be the next house over.”

Simms looked up his friend Duncan to say hello. Then he hiked to the platoon location, and as he walked through the door he heard someone yell, “Hey! It’s Sergeant Simms! I mean, Lieutenant Simms.”

Then someone called, “Attention!” out of respect, because it isn’t done in a combat zone.

“At ease, men.”

They crowded around him.

“Congratulations, Lieutenant. Are you taking over this platoon?”

“Yes, Sergeant Snyder, and you, too, *Corporal* Smith.”

“Lieutenant. These four men are Mentry, Danning, Hills and Monroe. They came in last week.”

One of them said, “We have heard about you, Lieutenant. Glad to meet you.”

“Thanks, men. Listen to these veterans, and they will help you make it.”

The nights were growing chillier. One evening, Simms noticed Fuller wearing a new Mackinaw instead of the long wool coat he had been issued. He was also carrying the new type of machine gun that the men had nicknamed the “grease gun.”

“Fuller, where did you get the jacket and grease gun?”

Well, Lieutenant, I had a German Luger pistol, and one o’ them new tankers wanted it real bad. So, I swapped the Luger for the jacket and grease gun.”

“What did you do with your rifle?”

“I gave it to Howser, Sir. His was always jamming.”

That evening, as the men were settling in for the night, they heard a burp from a machine gun. Everyone grabbed his weapon and helmet and rushed outside, expecting an attack. Simms spotted Duncan.

“What is it, Denny?”

“They say it came from that house,” he replied.

Simms spotted a group of men standing in front of the house. As he approached, Snyder said, “It’s Fuller, Sir. He was cleaning that grease gun, and the thing went off. Bullets were coming through the wall. It’s lucky no one was hurt.”

Simms went inside and located Fuller.

“Fuller, you get rid of that damned grease gun before someone gets killed,” Simms ordered. “I’m sure you can find a rifle somewhere.”

“Yes, Sir, Lieutenant,” Fuller said.

The Germans had retreated into the city of Metz. The Fourth Armored Division was positioned between “C” Company and Metz, so there was no fear of an attack. “C” Company was notified there would be a USO show at battalion headquarters, and they could leave a skeleton crew behind and go see the show. They had enough gas, so the men went by truck. The battalion headquarters was two

miles back. There, they were entertained by Jack Benny, Dinah Shore and Martha Tilton, plus some musicians and dancers.

The USO show brought the men a little bit of “home.” They had been getting homesick, missing their families and girlfriends. Some evenings, they would sit around and talk about their friends and the things they missed such as hotdogs, hamburgers, steak dinners and ice cream sodas. Whenever they received a package from home, they shared any cookies or other goodies.

The men enjoyed receiving letters from home, but writing home was a problem. The mail was so heavily censored that outside of saying they were OK, there wasn’t much they could talk about. They couldn’t say what city they were in or what they were doing there or even mention the weather. They couldn’t say anything that would give the enemy any idea where they were or what unit they belonged to.

Patton was fuming because his army had run out of gas even though the supply lines were so long. He suspected a lot of the gas was given to British General Bernard Montgomery for his paratrooper attack on the Dutch town of Arnhem, which turned into a complete disaster.

There apparently was a rivalry between the two generals. Both were flamboyant characters, “Monty” with his arrogant manner and Patton with his harsh, “Let’s go get them SOB’s” style. Patton considered Monty a prima donna who was moping because he didn’t get General Dwight Eisenhower’s job as supreme commander. Patton also believed Monty resented him for stealing some of his glory in North Africa, and he thought Monty was too slow because he kept stopping to straighten up his lines. It was what Montgomery called “tidying up.”

Patton considered the British to be capable soldiers but thought their leaders were too cautious in battle. He was glad Monty didn’t get the top job because he wouldn’t turn them loose on the enemy as Eisenhower and Bradley had done. Otherwise his troops might still be sitting outside of Paris.

Patton cut quite the image with his pearl-handled pistols, polished helmet, riding pants, boots and swagger stick. Despite being a showman, he was respected by the men under his command for his daring, his strategy, and his fearlessness in visiting the front lines. His method was, “The faster you move, the fewer the casualties.”

His Third Army earned the reputation of a hard-hitting, fast-moving unit that overran or simply went around the enemy and confused them. In fact, the XX Corps under the command of General Walton H. Walker – which the 35th Infantry Division was a part of – was nicknamed the “Ghost Corps” by the enemy because they never knew where its units would appear.

The front lines were finally able to get the needed gas. P-47 planes landed at Reims, carrying five-gallon cans of gasoline that were loaded onto trucks from the quartermaster truck companies and rushed to the front. The trucks had red balls painted on the sides and were known as the “Red Ball Express.” They had priority on the roads.

The units received the gas, filled their vehicles and prepared for the attack on Metz.

The mail had been delivered from battalion headquarters. The men gathered around as the company clerk stood on the hood of a jeep and read the names on the envelopes. Todd Simms’ name was called. It was a letter from his father. It read:

Dear Todd,

We were sorry to hear about you getting hurt, but we were glad you weren't disabled and hope you have fully recovered. Congratulations on your promotion and your medals. I have your picture on the wall in the store and your medals in a frame beside it. It is quite a conversation piece. People who knew you when you worked in the store ask about you.

Your mother and I are doing fine. The store is OK, but it is hard to get some supplies. The war has brought people together. Everyone is so patriotic and friendly. There is a shortage of many things, but people aren't complaining. Gas is rationed, and we have to have a coupon to get gas. There isn't much traffic, and nobody takes pleasure rides. I bought a bicycle to ride to work, and sometimes I walk, but if it's raining or snowing, I carpool with our two neighbors. We take turns driving.

It's almost impossible to get new tires. Good used ones cost as much as new ones did. I take

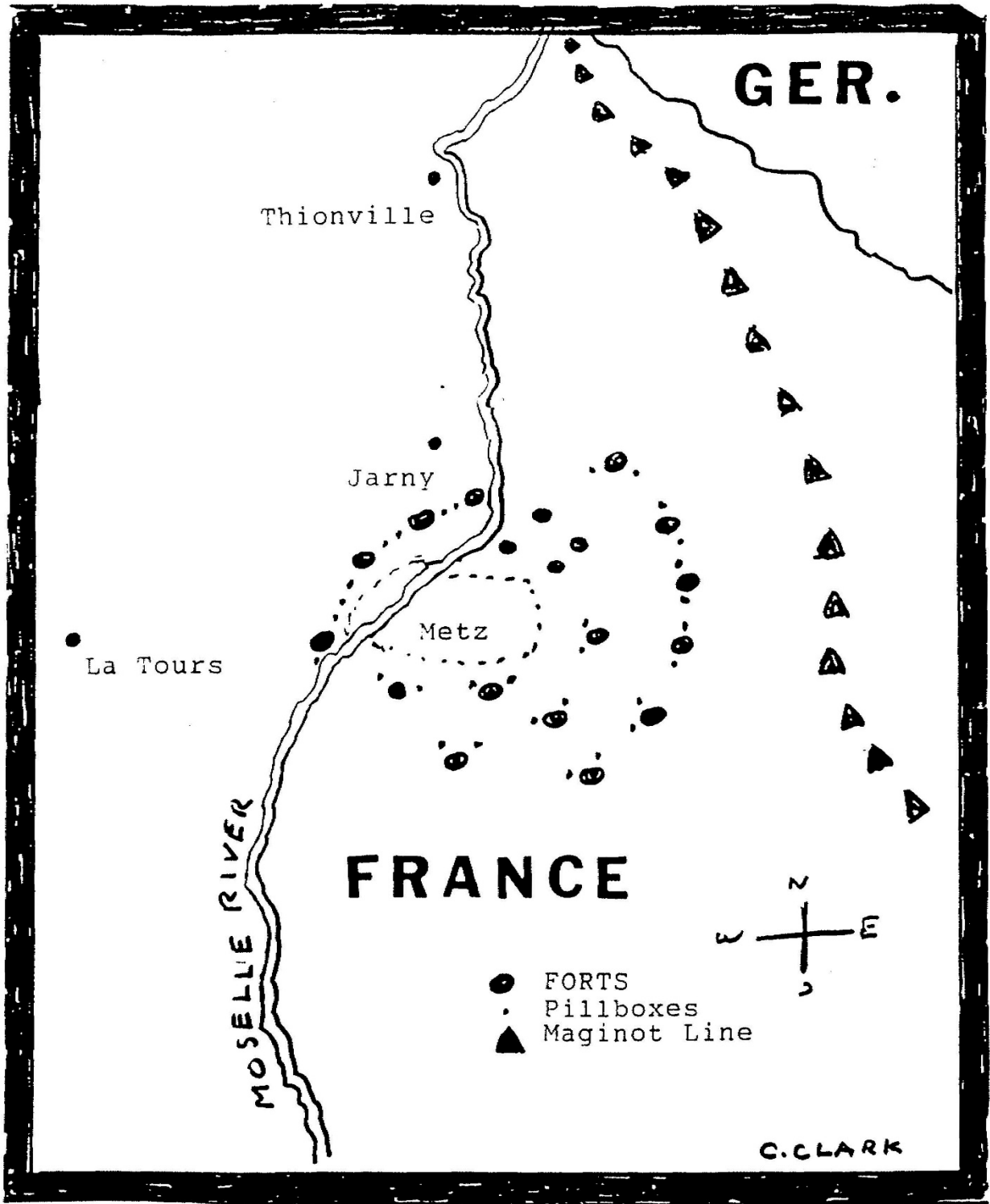
your car out of the garage once a week and drive it about a mile to keep it up. There is a defense plant in Rochester where quite a few people from here work, but they have a special bus.

Two of your classmates, John Wise and Henry Becker, were killed in the Pacific, and Ralph Thomas came home. He lost a leg in a place called Guadalcanal. I know it's hard to write anything with the censorship, and you can't tell where you are, but we listen to the news on the radio and hear about the Third Army, so we just about know where you are. We go to the movies occasionally and see the newsreels, and they show the battles. Every time we see a picture of a group of soldiers, your mother says, "That looks like Todd." We saw a picture of Bing Crosby entertaining the troops, and your mother swears it was you sitting in the first row.

There are a lot of victory gardens around, and we have one in our back yard that your mother takes care of. She has planted tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, peas, corn and rhubarb. We remember how you loved rhubarb pies.

We are proud of you, son, and we worry about you. Be careful.

Love,
Mom and Dad



CHAPTER NINE

The French city of Metz was near the German border. It had been built by the French to protect themselves from Germans. The city hadn't been sacked in 1,500 years and was part of the Maginot Line. When the Germans breached the Maginot Line and France surrendered, they were able to walk into the city without fighting for it.

The area around Metz was heavily fortified. It was ringed with twenty-eight forts that sat on hills about six miles from the city. The large forts were set into the ground with revolving turrets housing 110-millimeter guns. Around the forts were pillboxes, and in front of the forts were tank trenches, coiled wire, and infantry emplacements.

There were four larger forts with 210-millimeter guns – two in the front, north and south of Metz, and two in the rear. These forts were encircled with iron fences, and they also had pillboxes.

Tunnels connected the whole area with a communication center in the city. It was manned by two divisions of troops that were well stocked with supplies and ammunition.

The area was bombed and shelled by artillery and tanks, but these didn't make a dent in the seven-foot-thick concrete walls. The only thing such attacks accomplished was to drive the infantry into the forts.

To get into Metz, the American troops first had to take the forts in front of the city. The armored divisions went around the area to prevent any more enemy reinforcements. The Third Army could have bypassed the city, but that would mean they would have to leave two divisions to contain the area, and they were needed for the drive into Germany.

Several units were assigned to the forts. "C" Company was given Fort Dijon, one of the large forts. As Swanson and the platoon officers were observing the fort from behind a knoll, Duncan said, "This is impossible. We will lose a lot of men, and even if we get to the fence, they will cut us down."

Simms asked, "Captain, do you notice what's on the roof?"

"Yeah, it's a ventilator shaft. What about it?"

"Well, if we could get up on that roof, we could drop some explosive charges down it."

"That's a big 'if,' Todd."

“Captain, I have an idea. Could you get an engineering officer up here, and also a tank, and ask the Air Force to send over a couple of fighters with those new napalm bombs? Tell them we will let them know when to come in, and we’ll make an arrow out of the ID panels pointing to the fort.”

An engineering officer arrived, along with a tank. Simms explained the plan and suggested they bring a ladder and some Bangalore torpedoes to blow the coils of wire.

“Yes, we can get you all of that,” the officer replied. “But I think you had better let my men cut the wire and take care of the explosives, because they have more experience.”

Simms approached the tank. “Sarge,” he asked, “can you blow out the gate on that front iron fence and then get out of here? Because you will be an easy target for that big gun.”

The tank rolled up to the top of the knoll and with three shots knocked the gate off of its hinges. Then it quickly left the area. When the engineers arrived with the supplies, Simms said, “OK, we’re ready, Captain. Send up the troops and notify the planes that they can come in.”

Two P-47s came into view. One after another, they dropped the bombs. Fire spread over the area of the forts.

The searing heat forced the men to retreat into the tunnels where they stayed for a while, expecting more.

The engineers blew the wire and cut what was left. The platoons rushed in. While the engineers were climbing to the roof, the infantry threw grenades into the gun holes of the pillboxes. The charges were dropped down the shafts. With these explosions, the Germans in the fort who weren't dead surrendered.

The word passed to those attacking the other forts, so the same procedure was used. After the forts were taken in front of Metz, the troops entered the tunnels and went from fort to fort, throwing hand grenades. Howser and Shibelli, two of the original members of the first platoon, and two new men were killed when a German soldier threw a grenade around a corner.

Now that the troops had eliminated the forts in front of Metz, the way was clear to enter the city. Each battalion was given a sector of city blocks to neutralize. "C" Company got the main street going into town.

As they approached, it was evident they would be met with stiff resistance. They were informed there was a shortage of large artillery shells, which meant they would have to fight through the city with rifles, grenades, mortars,

bazookas and tanks, building by building. If heavy fire was coming from a building, a tank was called up to blast it.

In three days the city was cleared.

The 35th Infantry Regiment was relieved by another unit and sent back to rest and restock supplies and replacements. "C" Company was stationed in the small town of Jarny, just northwest of Metz. While there, the men managed to take get back to battalion headquarters for a USO show featuring Bing Crosby and Marlene Dietrich. Marlene was gorgeous, with her blonde hair and long, shimmering silver gown, while Bing was a regular guy who visited and played cards with the men.

Part of the first platoon was located in a small schoolhouse. The rest of the company was located in other buildings, and the command post was in the city hall. One night, the men were awakened by a loud blast near town. The Germans had a 280-millimeter railroad gun that was hidden in a tunnel in a hill. It was on tracks behind a movable house that sat on the tracks in front of it. By day, the tracks were camouflaged. On that particular night, the gun fired on towns up and down the line. When a shell hit, it made a hole the size of an intersection.

When the gun zeroed in again on Jarny, a shell landed behind the schoolhouse. The concussion lifted the roof and blew in part of the back wall. Everybody headed for the cellar in the city hall. The burst killed one guard at the motor pool, but the only person hurt in the schoolhouse was Nugent, who was hit in the head by a piece of plaster. He was treated by the battalion doctor and returned to the unit with a hell of a headache. It could have been worse.

One shell landed near Patton's headquarters, and although the fighter planes didn't fly at night, he ordered some up to watch for flashes from the gun. It was located and the next day bombed out of existence.

A few days later, Simms was approached by Snyder.

"Can you come with me, Lieutenant?"

"Sure, Sarge. What's up?"

"It's Powell, Sir. He's been acting strange, and he finally broke. He says he can't take it anymore."

Simms and Snyder walked into the room. Powell was sitting in the corner, hugging his knees and sobbing.

"We'll have to send him back. I'll notify the medics and Captain Swanson."

Simms remembered Powell as the meticulous one at Camp McCord. He was always neat and constantly polishing his shoes. He also remembered Swanson standing him up on a coal bin in front of the barracks at reveille one evening and saying, "This is what a good soldier should look like."

You never can tell about a man in combat, Simms thought. "Snuffy" Smith, who always got into trouble, turned out to be a good combat man.

Later Simms was sent back to corps headquarters where he was presented with the Distinguished Service Cross for his ingenuity, which saved a lot of lives that would have been lost in taking the forts.

The Metz area was finally cleared by December 1. Entering Germany was next.

CHAPTER TEN

It was December 17 when “C” Company heard about Germany’s breakthrough into the Ardennes, about a hundred miles to the north. Twenty-five German divisions led by Panzer tanks had broken through along an eighty-mile front and were advancing rapidly.

The Ardennes was a heavily forested, hilly area with narrow roads. It was an unlikely place for an attack. It was being used as a rest area for troops who had been relieved from the lines. Also stationed there were units that had never seen combat.

The breakthrough formed a bulge in the lines, so it was called the Battle of the Bulge. The attack was a surprise – but actually it was the fault of American intelligence. Civilians had reported tanks and troops there, but the brass didn’t take them seriously. They thought the enemy was simply moving some tanks around, and they didn’t think the Germans had that many troops. In fact, Hitler had been pulling troops from both fronts and moving them into the area under cover of darkness.

German tanks poured into the area. They overran the American troops and at one point even captured a division headquarters. Using captured jeeps, English-speaking Germans disguised in U.S. Army uniforms infiltrated the American lines to commit acts of sabotage, cut communication lines and spread false reports to create panic. They had been given orders to kill at will.

The weather was bad. It was snowing. Under overcast skies, the American troops could get no air support. German tanks headed for the Belgian city of Bastogne, the crossroads of the main routes the enemy needed. The paratroopers of the U.S. 101st Airborne Division refused to surrender, so the German tanks skirted the city.

The Germans no longer needed it. But since Bastogne was a symbol of American resistance, they blasted the city with tank and artillery fire.

Haste was made to send troops to the Ardennes to stop the Germans. Hitler's idea was to drive to the Port of Antwerp and split the American and British lines and cause confusion among the Allies. He intended to concentrate on the British in hopes they would quit the war; then he could try for a separate truce with the Americans.

When Eisenhower and Bradley heard about Bastogne, they asked Patton how long it would take to send some troops to rescue the trapped men. The answer took them by surprise: Just four days.

In one of the greatest military moves in history involving so many men, Patton diverted four divisions from the Third Army and sent them north. Among them were the Fourth Armored Division and the 35th Infantry Regiment.

The weather was frigid, and although Simms was from New York state and knew all about cold and snow, he never felt so frozen. *I hope I never see snow again*, he thought. When the men stopped, they collected wood and threw gasoline on it, then stood around the fire for warmth.

They also dried their socks and gloves. If you didn't change your socks often, you regretted it. Fifteen men from "C" Company were sent back with frostbite.

Although the mess sergeant was able to send up some coffee, meals consisted of K-rations, which were small boxes that contained a hard chocolate candy bar, a small pack of cigarettes, a small roll of toilet paper, some crackers and a round can either of meat or cheese. For breakfast it was a can of ham and eggs; for lunch, cheese; for dinner, a can of Spam. For variety they switched the meals around. For a

hot meal, they would heat the cans of meat on a vehicle's motor. Non-smokers would swap their cigarettes for a candy bar.

The men heard about the massacre near the town of Malmedy in Belgium. Panzer tanks had captured a field artillery unit and herded it into a field, then mowed down the soldiers with machine guns mounted on the backs of trucks. The Germans then went through and executed the wounded, shooting them in the head. Some GIs managed to escape back to the American lines and reported the slaughter.

As at the Ardennes, the Germans used special units of English-speaking troops in American uniforms with captured jeeps to commit acts of sabotage and create confusion. Duncan and his men had heard about these units and had an experience with them one day. The platoon was traveling up a snow-covered road in the Belgian woods when they heard the sound of an oncoming vehicle. They scattered into the forest. A jeep came down the road with a captain and three GIs in it. It was suspicious, because no one should have been ahead of them except possibly some tanks. Duncan and the men stepped into the road, raised

their weapons and told them to put up their hands. A couple of Duncan's men relieved them of their guns.

The "captain" stood up and barked, "I order you to get out of our way, Sergeant. Can't you see we are Americans?"

"Well, you look like Americans, but why are you coming from that direction?"

"We got lost," the man replied.

"What outfit are you with, Captain?"

"The 225th Engineers. Now will you get out of the way? Or I will have your stripes."

"Captain, what baseball team is the Bums, and what league are they in?"

"I don't know, Sergeant. I'm not a baseball fan."

"Everybody should know that's the Brooklyn Dodgers." Turning to the driver of the suspicious vehicle, Duncan asked, "Who's married to Betty Grable?"

The driver glanced at the captain and finally said, "Clark Gable."

"Wrong answer. Everybody knows she is married to Harry James."

Turning to one of the men in the back seat, Duncan asked, "Who's famous for singing 'White Christmas?'"

The man smiled and said, "Der Bingle."

He instantly realized his mistake.

Duncan could see the look of frustration on the captain's face.

“Another wrong answer. The Germans are the only ones who call Bing Crosby ‘Der Bingle.’ Everyone out of the jeep, and put your hands behind your head.

“Costa and Wylie, check them for more weapons. Captain, you sit on the hood of the jeep, and you other three get in front of it.

“Costa, you drive the jeep, and Wylie, you get in with him. Moore and Cramer, march these men back to the company CP, and if they make any sudden moves, shoot them.”

The prisoners were taken back to the company command post, then to the battalion command post where they were interrogated and officially determined to be Germans. Duncan never knew what happened to them. Because they were wearing American uniforms, they could be shot as spies.

The Third Army pushed toward Bastogne and ran into the elite Fifth German Paratrooper Division that was preparing to attack the city. It was an angry and determined group of GIs who remembered the massacre and fought the Germans until they gave up and retreated.

The Fourth Armored Division finally reached Bastogne. The Third Army had cut the German supply line, so the German tanks couldn't get any gas or reinforcements. The Germans decided to get gas from American storage depots, but these were blown up before they could reach them. As the tanks ran out of fuel, their crews abandoned them and started walking back to Germany.

There was a lot of heroism at the Bulge. Cooks, clerks, truck drivers and many others became infantrymen and delayed the Germans until the Allies could rush troops up to stop the attack.

Two days after Christmas, the fog lifted and the skies cleared enough for supply planes to drop ammunition and materiel at Bastogne. Fighter planes attacked the tanks that were still running, and the Germans retreated. They had penetrated sixty miles.

On January 16, the battle was over and the front lines were back to their original position.

The 35th Infantry Regiment was ordered back to the location outside of Metz where they stocked up on supplies and replacements.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

The company spent the rest of January in Jarny. The men could relax.

One day, Swanson informed his officers that a wash and laundry unit had set up outside of town so the men could get their clothes cleaned and take a shower. Simms took his men and found that the unit was set up in a big, circus-like tent with water trucks outside and a generator truck to run the machines. It was cold outdoors but warm inside, so the men took a shower while their clothes were being washed.

It was the first shower the men had in months. The front-line GI wasn't always the cleanest guy in the world, especially if he was on the move. There weren't always the facilities to clean up. In the larger cities, the water usually wasn't working, and the smaller towns were usually on wells. Company trucks carried five-gallon cans of water, so if they had time, the men could fill their steel helmets with water and take a sponge bath or shave. If they happened to be near a stream long enough, they could take a quick bath and wash their clothes and underwear.

The steel helmet was one of the handiest items a GI had. He could wash out of it, sit on it, and use it to protect himself from rain or flying rocks in an artillery barrage.

The men wore khaki shirts and pants called ODs (olive drab) when they were overseas. Their green fatigues, or work clothes, were left in the states. Since the Germans had used gas in World War I, the men were issued stiff, chemically treated fatigues and gas masks in the states. But when they found out gas wasn't being used this time, these items became excess baggage and conveniently got lost.

It seems every unit had someone who had been a barber or at least knew how to cut hair. They could make a little extra money giving the GIs a haircut. Private Gates of "C" Company had been training to be barber. When he arrived in camp and found there was no barber in the company, he sent home for his equipment. He got plenty of practice.

In February the weather warmed up and the snow cleared away. The 35th Infantry Regiment crossed the Moselle River and entered Germany.

One of the first obstacles they met was the famous Siegfried Line. The Germans hoped it would stop the Americans. It was a series of pillboxes with rows of dragon's teeth in front of them. Dragon's teeth were pointed concrete

blocks with land mines scattered between them. In front of the dragon's teeth were deep trenches to trap tanks.

Allied tanks fired smoke shells in front of the pillboxes to block the view of their occupants while the engineers disabled the mines. Then the infantry pushed through and reached the pillboxes, eliminating them by tossing grenades or satchel charges through the gun holes.

The engineers blew up enough dragon's teeth to make a lane for the tanks. A tank with bulldozer blades filled in a section of the ditch so the rest of the tanks could follow.

The first platoon of "C" Company was patrolling a road when the men noticed a group of barracks in a clearing. Surrounding the barracks were guard towers and a wire fence. As they approached, they heard yelling and cheering. A group of men poured out of the barracks, and some ran out the gate to meet them.

They had come across a prisoner-of-war camp. As Simms entered the gate, he could see they were Americans. He asked a POW who was in charge.

"Major Howe, over there, Lieutenant," the GI said.

Simms walked up to the major and saluted.

"Good morning, Major. I'm Lieutenant Simms."

“Hello, Simms. Are we glad to see you. The Germans took off and left us, but we knew you were coming, so we decided to stay here.”

“How many men do you have here, Sir?”

“There are two hundred thirty-five, and there are about twenty in the barracks over there who are sick and wounded. The Germans didn’t feed us very well, and the guards kept all of the Red Cross packages.”

“I will notify the CP, Major, and we will get you some help.”

Simms contacted Swanson at the command post and informed him of the situation, telling him they needed food, medical assistance and trucks to transport the POWs.

The captain called to the company clerk: “Jensen, get me Colonel James at battalion. Then tell the mess sergeant to fix a couple of big containers of coffee and soup and bread, enough for a couple of hundred POWs about three miles up the road, and tell him to have someone take them up.”

The captain told James about the POW camp and asked for medics and more trucks. The colonel said he would send them up and needed to have someone at the command post tell them where to go.

Leaving the first sergeant to direct the people from the command post, Swanson drove to the camp. The other two platoons had joined the first and were milling about, sharing their K-rations and cigarettes. When Swanson walked into the camp, Simms introduced him to the major.

“Hello, Major. We have some food, medics and trucks on the way, and there should be some coffee here shortly. We’ll get you people out of here soon.”

“That’s great. It’s been a long time since I had a good cup of coffee, and I can imagine the men feel that way, too.”

“I see you are a paratrooper, Major. How long have you been a prisoner?”

“Since June 6, when we dropped into France. There are some others here, too. We also have some men who were captured in Belgium.”

The POWs were transported to a field hospital where they were treated and given a good meal.

Many of the cities and towns that “C” Company went through were nothing but piles of rubble from the bombings and artillery assaults. Those with residents still living in them had white sheets hanging out the windows as a sign of surrender. In France, the GIs had often slept outdoors, but in Germany, they stayed in houses when they could.

In early March, Swanson informed Simms that his friend Duncan had been wounded and sent back.

“How bad is it, Captain?”

“The medic says it was a wound in the thigh, but it didn’t hit a bone, so it looks like he will be all right.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Americans pushed the Germans back to the Rhine River. They expected the Germans to cross and make a stand there, but many enemy units were captured before they could get there.

The Rhine was about 2,000 feet wide at the planned crossing point near Mainz. The higher brass had been planning the assault on the Rhine even before D-Day, so they had scale models and knew practically everything there was to know about the river: the width and depth, when the river was high or low, and the best places to cross. Assault boats and bridge sections were ready, and when the troops reached the river, these items were called up. The assault boats belonged to the Navy and were to be manned by sailors who were 600 miles from the sea.

While the artillery gunners shelled the opposite shore, the assault boats with the platoons of “C” Company and other units motored across the river. They received some fire, but not as much as they expected.

When they landed, they discovered there weren’t too many Germans there. A lot of the enemy had been captured

on the other side. The units fanned out to secure the area while the engineers began assembling the bridge from Mainz. It was put together in twenty-four hours and was the longest tactical bridge ever built in Europe.

Tanks and troops poured across the bridge and proceeded east. Fearful the enemy might send some floating mines down the river to blow up the bridge, some of the soldiers were stationed in boats upstream with orders to shoot anything in the water that looked suspicious. Anti-aircraft units were stationed at both ends of the bridge to fire at any attacking planes.

Hitler had built a superhighway across Germany mainly so his troops could move faster toward the country they were going to invade. He probably never realized the allies would use his Autobahn for the same purpose. When American troops reached the city of Frankfurt, they continued east on the Autobahn.

“C” Company rode on trucks that followed behind the tanks. When the highway overpassed cities or towns, it was up to the infantry to clear them.

At one point, the first platoon was going down a road into a town while the other platoons came in from the other side.

As the unit drove around a curve, it was fired upon from the direction of a wooden church at the edge of town.

“Is anyone hurt?” Simms yelled.

The answer was “No.”

Snyder called over to Simms: “Lieutenant, it came from that bell tower. We can’t get close enough because there is no cover.”

“I know it, Sarge. It’s too far for the bazooka, and too close to call in artillery. And the tanks are too far ahead. Send someone back and have the truck come up. Then have someone fire to protect the truck.”

Each platoon had its own ton-and-a-half truck so that when the troops cleared a town, they could catch up to the tanks. Another company would clear the next town, so they would leapfrog.

Each truck had an opening above the cab with a 50-caliber gun on a swivel ring. When the truck arrived, Simms pointed out the church steeple to its crew. When they started firing, they could see splinters flying from the wooden steeple and heard bullets hitting the bell.

Snyder took a squad of men and rushed the church. The man in the truck stopped firing. There were no more shots from the steeple, so the squad took the cue to enter. Snyder

climbed the ladder to the tower and found a dead enemy sniper. He collected a prized souvenir that day: a specially made sniper rifle with a scope.

The Autobahn headed north. “C” Company and the tanks got off and headed east.

As the first platoon was exploring a road off of the main highway, the men saw some buildings with guard towers and a wire fence around the perimeter. They thought maybe it was another POW camp, although some of the buildings were larger. They could see a smokestack. They weren’t fired upon, so they entered the camp. There was a sickening smell. They couldn’t believe their eyes. The Germans had gunned down about 250 prisoners before they fled. Clad in striped clothes, the bodies looked like skeletons.

They soon discovered the ovens with the bones still in them, piles of ashes next to the ovens, bodies stacked on carts and in sheds waiting to be cremated. They also saw skeletons in lime pits.

The men were used to seeing dead bodies, but this made a number of them physically ill.

Simms wondered, *how can people treat other people like this?* Some of the men finally realized why they were fighting the Nazis.

The prisoners had slept in wooden tiers in barracks. There were only about 75 survivors, and some were too sick to get out of their bunks.

Simms contacted Swanson and told him what they had found. The captain called James at battalion headquarters, and the word was passed all the way up to Eisenhower. Medical help was sent, and after seeing that the prisoners were being cared for, the first platoon continued on.

Simms found out later that Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton and Walker had come to the camp, along with Eker and James. Eisenhower called for every news reporter to come to the camp because the world should know what the Germans had done.

All adults in a nearby German town were forced to march through the camp, and all men from the town were made to dig a mass grave and bury the bodies. The town mayor and his wife committed suicide.

The troops learned that the Germans used all kinds of tricks. Spies in civilian clothes infiltrated the lines to check on American positions. They strung wire across roads to decapitate jeep drivers. German planes dropped propaganda leaflets advising GIs they wouldn't be home for Christmas – which everybody already knew. They even

boobytrapped their own dead. German bodies would be left lying for months because no one wanted to risk moving them.

There was also Lord Haw-Haw, who broadcast on a German radio station. In a British accent, he would identify Allied units and their locations. He also tried to make the GIs homesick by playing American music and telling them their wives were cheating on them and they'd soon receive a "Dear John" letter.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The men had seen a lot of death and tried to put it out of their minds. It was worse when a friend or someone you knew was killed – or civilians such as those in the camps. You might be talking to someone one day, and the next day they are not around and a new face shows up in the unit. You have to go on, but in the back of your mind, the thought is stewing: *Will I be around tomorrow? When is it my turn?*

“C” Company had been moving along fairly well. The men engaged in some skirmishes when they were clearing out different areas, but they noticed they were encountering older men and teenage enemy soldiers. The older men usually gave up easily because they really didn’t want any part of the fighting, but the boys were a problem. They had been brought up in the Hitler Youth program, and it had been drilled into them that the Nazis were superior beings. So they fought hard.

The first platoon was on patrol when Snyder called out: “Look, Lieutenant. There’s a jeep coming up behind us, and he looks like he’s in a hurry.”

As the jeep approached, they could see two men in it, and when it reached them, Miller hopped out.

“Lieutenant, I could have called you, but wanted to tell you personally. I have some bad news. Captain Swanson, Corporal Jensen and Private Dill were killed a while ago. They were going over to ‘B’ Company when their jeep hit a land mine. I notified Colonel James at battalion, and he wants you to come back there. If you will drop me off at the command post, the driver will take you to battalion.”

“Oh my God,” Simms exclaimed. Turning to Snyder, he said, “Take over, Sarge. I’m going back to the CP.”

Once they had dropped off Miller and were driving to battalion headquarters, Simms asked the driver his name and what platoon he was with.

“Private Carey, Sir,” the driver replied. “I’m from headquarters. I was a replacement. I’ve have been with the company about three weeks.”

When they arrived at the battalion headquarters, Simms noticed they were serving the noon meal.

“You’d better get something to eat, Carey. I’ll look you up when I’m ready.”

Simms went to James’ office, which was located in a house.

“Hello, Sir,” he said.

“Good afternoon, Lieutenant. I guess you have heard the sad news.”

“Yes, Sir. It was quite a shock.”

“Well, Simms, the reason I called you back was because I want you to take over command of ‘C’ Company. I know you can handle it.”

“Yes, Sir. Thanks for the confidence, Sir.”

“The job calls for a captain, and I happen to have some captain bars here.”

James removed the bars on Simms’ collar and replaced them with the new bars. Shaking Simms’ hand, he said, “Congratulations, Captain.”

While driving back to the company, Simms considered whom he would make his company clerk. And he would need to select a driver.

Miller was working at his desk when Simms entered.

“Congratulations again, Captain,” the older man said.

“Thank you, Pappy. Will you send for Privates Mason and Fuller and have them report to me?”

The men reported in. “We were told you wanted to see us, Sir.”

“At ease, men. Mason, I understand you were a reporter, so you probably know how to use a pencil and typewriter. I need a company clerk, and I would like you to take the job.”

“Sir,” Mason said, “it would be a relief to get off the line, but I don’t know what it involves.”

“Well, the clerk at ‘B’ Company can probably teach you the procedures.”

“Yes, Sir. I’ll take it, Sir.”

“One of your jobs will be to keep me up to date on the casualties. Sergeant Miller will order the replacements. And by the way, you are now a corporal.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

To Fuller, Simms said, “Fuller, I want you to be my driver. You’ve been on the line long enough. And it’s about time you were a private first class.”

“Thank you, Captain, and congratulations.”

Simms called Miller in and informed him of the changes.

“Sarge, would you send for a replacement lieutenant for the first platoon, and also two replacements for these two?”

A few days later, Mason stuck his head in the door and said, “Sir, there are six replacements outside, plus a new lieutenant.”

“What are you grinning for, Mason?” Simms asked.

“You’ll see, Sir.”

“Send the lieutenant in first, Mason.”

As the lieutenant walked in, he said, “Lieutenant Duncan reporting, Sir.”

“Oh, my God! Denny!” Simms exclaimed. Getting up from his seat, he gave his friend a bear hug. Then he stepped back and pointed at the bar. “How did that happen? And – congratulations.”

“After I got out of the hospital,” Duncan replied, “they decided I was officer material. So they sent me back for six weeks at Officer Candidate School in Reims. I got commissioned and was working in the replacement section at corps when I saw you needed a lieutenant. So I put in for a transfer, and here I am.”

“I have mixed emotions about this, Denny,” Simms said. “I was hoping you would be out of it, but I need an experienced man. You will be taking over the first platoon. They are a good bunch.”

“Stick around while I talk to the new men,” Simms added.

Mason sent the new men to report to the captain.

“Welcome to ‘C’ Company, men. I’m Captain Simms, and this is Lieutenant Duncan from the first platoon. Pay

attention to the older men. They have the experience. Don't try to be heroes. It's a matter of survival, and we hope it's going to be over soon.

"You two will report to Lieutenant Duncan's platoon," he said, pointing. "You two will report to the second platoon, and you other two will report to the third platoon. Sergeant Miller will show you where to go. That's all, men. Good luck."

Duncan was smiling as the men walked out.

"Some pep talk, Todd, but it seems to me that awhile back, you were sent to the hospital and got some medals."

"That was different, Denny. We were pinned down, and I had no choice."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The first platoon wasn't prepared for another shock. They were moving so fast, they quickly came upon another concentration camp. Some of the German guards didn't have time to escape, so a lot of them were captured.

The prisoners looked the same as at the other camp, but this camp was bigger, with cement buildings, a tall chimney and barracks. Duncan called Simms, who sent up the other platoons and notified battalion headquarters.

Some of Hitler's SS men and guards had fled into the woods, but they were rounded up. Some had tried to change into prisoner clothes, but the trick didn't work. They were obviously too well fed, and the real prisoners didn't hesitate to point them out.

The troops saw the big shower rooms where captives thought they were being taken for a shower but instead were gassed. They also saw the ovens and bones and torture rooms where people were hung on meat hooks and beaten. There was also a special room with lampshades, purses and book covers that the commandant's wife had someone make from the tattooed skins of the victims.

In each barracks was a “capo.” He was one of the prisoners, but he worked as a trustee for the guards. He was hated by the other prisoners because he would order them around and inform on them, causing them to be beaten or sent to the gas chamber. When the camp was liberated, the prisoners killed the capos with their bare hands. They also killed some of the guards. There were so many retaliatory prisoners that it was nearly impossible to stop them, outside of shooting them. And besides, the troops felt like doing it themselves.

It was a sprawling camp. Simms and some other men decided to walk through it. The building that stood out was a large brick structure with a tall smokestack. This was the crematorium, which held the ovens.

On one side of the camp was a large, white house, landscaped with bushes and flowers and a nice lawn. This was evidently the commandant’s house. Further on were six barracks for the guards. The men searched them and found them empty.

Then they noticed another barracks. This one was wider than the others, so they went in to check it out. It had a hallway running down the middle and doors that went to rooms on each side.

Simms opened one door and saw a pretty girl sitting in a chair next to a bed.

“Do you want to go to bed with me?” she asked as she stood up. She looked hardened but must have been a ravishing beauty at one time.

“No, Ma’am. We’re not Germans, we’re Americans, and this camp has been liberated.”

A look of confusion, then disbelief, then shock moved across the girl’s face. She sat down and started to cry.

Simms realized she wasn’t a prostitute, but rather an inmate who had been forced into subjection.

“We will have someone take you out of here,” he said as he left the room.

Fuller bounded down the hall and called out, “My God, Captain! This place is full of women. They have their own prostitutes.”

“They are not prostitutes, Fuller. They are inmates. Get the men together. We’re leaving.”

As soon as they were relieved by people from battalion headquarters, “C” Company moved out.

About a week later, Simms decided to set up camp in a forest so the men could have a break. They hadn’t see any enemy troops for a couple of days and figured they must be

on the run. The mess sergeant set up a tent and fixed some chow for supper.

Simms had just settled down to eat when a jeep drove up. Colonel James was sitting next to the driver.

“Hi, Colonel. Something up?”

“No, Todd. I just decided to drive up and see how your company was doing.”

“Well, we just decided to bed down for the night and get some hot food. Would you and your driver care for something to eat? The chow line is still open.”

“Thanks. I think we will have some dinner.”

“Snyder, get a couple of mess kits and make sure the guards up front are relieved so they can get some chow.”

As soon as the colonel filled up his mess kit, he sat down beside Simms.

“That sure was a shock seeing those camps, wasn’t it?”

“That was unbelievable. I still can’t get over how people can be so cruel.”

“One of the German captains decided all was lost, so he started babbling about the whole operation,” the colonel said. “He must have been hoping things would be easier for him. It seems Hitler decided he wanted a master race, so he eliminated all of the Jews, whom he blamed for a lot of

Germany's troubles. While he was at it, he included homosexuals and the mentally ill, and he also decided to clean out the jails. The Jews were forced wear yellow stars so they could be identified.

“So much propaganda was put out about the Jews that the German people hated them. Stores wouldn't sell to them. Germans looked down on them and fingered them when they were eventually rounded up. They were told to pack up anything they could carry. Then they were loaded into trucks and trains and told they were being relocated. Some didn't have a chance to pack anything before they were whisked away. Their neighbors had the pick of anything they left behind. Nobody had any idea what was in store for them.

“At first they were put in sealed trucks and gas was pumped in, or they dug big trenches and were shot and pushed in. Hitler decided this was too slow, and besides, it was using up ammunition that the army needed. So Hitler appointed some colonel named Eichmann to start building camps with gas chambers and ovens.

“The captain said he was at a meeting with Eichmann one time and learned there were twelve of these major death camps, mostly in Poland. There were also about 300 labor

camps and holding camps. Even with all of the death camps, they couldn't manage all of the inmates, so they built the holding camps until there was room in the death camps.

“The Jews were packed into boxcars and shipped off. Their luggage went into a special boxcar. Once they arrived at their destination, they were lined up single-file. The healthy-looking men were pulled out. They went into another line and were marched to some barracks. From there, they were shipped to the labor camps and forced to work in production plants or building fortifications like the Siegfried Line or the ones on the French coast. They were worked to the point of exhaustion, and if they collapsed or got sick, they were shot. There was an unbroken stream of people coming in to replace them.

“Everybody else was marched to barracks and told to strip down. They were given striped clothing. Some were marched directly to the gas chambers. All of the luggage was taken to a warehouse, where it was sorted. The jewelry was sold to finance the war. Some of the clothes were used to make German army uniforms. They even took gold from the teeth of the dead.

“If there were any pretty women in the line, they were pulled aside and marched to another barracks under the charge of some cruel German women who told them to cooperate or be killed. I guess when it comes to death or survival, there’s not much choice. They were given dresses and makeup from the warehouse and confined to barracks with rooms where they could service the officers and guards. Some were shipped to houses near army camps so they could service the troops. If any of them got pregnant or sick or didn’t take care of herself, she went to the gas chamber.”

Simms thought about the girl in the barracks and felt sorry for her. He wished he had met her under different circumstances.

“It’s sad to think we might have people in our own country who could be just as bad as that, but the good thing is, the people wouldn’t stand for it.”

“Well, Todd, when you’re a dictator, you don’t have those kinds of problems. You have plenty of strong-armed men around to take care of your critics.”

He paused. “Well, I have to get back to headquarters. Thanks for the dinner, and be careful. By the way, after seeing the camps, we have a lot of mad GIs, and I’ve noticed

a drop in prisoners. We need to keep some alive for interrogation.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

More experiences were in store for the troops. One time they came across a Hitler Youth training center and a clothing supply depot. The men stocked up on socks and underwear and even some white fur jackets that were used for winter camouflage. Some got single-shot, 22-caliber Hitler Youth training rifles. Fuller sent two of them home to his nephews.

Another time they slept overnight in a big castle with huge rooms, towers, tapestry-decked walls, fireplaces and oversized tables and chairs. The castle had been used as a German headquarters, and when the Germans left, they took all of the paintings, dishes and silverware away with them.

They also came across an arms depot with crates of brand-new German army rifles and Luger pistols. Almost everyone in "C" Company got a pistol. The rifles they could pick up anytime. The men were allowed to bring one pistol home as long as they filled out the paperwork. The men left them in their gear at the command post because they

wouldn't want to be carrying German weapons if they were captured.

The second platoon liberated another POW camp, only this one had French, Polish and Russian soldiers.

One of the first orders of business when they entered a town with no resistance was to order the people to pile up all weapons, swords or daggers in the street. The men acquired all kinds of souvenirs. The rest were sent back to battalion headquarters. Simms sent his father a 16-gauge, double-barreled shotgun with a gray bone trigger guard and hunting scenes etched into the barrels. "Fuller the Forager" made a deal with the company clerk: Fuller would get him souvenirs if the clerk would wrap and mail Fuller's collection.

In April, as they neared the Czechoslovakian border, they were told to stop and head south into Austria. The Russians were going to take Czechoslovakia. They met more resistance when they turned south but fought through it and keep going.

They passed through Nuremberg, where the war crimes trial would later be held. As they neared Austria, the troops encountered groups of enemy troops marching toward them on the road. They were unarmed and carried white flags.

They didn't want to be captured by the Russians. All "C" Company could do was tell them to keep going, and someone would take care of them. Thousands of enemy troops were herded into fields where they were guarded by GIs in half-tracks. They were slowly interviewed and sorted to determine whether they were wanted for war crimes. Some SS members and senior officers had changed into enlisted men's clothing.

The men of "C" Company had been alerted they might soon meet the Russians, and if they thought they saw them, they were to send up a red flare. As the first platoon was heading down a main road, they spotted some soldiers in brown uniforms in the distance. They shot up a flare. It was immediately followed by a flare from the other side. Cheering erupted as the American and Russian troops rushed to meet each other. There was a lot of backslapping and hugging and happy smiles because they knew it was over in their area. The Russians had plenty of vodka, which they insisted on sharing with the Americans.

Coincidentally, these Russians also belonged to XX Corps. They had American jeeps and trucks, which they had acquired under the Lend-Lease Act, to complement their horses and wagons and Stalin tanks.

Battalion, regimental and corps officers were notified, and before long, General Walker and his staff, together with Eker and James, were being escorted to the Russian headquarters where both sides presented medals to each other and the visitors were wined and dined.

The 35th Infantry Regiment was ordered back to an area below Munich to await further instructions. The battalion set up at the head of a lake that served as a German summer resort, and "C" Company settled into a village down the lakefront. The men stayed in houses; there was dock with a sailboat, a canoe and a boat with an outboard motor. They also found a ping-pong table that they set up in a front yard.

Next to the dock was a small restaurant. The mess sergeant took advantage of the kitchen to prepare hot meals.

The official surrender papers were signed in Reims, France, in April 1945.

The men received copies of the American military newspaper, "Stars and Stripes." One day the cover featured a photograph of Patton and a headline that read, "My boys are ready to go to Japan." It was a morale breaker. There were mutterings like, "He didn't ask us," and "We made it this far; why more?"

The men waited, but nothing happened. When they heard the atomic bombs had been dropped and Japan was prepared to surrender, a feeling of relief swept over them. They wouldn't have to go.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Simms called the platoon lieutenants together for an announcement. “We have been informed that it will probably be a while before we are shipped out. They’re letting us send two men from each platoon, along with two platoon sergeants and two of you, to Paris for a few days. The best way would be to have the men draw two names. You and the platoon sergeants, too. The officers and platoon sergeants who are left behind will take care of the men while we are gone. The colonel said I could go, and we can take a truck and a jeep. We will be leaving in three days.”

Three days later, the ten men loaded their gear in a truck and climbed in. Some had to borrow money or sell a few of their souvenirs. Extra five-gallon cans of gas were bought along in case of emergency; gas should be available from units along the way. Duncan and Haley won their lottery, so they climbed into the jeep with Simms and made their way for Paris.

They stopped at different units to eat and gas up. They spent nights in cities that had a Red Cross hostel. They reached Paris in three days. There were a lot of Americans

in Paris, so the Red Cross hostel there was full. The men were referred to a hotel that was run by the Army for visiting GIs, so it cost them nothing to stay there.

Paris was a beautiful city. It had returned to normal. The men from “C” Company took tours and saw the Eiffel Tower and other sights including the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier from World War I at the base of the Arc de Triomphe. At night they visited the Montmartre section of the city, known for its many nightclubs. The main street was Pigalle, which the GIs nicknamed “Pig Alley.”

They spent three days in Paris before heading back. Kiley from the third platoon fell in love with a French girl and vowed to return for her.

The trip back took another three days, so they were away from their unit for an unprecedented nine days.

Simms reflected on some of the men who were no longer around. Curious, he had the company clerk bring him the various casualty reports. Of the original 175 men in the company, 124 were left. He figured it would be a high total.

The company had traveled roughly 1,300 miles in 279 days of action. The men had been strafed many times, had been bombed and fired upon in artillery barrages, and had

engaged in numerous firefights with the enemy. Twice they had been strafed by their own planes.

Breaking it down further, Simms found three men were killed by strafing, two by artillery, four by snipers, three by a land mine and eight in firefights. There were thirteen wounded, fifteen who suffered frostbite, one nervous breakdown and two who transferred out. That was not counting the eight replacements who were killed or wounded.

While they waited at the lake, "C" Company shared guard duty at a nearby camp for displaced persons. Many people were displaced after the war. Camps were established to give them a place to stay and eat. Supplies were sent in from German storage depots. They were guarded mainly to keep some semblance of order and to keep the refugees confined; otherwise some would sneak out at night and loot the homes in the surrounding area. Eventually they would be sorted out and interviewed because some German officers, SS men and guards would mingle with them in civilian clothes.

The Army sent around a notice asking soldiers to reenlist. Men were needed for the Army of Occupation. A promotion was almost guaranteed. Nonetheless, there were few takers among "C" Company. Most of the men had been

away from home for nearly two years. Snyder decided to re-up, and Simms decided he might stay in for a while but not in Europe. He talked it over with James. He would stay in if he could go home with "C" Company and have three months of leave before assuming his duties. It was agreed, and he signed the papers.

On October 1, "C" Company got the word. They were going home. Some of the new men were transferred to other units. The rest loaded up their gear and were transported to Munich where they turned in their weapons, vehicles and equipment at a storage depot.

The men filed into boxcars and were taken to camp Lucky Strike near the French port city of Le Havre. Many troops were ahead of them, awaiting their turn for passage on a victory ship. Finally "C" Company's turn came, and the men sailed to the States on the *S.S. Hagerstown Victory*.

They landed in New York and were transported to Fort Dix, New Jersey, for processing. They received their pay and their discharge papers, followed by a lot of goodbyes as the men went their separate ways. Simms had been ordered to report to Fort McMahan, Georgia, after his leave.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Todd Simms was finally home. As he walked through the door, his father jumped up out of his chair and gave him a big bear hug. “Mary, our hero is home!” he yelled. Todd’s mother rushed from the kitchen. She threw her arms around her son and started crying. Finally, she asked, “Are you hungry? I’m just fixing dinner.”

They visited for the rest of the evening. Todd had to explain to his father what all the medals were for. He told his father he had decided to stay in the Army for a while. “The store will be waiting for you when you get out,” his father assured him.

The next day his father had to open the store. Todd joined him there for a while and then drove around town to see if there were any changes. Linden, with its population of about 10,000, still looked the same. He got the chance to visit with some old friends.

A few days later, Todd was reading the local paper. It had a picture of him, along with an article about his travels, medals and promotions.

“How did that get in there?” Todd asked.

“Well, Kasco, the editor, was in the store, and I told him about you, so he wanted all the information and a picture. That’s why I took a picture of you with your uniform.”

Todd’s father had saved all of the Life magazines from the war, and as Todd was reading through them, he came across an article and pictures of the concentration camp he had helped liberate. Another magazine had an article and a picture of Madame Clavel, the lady in the French resistance. She and her husband had been awarded honors by the French.

About two weeks later, Todd’s mother was opening the mail and called out to him. “Here’s an invitation to a party at the Duncans’ this Saturday night.”

Saturday night came. As they pulled up in front of the Duncan home at the edge of town, Todd could see it was a large, white mansion.

“Wow,” Todd exclaimed. “I knew he was a retired Marine coronel, but he must get a helluva pension.”

His father laughed. “We have met the Duncans at some affairs. When he retired, he started an investment business in Rochester, but he likes to live here. As you can see, he has done rather well.”

Denny's father opened the door. "Hello again, Mr. and Mrs. Simms, and you must be Todd. Denny always talks about you. I finally get to meet you. Come on in. We'll get you folks a drink and introduce you around."

After meeting some of the other guests, Todd walked out to the back patio where Denny was talking to a pretty brunette. He thought, *Denny is doing really well*. Denny spotted him.

"I'm glad you came, Todd. I want to introduce you to my sister, Cindy."

Todd was speechless. It took him a moment to regain his composure.

"You said you had a sister, but you never said she was so beautiful."

"Denny said you were nice," Cindy said, "but I never knew you were so handsome until I saw your picture in the paper."

Todd spent most of the evening talking to Cindy. Eventually he got up the nerve to ask her out to dinner and movie.

"I'd love to," she replied.

Todd had a few dates in school and after, but he never found the right girl. He dated Cindy a few times and realized she was the one.

“Cindy, I would ask you to marry me, but I’m going back in the Army for a while, and I have to report to Georgia in another month.”

“Todd, you forget I was an Army brat. I’m used to moving around. So, don’t let that stop you.”

“Cindy, will you marry me?”

She threw her arms around him and said, “I thought you would never ask.”

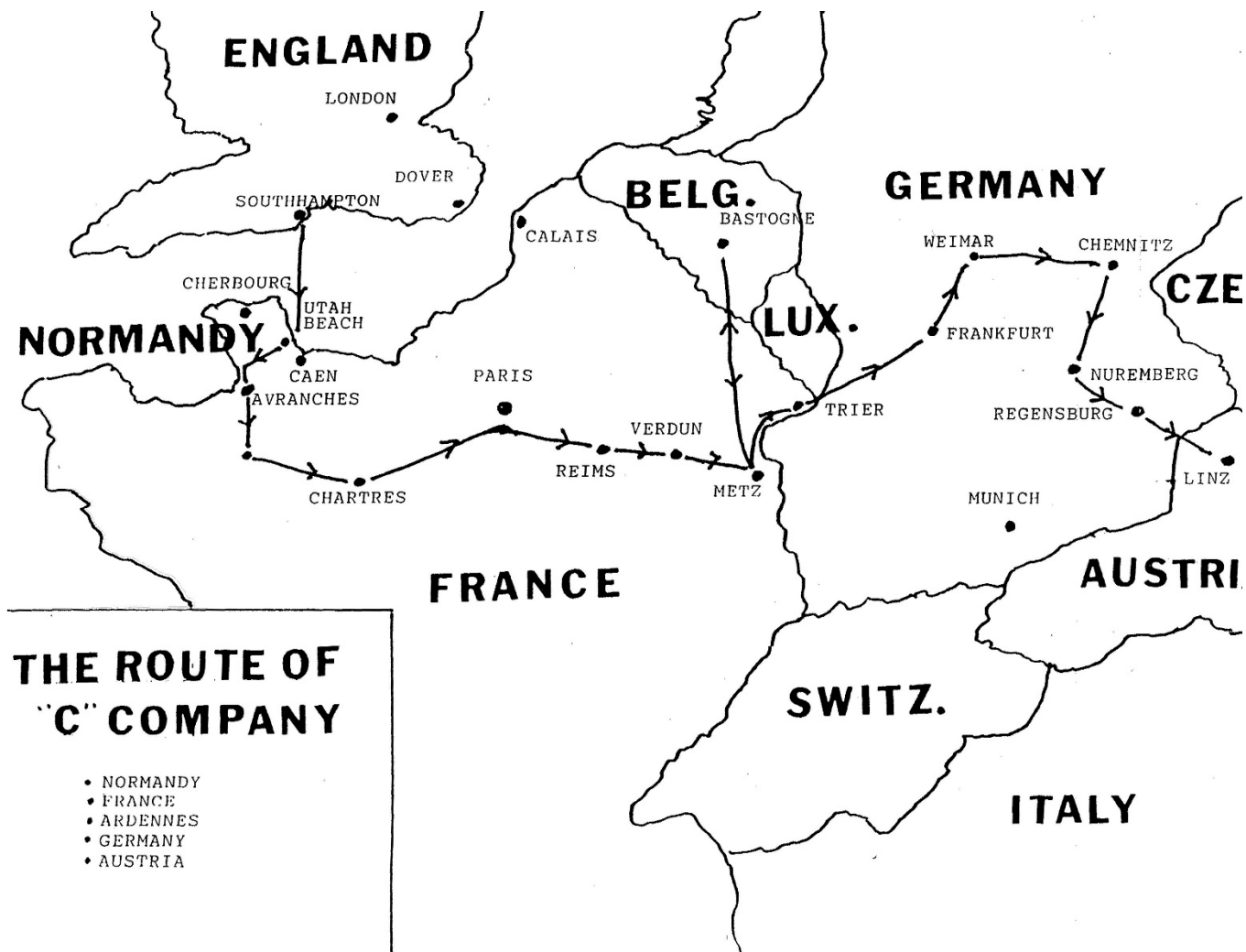
Two weeks later they were married. Denny was best man.

Mr. and Mrs. Todd Simms reported to Fort McMahan. Todd was promoted to the rank of major and given command of an infantry battalion.

During the Korean War, his unit participated in the landing at Inchon. After the unit returned home, Todd decided to leave the Army. He and Cindy moved back to Linden and bought a house. Now his father could retire from the hardware store. Todd took it over.

Todd Simms was a quiet man for whom the small problems of everyday life seemed trivial. He found he could

make new friends and not worry if they were going to be around tomorrow.



AFTERMATH

Lieutenant General Walker became Commander in Chief of all forces in Korea during the Korean War. He was killed by a North Korean sniper.

Colonel Eker retired.

Lieutenant Colonel James eventually became a general in charge of a division.

Lieutenant Duncan worked for his father and became head of the firm when his father retired.

Fuller went to work at a car dealership.

Snyder reenlisted and became a first sergeant.

Mason went back to work as a reporter for a New York newspaper.

“Snuffy” Smith decided to stay in the Army. He was promoted to sergeant.

Powell was released from the psychiatric ward of a VA hospital and committed suicide.

Nichols of the first platoon committed suicide about six months after his discharge for reasons unknown.

Billings, the school superintendent, was discharged as a major and became a college professor.

First Sergeant “Pappy” Miller became a peach farmer in California.

Sergeant Ruen had been transferred to the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS. He parachuted into Yugoslavia and worked with the partisans. He was discharged as a captain.

Kiley went back to Paris, got married and bought a small paint factory on the outskirts of the city.

BEHIND THE STORY

Our battalion trained together, went overseas together, came home together and became a family. Most of the men were from New York state, but we had men from all over the country. The battalion has had a reunion every year since 1947 in various parts of the country. The wives and children became part of the family.



We are getting smaller in number every year. At the reunions, I found out what happened to some of the men.

The following are a few experiences of men in our platoon. These are their real names.

Sergeant Fred Rubin, who did not go overseas with us, was taken into the OSS, which is now the CIA. He parachuted into Yugoslavia and worked with the partisans.

He was discharged as a captain and attended a reunion in New York City.

Private Leonard Baker, the school superintendent, was assigned to military government in Germany and was discharged as a major.

Privates Bob Baker and Fred Allison ran into a German machine gun nest. Allison was shot in the arm. Baker had a bullet pass through the top of his helmet and ricochet down his back. It didn't touch him. He also had some holes in his field jacket where the bullets just missed him. The jeep was riddled with holes, and there were some bullets sticking out the dashboard. We saw the jeep. They were lucky to be alive.

Captured, Baker and Allison were taken to a town that was surrounded by U.S. forces. Artillery started shelling the town, convincing the German captain to give up. He used Baker to negotiate the surrender. Allison was badly wounded and sent home. Baker returned to the unit and told the men how one of the Germans had hit him.

END NOTES

The following is a recap of the XX Corps' accomplishments during World War II. It was known as the "Ghost Corps" because of its mobility.

1. Traveled 1,300 miles in 279 days of action.
2. Captured 431,419 prisoners (43 divisions) and inflicted 89,000 enemy casualties.
3. Spearheaded the Third Army's drive across France to the Moselle River; 600 miles in 28 days. Swept through Germany in 21 days and drove into Austria in 20 days. Captured Metz; first assault in 1,500 years.
4. Pierced the Siegfried Line and captured Trier.
5. Opened the Saar Valley and Palatine.
6. Assisted in the destruction of German Army Group B.
7. Built longest tactical bridge over the Rhine River at Mainz; 1,896 feet.
8. Cut behind the enemy in a 100-mile, two-day drive to Kassel.
9. Led the way across central Germany to Chemnitz, pushing farther east than any other unit.

10. Turned south to attack through the Danube River Valley.

11. Captured German Army Group South.

12. Captured fleeing government officials of Slovakia.

13. Contacted the Russian XX Corps, which had driven straight west from Sebastopol.

14. Fought over 18 major rivers and liberated or captured more than 600 cities, towns and villages.

