

## Recollections of World War II

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March 10, 1916 – March 26, 1996

I have a message which should be told even though there are millions of men with a similar message. No one has written this message in a manner that reflects the ideas or the actions of the enlisted man in World War II. Anyone can read about World War II as written by an Eisenhower, a Patton, or others in high positions but none of them can relate to the experiences of the enlisted man. Perhaps one reason no one has written this message is that we had direct orders not to write about any of our activities while we were in Europe. Does it not seem ironic that we hear so little from so many men? Movies were made and books written about Viet Nam but that war does not compare with World War II or the millions of enlisted men who did their duty there.

My participation in World War II began November 15, 1944. Preparations to get us to the war started May 11 of the same year. Europe was officially a combat zone when we arrived and this was verified by what we saw and heard. As we approached the front by ship and later by truck we were divided and subdivided until we were a small group of perhaps fifteen men who were delivered to as near the front as it was considered safe for trucks to go.

Dad's discharge shows that he arrived in Europe on November 2, 1944 after a 12 day trip by ship. It took about 2 weeks for him to get from Utah beach in Normandy to his Company located in Many, France at that time. The Company F Morning Report lists, Valie Hotz, Sam Ellis, Joseph McInerney, and Thaine Hogue among a group of 64 replacements assigned on November 15. At full strength a Company has 193 men. Company F was down to about half strength (102 enlisted men present for duty) on November 14. On November 16, after the replacements arrived, the Morning Report listed 174 enlisted men present for duty.

It was evening and we were met by two enlisted men from F Company, 317<sup>th</sup> Regiment, 80<sup>th</sup> Division. They told us that from here on we would have only what we could carry on our backs. They said we should leave our duffel bags, put on what clothes we wanted, and put blankets in our packs. They told us to spread our blankets on the grass in the orchard and sleep there. They did not mention the 240 mm cannons 200 yards behind us. We learned about them as soon as darkness came. They fired throughout the night. We knew for sure we were in a combat zone. Fortunately, no artillery came in on us.

Each infantry regiment had 3 battalions numbered 1, 2, and 3. Each battalion had about 870 men at full strength (193 men in each of 4 Companies). The companies in an infantry regiment were lettered A-M. Companies A, B, C, and D were always in the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion; E, F, G, and H were always in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Dad was part of F Company, which put him in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 317<sup>th</sup> regiment.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Dad's unit) was located in Many, France on November 15 when Dad arrived. The Battalion moved to the vicinity of Herny, France on November 17 and remained there until Nov 19. On Nov 20 they moved back to Many and remained there until November 23 (Morning Reports).

It was foggy and wet. It had been raining but that's hardly worth mentioning because it was always raining. There was mud for the trucks to get stuck in, mud for us to walk in, and it looked like mud they were pumping from the stream. Actually, the mud from the stream was to become our drinking water, (There was a picture of this in *Life* or *Look Magazine*). This muddy, damp, cold, and rainy condition was not new. We had seen it all the way from Utah Beach to our present location near the battle for Metz.

*Noncombat casualties, most due to trench foot, roughly equaled combat casualties for the month of November. Moreover, 95 percent of the trench foot cases would be out of action, at least until spring. Part of the blame for the high rate of noncombat casualties must go to the Quartermaster, European Theater of Operations, who had refused to order a newly developed winter uniform for the troops because he believed that the war would end before cold weather came. Not until January was there an adequate supply of jackets, raincoats, overshoes, blankets, and sweaters. As a result, 46,000 troops throughout the European theater were hospitalized, the equivalent of three infantry divisions.*

*Weather and enemy action took their greatest toll among the infantry, which sustained 89 percent of Third Army's casualties. By the end of November, Patton could no longer obtain enough infantry fillers to replace the losses among his rifle units. Manpower planners in the Pentagon had failed to foresee that the battle along the German frontier would be a hard-fought affair conducted in terrible weather and had thus failed to allocate enough manpower to infantry training. Back in the States, tank destroyer and antiaircraft battalions were broken up and sent to infantry training centers. In Lorraine, General Patton "drafted" 5 percent of army and corps troops (e.g. cooks, clerks, and mechanics) for retraining as infantry, and when bloody fighting along the Westwall sent infantry losses soaring, he "drafted" an additional 5 percent. (The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, September-December 1944 by Dr. Christopher R. Gabel, February 1985)*

The next morning we heard the familiar call, "saddle up," and off we went to the next village to join what was left of the Third Platoon of Company F. We were inside a building. It was dry and we could have slept well there. Unfortunately, we were told the replacements (that was us) would take all the guard duty because the men already there just arrived from the fox holes. We spent hours standing on the side of a muddy road, calling "Halt." We stopped every person and jeep that moved and exchanged passwords before allowing them to proceed.

We stayed there four or five days and received some training. I cannot remember the names of any man we met there but I do remember that Hotz and I were assigned the job of scouts. Hotz was assigned first scout and I was assigned second scout. We knew what

scouts did. They went ahead of the larger group to draw fire and allow them time to take cover. A PFC who was acting Sergeant told us that we would all move together and scouts were not sent out front. I don't know if he based that on his own past experience or if he was lying to make us feel better. I never found out because after ten days I never saw him again.

We backtracked about two miles from the village and dug fox holes. They said we would defend this position if the enemy broke through our line at the Battle of Metz which was not far ahead. We were given regular shovels to dig with instead of the entrenching tools we all carried. An officer who arrived with us was surprised to see these shovels and said he had heard in the States they would be available in combat. He should have been surprised - I stayed till the end of the war and I never touched a shovel like that again.

Back to the village and next day we had church even though it was not Sunday. The Chaplain just came along and asked us to get together. Everyone who wanted to go gathered at the indicated building. Church was beginning to look like a very good idea so both Hotz and I went. However, about the time the Chaplain got going good a German plane came over and strafed the street. The Chaplain led us all to the basement. One strafing pass by the German plane and it was over. We waited a while before coming out of the basement. This was my first and last experience of a plane firing at me. The Chaplain finished by saying we could relax; we would not be making an attack soon. That is how he got the reputation of always being wrong and he maintained that reputation as long as I knew him.

We moved forward a mile or so one rainy evening and received orders to dig in. The sergeant came by and pointed to the exact spot for Hotz and me to dig our foxholes. And dig we did; right in a dead furrow of a plowed field. The rains came, ran down the dead furrow, and filled our fox hole. Hotz and I dug and then dipped water. Finally realizing the futility, we moved to higher ground. I decided that our sergeant had never seen a farm and that was his excuse for telling us to dig in a dead furrow. I really can't say what my excuse was but I was learning. I learned other things as well. I learned I could sleep for about a half hour laying in the mud and water. This was better for me than sleeping leaning over my rifle like John Pavelda did. I believe Hotz had no sleep that night. The next day we went back to the village and tried to dry the clothes we had on since we had no change of clothing.

Thanksgiving Day was coming up. I believe this was FDR's Thanksgiving dinner for the troops. He moved it up one week so it would be farther from Christmas. With a lot of publicity it was announced that every military man overseas was to have a good turkey dinner. We had ours in the evening, probably due to the danger of the enemy observing us in daylight.

This was probably November 21 near Many, France because the Company F Morning Report states, "Company held defensive position on hill 284 outside of town during the hours of darkness. During the daylight hours the company came

into town for the purpose of drying clothes and shoes. Weather was cold and wet.”

The night after we left the orchard the Germans directed artillery fire on it. We all wondered how they knew we were there. Well, this was our introduction to “Bed Check Charlie,” a plane that flew overhead after dark every night. He never bothered us so we never bothered him. I think he had a camera that could take pictures of us in the dark. Why couldn’t someone have figured it out at the time?

Here we sat with training, a Thanksgiving Dinner, and replacements to bring the company up to about three quarters strength. We all knew where we were going but only the enemy knew what we would find. Before noon we saddled up and started down the road; mud and all. We did not walk straight ahead but we followed a road or a wide trail. Along the way I had a new and grim experience. A German soldier was dead beside the road and jeeps were splashing mud on him. We were spread on both sides of the road and my path led very near the dead soldier. When I walked to one side to avoid the dead German the young man behind me said, “That doesn’t look good to you does it?” I quickly answered, “No” and he replied, “It will look real good to you soon.” (One of the awful truisms for the infantry soldier)

We walked on through the afternoon but I had no idea where we were going. One thing I was very conscious of was that we were clearly exposed to the view of the enemy. It was probably for this reason that we maneuvered around until after dark and then went into the town of Faulguemont and into a warehouse with a dirt floor.

As we entered town John Pavelda and I saw a Colonel standing beside his jeep. We were walking by when John told me that he didn’t like that Colonel. John said that the last time the Company went into attack he was there shouting to the troops, “Get on out there. I will get stretcher bearers out to you.” I do not know who the Colonel was but to John and me that didn’t seem an appropriate way to exhort men into combat. I never saw him again but I heard that he was a West Point graduate and later moved on to a higher position.

Dad may be referring to Major James Hayes, who was the Commanding Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at that time. Major Hayes was a West Pointer and not well liked by the troops. In his book, Lieutenant Adkins of H Company had this to say,

*...the men remembered too well that in the two attacks at Moivron and Sivry when he was our Battalion CO, we had gotten the hell beat out of us. The way both of those attacks had been ordered was not only useless, but foolish. That left a bad taste in the men’s mouths. Then too, Major Hayes sported the Silver Star for personally leading his troops during an attack on Sivry. Okay, so the guy did kill a few Krauts and ran around shouting, ‘Follow me!’ Still, he never got into the town of Sivry. The men couldn’t quite understand that. (A.Z. Adkins, You Can’t Get Much Closer Than This)*

Major Hayes was promoted to regimental executive officer in late November or early December.

The tension was mounting. We knew we were in for something but we were told nothing. Patton's Third Army, 80<sup>th</sup> Division, 317<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, F Company, Third Platoon was going to attack somebody, some place, and I was going to be there, like it or not. Some of the experienced men appeared to be looking elsewhere, like sick call or something. All of us replacements knew we had no other place to go. Sometime after dark we were issued cold C Rations for our supper.

It was nearly midnight when a squad leader called us together and told us tomorrow morning we were going to attack. We were told nothing of the conditions we would encounter and I did not know who the squad leader was but that was the last time I saw him anyway. At 4:00 A.M. November 20, along with all of F Company, we were called out and told to saddle up and move out. We had little sleep but we knew things were going to get worse before they got better. After the normal hurry up and wait process, we moved off into the darkness and through another company's position. They were in a defensive position near the edge of town. A GI called out to me saying, "Where have you been? I have been here for a week." He was a member of the 80<sup>th</sup> Division 319<sup>th</sup> Regiment who came over on the same ship with Hotz and me. He was lucky because his regiment (the 319<sup>th</sup>) was holding a defensive position. My regiment (the 317<sup>th</sup>) and the 318<sup>th</sup> regiment were attacking.

We moved on until about daybreak when we could see that we were walking along a trail through a timber. Suddenly an automatic weapon opened fire at us. I could see from the tracer bullets that he was not hitting anyone. Someone called, "Bring up the bazooka," and it was done. Someone (perhaps Sergeant Clark) shot the bazooka into the small building where the machine gun was located. The building flew apart and everything was quiet. Nobody went to see what happened. We moved on up the trail where we spread out and prepared to enter the timber to the left of the trail. Now came the moment of truth for the scouts and sure enough the squad leader remembered us, "Hotz go first, Hogue second, the remaining men spread out behind."

It was about full daylight on a foggy rainy day when we moved into a very thick timber. We remained fairly close together to avoid losing contact with each other. We came to a trail crossing ours and requiring us to cross open ground to continue on to our objective. So far there had been no enemy fire in the timber but as soon as someone moved to cross the trail a machine gun opened up from a cement pill box on the right flank. Hotz crossed the road but a burst of machine gun fire made us all hit the dirt. A pause and someone from across the road yelled "Bring the BAR. Come on across. I can see him." I jumped up and ran over and hit the dirt on the other side. As I ran a burst of machine gun fire came from the pillbox and I felt something hit my coat in the middle of my back. When I was on the ground I put my hand back there and counted the articles of clothing the bullet penetrated: raincoat, field jacket, sweater, wool shirt, another wool shirt, and wool undershirt. There was one undershirt with no hole. I thought to myself - That was too close. I will not jump so quickly again. I wondered who called for us to come. Why

it was Sam Ellis! Who was he? He was a new replacement just like us who was designated acting Sergeant and not highly qualified either.

Sam Ellis must have distinguished himself in the fighting that occurred during this time. He may have been Dad's squad leader a few days after this incident because he was promoted to Corporal and squad leader on November 24. Sam Ellis was promoted to Sergeant on November 27 and Staff Sergeant on February 10, 1945. He was wounded in action of February 11, 1945 as the 317<sup>th</sup> Regiment crossed the river into Germany. His wounds must have been serious because he didn't return to duty until May 2 after 7 weeks in the hospital. On May 23, 1945 S. Sgt. Sam Ellis was busted back to private for reasons unknown (Morning Report).

When I hit the dirt before crossing the road I was not far from the second scout of another squad. He was a fine young man from Nebraska with more combat experience than me. He stayed put when Sam Ellis called for us to come. Ironically, he was hit by the machine gun where he lay. We heard later his wound was not fatal but we never saw him again. I guess it confirmed General Patton's policy that the safest place to run is forward. I wish he was here. (I had not seen the old bat yet.)

General George Patton was referred to as "old blood and guts" by the grunts in his army. "Our blood and his guts," Dad would say. Patton was famous for wearing two pearl-handled, nickel-plated revolvers, highly polished helmet, riding pants, and high cavalry boots. His speech was riddled with profanities. His vehicles carried oversized rank insignia and loud sirens. He deliberately cultivated a flashy, distinctive image in the belief that this would motivate his troops. In an incident in 1943 he was temporarily relieved of command for slapping a soldier recuperating from battle fatigue at a hospital; Patton considered him a coward. Patton often got into trouble with his outspokenness and strong opinions.

Dad's reference to Patton's policy that the safest place to run is forward comes from a speech Patton gave to the Third Army in June, 1944. I excerpted a portion of it here. The complete speech is on the last page.

*When a man is lying in a shell hole, if he just stays there all day, a German will get to him eventually. The hell with that idea. The hell with taking it. My men don't dig foxholes. I don't want them to. Foxholes only slow up an offensive. Keep moving. And don't give the enemy time to dig one either. We'll win this war, but we'll win it only by fighting and by showing the Germans that we've got more guts than they have; or ever will have. We're not going to just shoot the sons-of-bitches, we're going to rip out their living Goddamned guts and use them to grease the treads of our tanks. We're going to murder those lousy Hun cocksuckers by the bushel-fucking-basket. War is a bloody, killing business. You've got to spill their blood, or they will spill yours. Rip them up the belly. Shoot them in the guts. When shells are hitting all around you and you wipe the dirt*

*off your face and realize that instead of dirt it's the blood and guts of what once was your best friend beside you, you'll know what to do!*

*I don't want to get any messages saying, 'I am holding my position.' We are not holding a Goddamned thing. Let the Germans do that. We are advancing constantly and we are not interested in holding onto anything, except the enemy's balls. We are going to twist his balls and kick the living shit out of him all of the time. Our basic plan of operation is to advance and to keep on advancing regardless of whether we have to go over, under, or through the enemy. We are going to go through him like crap through a goose; like shit through a tin horn!*

Old bat indeed! How would you like to serve under that SOB?

We came a half mile or more through the Maginot line, which was turned in reverse to protect Germany as the German Army retreated from France. Looking forward we could see barbed wire entanglements. It was not just a barbed wire fence (see picture). From somewhere came a command "Fix bayonets and charge. Who in Hell said that?" Why they say that was our platoon lieutenant. He just came over with us and he was no smarter than Sam Ellis.

*The 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division launched a coordinated attack at 0800, 25 November 1944. The Maginot Line was broken in each Regimental Sector. Eight forts of the Maginot Line were captured. The 317<sup>th</sup> Infantry, employing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, attacked in*



*its zone at 8:00 AM. Moving eastward from the high ground south of Tritteling, the Battalion swept through the northern edge of Bois De Point-Pierre to enter Bois De Teting. Light small arms fire and heavy mortar and artillery fire were encountered. Small pockets of enemy were encountered during the advance and by 11:15 AM the battalion had reached the east edge of the woods. Forts Laudrefang and Teting Woods were captured and mopped up. By 3:45 PM, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had advanced to the vicinity of Hill 363, northwest of Folschviller, where the advance was halted for the day. (80th Division Operational History – NOV. 44 SECTION VI BREACHING OF THE MAGINOT LINE)*

*The Maginot Line was a fortified line built at a tremendous cost by the French in the decade prior to WW II, and, although a masterpiece of technology, proved to be worthless when the Germans simply bypassed it in the May, 1940 invasion, attacking through the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg to threaten Paris from the north, and compelling the French surrender on 22 June, 1940.*

(*Farebersviller, France an In-Depth Study, By Terry D. Janes,*  
[www.thetroubleshooters.com](http://www.thetroubleshooters.com))

Fix bayonet we did and charge too. A bayonet charge on barbed wire is not very effective but obviously it was not our job to question why. It was our job to do or die. Climbing over the wire was bad enough if we had all day but we didn't. Machine guns bullets were ricocheting off steel posts and it was time to get down and crawl. So we did. Four sets of entanglements made slow going but both Hotz and I made it. Out the other side I stood up and looked at my raincoat (it was still a rainy day). My raincoat was shredded from top to bottom, so I dropped it there. I don't know if the Lieutenant who ordered the charge on the barbed wire made it through or not but in any case, I never saw him again.

The time was about noon and we had come through the Maginot Line in the first half day of attack. I wondered what the news reports would say about this at home. If I was an optimist I might have thought that breaking through the Maginot Line in a half day was encouraging. I might have even believed that the war would be over before I spent long in combat. But I was not an optimist and this was not good news for us. This was only the beginning of the fight to Germany and we knew it.

*80th Infantrymen Penetrate Maginot Line; Nazi Border Stands Only Four-Miles Away, New York Times With American Third Army in France November 26, 1944 - Splitting the Maginot Line wide open with the seizure of ten of its forts, elements of the Eightieth Division continued right through the breaks today and tonight they were on three sides of St. Avold, a communications center. These troops are two miles beyond the Maginot Line and within four miles of the German border. The Eightieth Division is now in a strong position, with its heavy guns firing into the Reich from ridges around St. Avold while its infantry is threatening the city itself. One hour after the attack on the line jumped off the first of the Maginot Line forts was taken. This was Fort Bambeiderstroff. When it fell the crack in the wall started to widen. There was considerable opposition and mortar fire was particularly heavy. One of the strongest points at the start of the attack was Fort Quatre Vents. It laid down a sweeping barrage of mortar fire but it could not seem to keep up the pace when pressure was applied from three sides. It was successfully stormed soon after Fort Bambeiderstroff fell and that was the beginning of the end for all the principal fortifications in this particular part of the famous Maginot Line. Most of the forts, like the Inseling group of three were in clusters, with outlying pillboxes. Each was capable of covering the other with interlacing crossfire. While the attack was speedy and spectacular, and carried with it the element of surprise, it was a hard fought battle over difficult terrain studded with traps. There were mine fields everywhere. There were tank traps, ditches, and intricate roadblocks. (The New York Times, 27 November, 1944)*

Somebody told us to gather around but not to get too close because one 88 round could get too many men. Now came the order again, "Move out - Scouts ahead." I still had no idea where we were going and had no picture of the end. I expected to get hit and hoped

it would be serious enough to get me out of here without causing permanent disability. It was called a "million dollar wound" and some of the men had already received it today. Some had received the kind with no special name too. We were off and running, always running. Open pasture was easier traveling but with the special disadvantage of certainly being in full view of the enemy. We were green but we knew what that meant. We just did not know when it was coming.

Everyone knew our best move was to reach high ground and dig in. So it was no surprise when we were told to make a circle and dig fox holes on the hill near a farm house. I estimate we walked over five miles that day although we probably did not advance the battle front that much since we did not always march in the same direction. The circle indicated for our foxholes was relatively small. This was partly because we had lost some men and there were fewer foxholes but also because the holes were closer together. Nevertheless, the only solutions for us were to dig hard and dig deep. Get cover before the enemy could zero in their 88's. We dug and they came. We thought we were tired and could dig no more but when those 88's came we dug a lot more. I don't know where the strength came from but everybody had it.

About evening it looked like we might have a hole for the night but more 88's came. They began to take their toll. We were taking an awful beating from that artillery. In fact it looked very bad for Hotz and me when a shell landed in a foxhole between the two of us and dirt flew over us. We would have been gone except the shell was a dud. It did not explode. At last somebody realized that our foxholes made an excellent target for artillery because they were all bunched up together. The word came down to spread out and dig a new fox hole, which we did post haste. Digging with that small shovel was hard but we had a tremendous stimulant where those artillery shells came in.

It was dark and we had no food so far that day. They asked for some one to go for food with a detail and I believe Hotz went. About 10:00 PM we had 2 cans of C rations: one of hash and one of biscuits. Artillery continued to pound us throughout the night and the next morning I walked up to a farm house. It was a sorry sight. The farm house was being used as an aid station; to hold the wounded until a jeep could be brought in to move them. There I witnessed one of the saddest things I have seen: a man inconsolably crying like a baby. They called it battle fatigue.

In some ways the darkness seemed better than daylight. We felt we could move without being seen. There was little rest because one man had to be alert and ready in every fox hole at all times. From this day until Nov. 27, we moved every day. Most days we dug two or three fox holes and were never inside a building. We ate cold C rations only and we had two or three hours sleep each night. It was rainy and foggy every day and we had no raincoats. We had no overshoes because they were never issued to us. From the map it looks like we traveled about twenty miles but we never traveled in a straight line.

I found one thing of value during this time. Hotz and I got very well acquainted and I learned to really appreciate his companionship. We had one great thing in common: we trusted our lives to each other. We were forced into it but it was also a great satisfaction.

I could put real faith in him. There was 10 years difference in our ages but it did not mean a thing here. Only the real character of the man counted now.

Hotz and I talked and talked. I remember a conversation where Hotz said he wanted to get out of this with his whole body so he could play ball and go hunting and really enjoy sports activities when he got home. I said I was willing to give up some of that if I could get out of this misery now. At this point I was really resigned that a bullet wound was inevitable. The sooner it was done and over with the better. I wondered how soon we would know if we had a choice.

It was about noon, November 27, when we walked out on a trail through a timber near the town of Farébersviller. There was fog and mist in the air and to my surprise there were three of our tanks by the edge of the timber. What a relief. We had open ground ahead and tanks were there to help us! This was a first for me. Company G was assigned to take the town. We were going to clear the area on the right side of the town and dig in on the high ground beyond.

*Farébersviller. That's the French spelling—with a little thing over the first "e". The German spelling is Pfarrebersweiler, and it was a German town until the end of WWI when the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine became French again. Farbersville—as we Americanize it—is not a large town, even today at easily twice the size it was at the end of 1944 when the 80th Division arrived there; too small to appear on any but very large scale local maps. The town lies in a shallow valley about five miles east of St. Avold, straddling a key railway line and road running southeast to northwest, roughly paralleling the constantly shifting French-German border in that region. The old section of the town remains much as it was then, with most of the growth since to the northwest of the road, toward Theding. Many of the men of the 80th's 317th and 318th regiments who were at Farebersviller probably never knew the name of the town, or quickly forgot it in the blur of names of similar crossroad towns they passed through, sometimes three or four in a single day. (Farébersviller, by Jeff Wignall, Blueridge news, <http://www.80thdivision.com/BlueRidge/04jun.pdf>)*

Tanks from 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Division should have been a great help. However, these did not act like 4<sup>th</sup> Armored because when I started across the open area I saw them pulling back toward the timber. What's more I never heard them fire any gun to support us.

*The Infantry-Tank Team – The problems which arise in infantry-tank cooperation are largely confined to the tank commander and the infantry platoon leader. There must be a clearer understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the tank by the infantryman and a similar understanding by the tanker. Our main difficulties, on the infantryman's side, were to make the tanker realize that to effectively support infantry he must take risks. Many times when the tank was called on to eliminate a machine gun which was sweeping an open field, the tanker refused, fearing an antitank gun. Then, too, the infantry often expected the tank to do jobs which could have been handled by their own weapons... The*

*presence of our tanks makes the doughboy feel better. But he becomes a little apprehensive when he sees a tank withdrawn. "After all," he reasons, "that guy has three inches of armor. All I've got is this O.D. shirt. If it's too hot for him, what the hell am I doing here?" (Notes from Capt Mullen (E-317) Note Book)*

We moved out more than half a mile into the open area with no overhead artillery fire to help and no evidence that G Company was getting into town. We advanced to a line even with the town and here it came; everything we expected and more. They hit us with everything: small arms, machine guns and mortar. It came suddenly and we all hit the dirt. Hotz was not far from me but we did not try to talk. Soon there was a pause (it seemed like a mighty long time) and somebody called, "Move out." I stood up and said, "Hotz, Hotz," but got no answer. I ran on a short distance to a dugout which apparently was used as a beet bunker. I wanted to go back to Hotz but I knew I would have drawn more fire on him and me both. I did hope we would remain where he was until it was dark enough not to be seen from town. If I was put in this situation later I would have handled myself differently. At that time we were conditioned to jump on command.

Valie Hotz was seriously wounded in action on November 28, 1994 (Morning Report). He was 19 years old from De Witt County, Texas. He had 2 years of high school when he was drafted and his occupation was listed as "farm hand, general farms," on his enlistment record. He had been in combat for only 14 days.

The beet dugout was safe from enemy fire except artillery from straight overhead but I knew none of the half dozen men in there with me. There were two parts to the dugout but as far as I knew we were all in the same part. Then a man came into our part of the dugout and showed the sergeant his right hand - shot through and the fingers dangling. Of course the Sergeant told him to walk on back and get first aid which he appeared to be happy to do. Now I cannot say that I ever saw any man shoot himself and it never did appeal to me but I do not know how another person could have shot that man. I believe he had been in combat a long time and certainly was under much stress.

Self inflicted wounds were not uncommon among rifle companies especially after a period of sustained combat as was the case in the battle at Farbersviller. Adkins described similar incidents that occurred after a battle at Sivry, France before Dad joined the Regiment:

*One kid had put his left hand over the muzzle of his M-1 and pulled the trigger with his right hand. Boy, those bones were splattered. The other kid hadn't been as smart. He had put an M-1 slug through his knee, and it was a mangled mess. I couldn't see how the medics could do anything but amputate his leg (You Can't Get Much Closer Than This, A.Z. Adkins).*

We knew our objective and we could see the outline of a hill in the fog ahead of us an estimated two miles away. There were not many of us left but we moved forward in a disorganized manner across a big ditch and up a big hill. I was alone so I looked around

and found John Pavelda who had lost his partner (the nice young man from Nebraska). We dug in together and stayed all night in that hole. The 'hell to pay' was downtown. Rifle fire continued all night long. It was obvious that G Company was not able to clear the town. I kept remembering that the town (still occupied by Germans) was behind us, not in front of us and that put us in a bad position.

*28 November 1944 - Elements of the German 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Div, and 38th SS Regt were entrenched in Farebersviller, but were driven out by the 3rd Battalion of the 317th Regiment by late afternoon. However, the Germans counterattacked at 1950 (7:30 pm), and had re-taken the eastern side of the town by 2000 (8:00 pm). The 3rd Battalion 317th was fighting from house-to-house when night fell. The 2nd (Dad's Battalion) had moved on to the high ground north of the town. The weather became overcast. Counterattacks against the 317th positions continued throughout the night. (Stars and Stripes, November 29, 1944)*

*November 29 - The persistent rain and cold continued. The 3rd Battalion 317 was still fighting inside the town and was under tank and artillery fire. The 2nd Battalion (Dad's unit) fought off two counterattacks to the north, on hill 316, while the 1st Battalion held the high ground to the south against small arms fire. The 317th Regt was ordered to pull back to reserve positions later in the day (2330), and the 318<sup>th</sup> was to relieve them. (Stars and Stripes, 29 November 1944)*

***A Village Lies Still in Death After War Hurtles Through***

*By Jimmy Cannon*

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*"With 80th INF. DIV, Dec 3. The dead hold Farebersviller now. Once the enemy did, and then we came. But they returned, and so did we. Today only the dead are there. The fish in the shallow creek are the only living things in the town, which lies prostrate in the basin between the disfigured hills. "We got into town at 10:30 AM and by dark we had driven them out," said Lt. Col. William J. Borston, of Ft. Worth, commanding the Third Battalion of the 317th Inf. Regt. "I was in my CP when it happened," Borston said, "The tanks came through the fog that had sprung up like a suddenly recruited German ally. The infantry followed spraying fire like insane gardeners with deadly hoses."*

The fog was worse in the morning and we knew even less about what was going on. There was a company commander with us who came over on the same ship with me. They took out platoon guide, Sgt Hill, and put him in charge of the first platoon. This left Sgt Reece with us but no Lieutenant to help. We were not much more than a squad (12 men) anyway. There were so few men left that I did begin to learn some names.

Dad says, "We were not much more than a squad (12 men) anyway," which probably means there were 12 men left from a platoon of 36 men! From November 25 when they attacked the Maginot Line to November 30 at the conclusion of the battle at Farbersviller the number of men present for duty in

Company F dropped from 214 to 139; a loss of 75 men or more than 1/3 of the Company (Morning Reports). Thirty of the 75 men were lost between November 28 and November 30 during the Battle for Farbersviller. The losses were no doubt concentrated among the men in rifle squads and they composed somewhat over half of the men in the Company. The battle at Farbersviller isn't mentioned in most accounts of the war. The number of men lost there is insignificant to the total men lost in the Third Army in France during the month of November but the fighting was intense for Company F of the 317<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 80<sup>th</sup> Infantry of the Third Army. Now might be a good time to reread General Patton's speech (see page xx). Especially the part where he says, "Only two percent of you right here today would die in a major battle."

John Pavelda was a good man having joined the outfit one shipment ahead of me. He had already earned his Infantry Combat Badge, PFC stripe and some valuable experience. The most important man and probably the most experienced in this business was Sgt Reece. He had trained in the states as a platoon Sergeant and had been with the company all the way. Most of all he showed no fear; giving confidence to all the men around him. If anyone knew what was going on, Sgt Reece did.

John Pavelda moved up in rank quickly along with Sam Ellis. They were both promoted to Corporal on November 24 and Sergeant on November 27. Dad had a high regard for John and I think they maintained contact after the war.

Dad doesn't mention Leland Holland but Leland was also a close friend during the war. After the war Leland was involved with an organization that promoted peace and nuclear disarmament. I met Leland when I was about 12 at a meeting of the organization on Mackinac Island, Michigan.

There was trouble behind us and a question in front of us. In the edge of the fog there was a timber about a one-half to one-quarter mile from us. In the edge of the timber we could hear a tank moving from time to time. I don't know if our company had radio contact but we could not get information about our situation. Finally Sgt. Reece said, "I can not tell if that tank is ours or theirs. I am going over there and see. Who will go with me?" No one moved so he said "Damn it if you are all afraid I will go by myself." A couple of men jumped up and went with him and they were gone in the fog about one half hour. When they came back Sgt Reece said, "Well that sure ain't ours." Late in the afternoon the battle was still going on in town and we were stuck out on the hill. We could see nothing but fog and hear nothing but gunfire. We had only our rifles for defense if the tank came in our direction. There was an artillery observer with us earlier but there was none now. If we could have placed a few artillery shells on that tank it would have done us a lot of good and helped our moral tremendously.

Dad says several times, "they were not told where they were going, they did not know the situation." This was a common complaint among the GIs. Captain Mullen (E-317) commented about the complaint in his notes.

*Many men claim that they do not know the situation and many times they are justified. Platoon, squad and company commanders must tell each man what his squad, platoon and company is to do. Once this has been done and the man knows his objective, the units on his right and left and his part in the plan, the cry "I don't know what the situation is," becomes a fallacy. When the action begins and progresses, the individual man is not only a part of the situation, he is the situation. No one knows more of what is happening around him than he does.*

We were holding and waiting for something to happen and it did. The CO called a meeting of about five or six of the leadership standing together in the center of a circle of fox holes. One 88 round came in. Three men were hit including Sgt Reece. He took off for the aid station as walking wounded and I never saw him again. Obviously, the enemy was able to see us and knew they were destroying our leadership. Darkness was coming, and the tank was moving toward us. It was time for a decision and the CO made it, "Move to the rear down over the hill. Leave the wounded who cannot walk." So we took off to the rear on the same path we came in on. This put us on a route to right where we left Hotz. Thank God he was gone but unfortunately I couldn't find out what happened to him.

It was a long walk and no use to think about food. I found a small stream, filled my canteen, and put in halazone pills for purity but the water was not drinkable. We reached the town of Seingbouse about two AM and there was cold food. We were given the hay mow in a barn to sleep in and that was a real pleasure. John and I were together but Pvt. McInerney was an odd man without his partner so we asked him to join us. That made six blankets and more body heat.

Under counter-attack company withdraws to town of Genweiler, France (Morning Report, November 29, 1944). Dad says they withdrew to Seingbouse but the two towns are very close together.

Early next morning we were called out with "Hot chow." Best news we had for ten days. Pancakes and hot coffee were delivered from the cook's insulated cans into our mess kit and canteen cup. A few bites and I knew something was wrong. That food was not going to stay down. I took off for a board fence to lean on. My breakfast tried to come up but there was not much there. I saw that I was not alone. There was a young man named Bowen having trouble as well. I know now my gall stones were acting up but I didn't even consider going to the aid station. It would take much more than an upset stomach to get any consideration. Anyway what could you expect after what we have been through? The problem was temporary but that finished morning chow for me. We were now in a rest area with a good dry hay barn and we loved it.

We stayed in the barn for two days and a few men from a tank company stayed nearby. One day their Chaplin came by and said, "Let's have church right here in the driveway of this barn." We were invited to join in and I did. When he asked for anyone who wanted to accept God and be saved to raise their hand I reached for the sky. I was ready. Maybe he was a Baptist but that was not important. This was not a new idea. There is no place

to turn when you are in a situation like I was in. That was confirmed for me by John and his friend as we talked together. I never regretted this decision and I remained a Christian, talking with God in prayer regularly from that point on.

Dad's account covers the period of time from November 15 to November 28, 1994. Company F moved about 50 miles and ended up less than 4 miles from the German border. From November 29 to December 6 the Company remained in Guenerville and on December 16 they moved to St. Avold a few miles away. This time was a respite. There was no combat for Company F as the Army consolidated positions and prepared to attack Germany.