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November 28, 1944

Suddenly there was a vicious explosion tearing at my body. With a blinding flash of searing pain, which lasted only for an instant, I felt my body being slammed backward and upward into a swirling, spiraling, cone shaped black hole. The dark hole seemed to come alive with flashing streaks of florescent orange, purple and white light that made my eyes burn with fire. For a split second, I felt as if I had left my body and was floating into outer space. The bittersweet smell of gunpowder burned my nostrils.

The blast and concussion from the German 88 had sucked the air from my lungs. I had the awesome feeling that my lungs were being ripped from my chest and I found myself gasping for breath. I had the strange feeling that my eardrums were being torn from their sockets and for an instant, all was silent. I could not hear the guns, the bullets, the shelling, and for a moment, I had the unexplained feeling that somehow, somehow, I had been lifted up and transported away from the scene of battle.

Then suddenly, as if hit by a giant hammer, I felt my body being smashed against the ground. It all seemed to be a dream, a nightmare, as drowsiness was overcoming me and I wanted desperately to sink into a deep and peaceful sleep. My body was in a semi-conscious state and my eyes seemed to resist any effort to focus on my surroundings. Still the frightful silence. Then suddenly, as if touched by a magic wand, I could hear the guns, the shells, the awesome sound of battle and I realized that I was on the shell torn ground of a battlefield in France.

I was now aware of the smell of battle. The bittersweet smell of burning gunpowder hung heavy in the air. I desperately wanted to get up and join the battle. I tried to get up, but could not make my body move. The pain was now returning. My chest was hurting bad. I looked at the front of my field jacket. There was no blood. "Where was I hit" I wondered. I struggled to get up but kept falling on my back, and the pain now seemed to spread throughout my body.

My senses were returning and I realized that I had been badly hit. Just how bad, I did not know. Then the peaceful drowsiness returned. I desperately wanted to sleep, but was afraid. I fought to regain my sanity and then, at last, my head started to clear and I was able to raise my body on my elbows. My eyes began to focus and I could clearly see my buddies moving forward.

I saw my young squad leader move by me. I watched him as he passed. Then suddenly, not ten feet from where I lay, I saw his body slam backwards. Before he hit the ground I could see a fine mist of blood spray from his back. I was fascinated by the fact that the blood came out in a round spurt that was shaped like a cone. As he hit the ground very hard, he rolled on his side and I could see a growing splotch of dark red blood growing on his chest. A bullet had hit him in the chest and went right on through his back. He

struggled to get up, but kept falling to the ground. I could see his face clearly now. As our eyes met across the short distance, I could see his pleading look, as if begging for this dream to end. I could now plainly hear the blood bubbling in his chest.

I decided to survey my own situation. Since I had severe chest pain, I thought I had been hit in the chest. I opened my field jacket and shirt, but found no blood nor wounds. I now reasoned that the nearness of the shells' vicious explosion had knocked the wind out of me. I tried again to get up, but fell back again.

For the first time, I looked at my legs. I could move my left leg. I could see a small amount of blood seeping through my trousers, just above the left knee. I raised my leg and moved it around. There was little pain and I realized that my left leg had only been scratched by the shrapnel. No broken bones.

My right leg was strangely twisted along my right side. I could see the bottom of my right combat boot. There was a sharp twist in my leg just along the knee and I could see bones protruding from my trousers. The sight of my blood and bones made me sick at my stomach and I wanted to vomit.

I was jerked from my lethargy when suddenly I heard someone calling my name. "Hotz, Hotz, Hotz." I recognized the voice of my good comrade, second scout, Thaine Hogue. "Hotz, are you alright?" I could see the concern on his face, as he stared down at my twisted leg. Hogue, the gentle school teacher from Bonaparte, Iowa; was deeply touched. "Hotz can you get up? We have to keep moving," Hogue said with great concern. "We will all get killed if we stay here. We have to attack."

My head was clearer now and I answered as strongly as I could, "You better get your ass out of here. Go on school teacher; get moving before the Krauts shoot your ass off. I won't be going with you on this trip. "Goodbye Hogue, you lucky bastard. With me gone, you are now the first scout," I said, trying to force a laugh. "What are you going to do with the extra money?"

"Goodbye Hotz, the medics will pick you up and you will be back home, in Texas, before you know it." Hogue then abruptly turned away and started moving with the battle line. He never looked back.

Uncontrolled tears burned my eyes, as the gentle man continued in combat. Hogue, the man who never used profane, was walking out of my life. (Nearly forty years later, Thaine Hogue and his wife, walked in my real estate office in Victoria, Texas. We both had tears in our eyes, as we embraced.)

Realizing that I needed help, I started calling for a medic. "Medic! Help! Medic! Help! Help!" It seemed like hours had elapsed since I was hit. But logic told me that only a few minutes had passed. "Medic! Medic! Medic!" I began to feel somewhat panicky; as I knew the battle was moving rapidly on. "Would we be left alone?"

I could still hear the blood as it bubbled in my squad leader's chest. He was lying very still, but I could see him breathing. The blood was spreading on his chest. His field jacket was now bright red. His M1 garand rifle had fallen some ten feet away, but I could see that he still had two hand grenades hanging in the bottom holes of his field jacket.

Realizing that he desperately needed help, I called for the medics again. "Medic! Medic!" Then I saw the medic coming toward us. The Red Cross on his arm band was a welcome sight. He went to help my squad leader first. As he knelt beside him, opening the front of his shirt, I could see the blood and the bullet hole in his chest. It was a small hole and a frothy, light colored, blood was trickling down his chest.

The medic sprinkled Sulfa Powder in the wound and then placed a bandage on my buddy's chest and back. After treating my friend's wounds and giving him a shot of morphine, the medic turned to me.

"Where you hit soldier?" the medic asked "Don't tell me I can see you have a shot-up leg. Looks like some shrapnel tore your leg and knee up pretty bad. I have to straighten that thing out and take a better look at it. This is going to hurt. You can't be gentle with a break like that."

He took a firm grip on my combat boot and began to pull my leg back where it belonged. As he pulled very hard, the bones disappeared back into the leg of my trousers. The excruciating pain and the nauseous sight of the bone receding into my leg was more than I could stand. I was engulfed with dizziness and I mercifully passed out into nothingness.

When I returned to consciousness, the medic was busily cutting away my trousers to expose the wound. He poured Sulfa Powder into the wound and then wrapped a bandage around my leg. The bleeding had almost stopped.

"I hate to tell you this dogface, but you're going to live. You lucky son-of-a-bitch you'll be going home soon. A lot of the bone and muscle is shot away, but I think you'll be alright. Your leg will probably be short and stiff, but you can live with that."

"How in the hell are we going to get out of here?" I asked with genuine concern. "I can't walk and my squad leader has a bullet hole through his chest."

"Oh! Don't worry about it," the medic replied. "One of your other buddies got hit and I sent him back to the aid station. He'll send someone back to pick you two up. You'll be out of here before you know it."

The medic stood up and said, "I better get my ass on up to the battle line." With this, he turned and started walking rapidly to the front. I watched him as he disappeared behind a small rise, some three hundred yards away.

After the medic had gone, the battlefield looked deserted, but we could hear the sound of battle in the distance. We were in an open field and I could see trees and a small village

in the distance. The battle had moved in that direction and out of site. I wondered about the village. I did not know. I thought perhaps it was Guenviller, Seinghouse, or maybe Farebersviller.

“How you doing Hotz?” my squad leader asked. He was lying only a few feet away. He had dragged himself closer to me and across this close space I could hear the blood gurgle in his chest.

“Oh, I’ll be alright,” I replied. “Shrapnel from that goddamn 88 got me in the knee. It’s swollen like hell, but the bleeding seems to have stopped. How you doing?”

“My chest really hurts, but if they pick us up soon, I think I’ll make it,” he answered very softly. “Somebody should get here soon. It’s about 1430 hours now. Sure has been a long day, hasn’t it?”

“Hey, you better not talk so much. Might make your chest hurt more,” I cautioned him. I was deeply concerned about him. He was very pale and I could hear the rattle in his chest. It had now been over two hours since we had been hit and still no one had come to pick us up.

“Hotz, maybe you should holler for help. Maybe someone will hear you and go for help,” my buddy whispered. “I’m really getting cold. This damn ground. It’s like ice.”

“Maybe you are right,” I answered. I tried not to act worried, but I was very scared. After more than two hours, they should have picked us up by now. If the Germans counter-attacked and re-took the hill, we wouldn’t have a chance. The more I thought about it, the more I worried I became.

I sat up, the best I could, and started yelling as loud as I could. “Help! Help! Help!” Over and over I yelled until I became fairly hoarse and very tired. But no one heard. Again and again, I yelled. All afternoon, but no one heard. “Damn it to hell,” I thought.

It would soon be dark and still no one came. My buddy appeared to be getting weaker. He was very pale, but his breathing appeared to be fairly regular. I could hear the gurgle of blood in his chest – always the gurgle. He was probably drowning in his own blood, I thought.

In the far background, we could still hear the guns. It would be dark soon and still no one had come to pick us up. I thought about Hogue. I wondered if he was still alright. As darkness came and closed around us, so did the bitter cold. Winter had come early in late 1944. There had already been sleet and snow and all along the battlefield the mud and slush was horrendous. Frozen feet had become a serious problem for the soldiers of the 80th Infantry Division.

“Well, it looks like we’ll be here all night,” I said, trying to keep the fright from showing in my voice. “I’m sure they will pick us up early in the morning.”

“I know. I know,” my buddy said. I’m not sure if I can make it through the night. I’m pretty weak and so damn cold.”

“Oh, you’ll make it alright. You’re too tough to let a little German bullet stop you. Besides, aren’t you curious as to how this damn war will end? Look on the bright side. At least we won’t have to walk to Berlin or go to the Pacific to fight Japs.” I tried to act cheerful but I knew I failed.

As the night wore on, I could still hear gunfire and shelling in the distance. Occasionally, shells exploded dangerously close to where we lay.

Then suddenly I could hear voices in the distance. My buddy was awake and also heard them. “Hotz,” he whispered. “I hear someone coming. Start yelling so they can find us. Hurry, yell as loud as you can.”

I sat up, the best I could, and was about to yell. As the voices approached, I suddenly realized that they were Germans – not American. Evidently they were on a patrol or had been trapped behind our lines. After darkness approached, they were returning to their lines.

My buddy also realized that these were German voices. “Hotz,” he whispered, “we better play dead. If we move and are seen, we might get a bayonet through our gut. Do you have any grenades left? I still have one of mine.”

“Yes, I’ve still got two,” I softly answered.

“Quick,” he said. “Pull the pins with your teeth and just hold them in your hands. If something happens to us, at least we’ll take some of the, Krauts with us.”

The voices were very close now, maybe fifty feet or so. I took my two grenades, squeezed the handles down tight, and pulled the pins from one with my teeth. As the pins fell to the ground, I lay on my back with the grenades tightly gripped in my hands. The voices were now on all sides. I never moved. In the dark, the Germans kept moving fast. They never stopped to look at us, but kept moving toward their lines. Soon they were out of hearing.

After they were gone, I breathed a tremendous sigh of relief. My relief was short lived, as I realized I held live grenades in each hand. In the darkness there was no way to find the pins and re-insert them in the handles. If I relaxed my grip on the handles there would be a small click and then the grenade would explode.

For an instant, only a split second, I wondered how it would feel. A quick explosion and then a peaceful sleep – no cold – no pain. I wiped that crazy thought from my mind. At that moment I had no fear of death.

I suddenly remembered that my squad leader also held a live grenade. “Hotz” he whispered, “can you throw these damn things far enough?”

“I’ll have to try,” I answered. “We have no choice. Lay as flat as you can,” I told him. I raised myself to a sitting position. I threw the first grenade as far as I could and quickly fell on my back. The pain in my leg was terrible now and I could feel the broken bones moving in the flesh. I hoped this movement won’t start the bleeding again. The grenade exploded in the darkness and we were still safe.

I threw the second grenade. Explosion. Again we were still safe.

After the two explosions from my grenades, my buddy whispered, “Here Hotz. Reach over here, as far as you can, and take my grenade. For God’s sake, watch the handle and don’t let it slip.” He was breathing hard and panting from the exertion. He began to cough and the rattle in his chest became louder.

I reached out my left arm and was groping in the darkness for his hand. There it was. I could now feel the grenade. “Hold onto the handle until I get a good hold on it,” I cautioned. I slowly moved my hand onto the grenade. There it was. I could feel the handle. I wrapped my hand carefully around the grenade and squeezed the handle down. There, I had it now. I very carefully moved the grenade to my right hand. Suddenly, the little deadly weapon felt heavy. I never realized how heavy they really were. I wondered how much it weighed and if I still had the strength to throw it out of range.

I raised my arm and with all the strength that I could muster, I threw as hard as I could. I felt the grenade leave my hand. I heard the sharp click as the handle was released and then I waited. It seemed like an eternity. Then the explosion and we were safe,

I lay back on the cold ground, completely exhausted. The night was bitter cold and pain racked my body. I wanted desperately to sleep. I was very tired and dozed occasionally until day break.

November 29, 1944

“Hotz, Hotz, are you awake?” my buddy whispered. I rose up on my elbows and looked at my friend. He was very, very pale and I could see the weariness in his eyes. He was breathing unevenly in short gasps. I could plainly hear the bubbling of the blood in his lungs. I was completely amazed that he was still alive. I fully expected for him to die during the night.

“I’m awake,” I answered, cheerfully as I could. “We’ll be alright now. They’ll be coming for us soon now. I’m going to set up the best I can and start watching. When they come, I want to be sure they find us.”

“I hope they get here soon,” my friend answered. “I sure am weak. I can’t stand this damn cold weather much longer. My chest sure hurts when I shiver.”

We didn't talk for a long time. Each of us was deep in our own thoughts. We waited. Still no one came to pick us up. I could hear gun fire in the distance. I secretly hoped that our soldiers could hold the ground that we had taken. If the Germans counter attacked, we would be helpless to defend ourselves.

It was now mid-morning, about 1030 hours. I tried to remember the date. I thought to myself, it must be about November 29, 1944. I began to wonder if I should try to crawl back for help. My bleeding had nearly stopped and I knew I could survive for a long time, if I lay still. I made the decision to stay and wait. I did not want to risk tearing an artery in my leg and cause more bleeding.

"Hotz, I think we have to do something," my friend said very weakly. "I know I can't make it through another day and night."

"I think our best bet is just to wait. Surely someone will happen along," I answered, trying to sound as confident as possible, but secretly I was now beginning to have my doubts. We were out in an open field, but there were no roads in sight. If our troops were attacking along the main roads, it could be days before we were found.

We did not talk for a long while. We were deep in our own thoughts and fears. Suddenly my buddy said, "Hotz, do you think that we should read the bible?"

"I don't have one large enough to read," I answered. "I have a very small one. It's just about a half inch wide and the printing is just too small to really read. My Aunt and Uncle gave it to me a short while before I shipped overseas. They thought it would be good luck to carry a bible into combat. I also carry a very small head of Abraham Lincoln attached to my dog tags." I opened my shirt and pulled out my dog tags along with small head of Lincoln. I looked at it a long time and then showed it to my squad leader.

"You better hope it brings you good luck. We need some good luck for a change, and quick," he answered. "I have my bible, he added. He reached into his left shirt pocket and removed the small brown colored testament. He had carried the testament, with its steel cover over his heart. Unfortunately, the bullet had missed the steel cover and went right on through his chest.

"I have heard that many soldiers have escaped death because of the protective steel plate on the testament," he commented. "This is the new testament with the Psalms," he continued, "what do you want me to read?"

"I don't know much about the Bible. Just read whatever you want to," I answered. "Why don't you just read the first page?"

At my statement, he laughed weakly and said, "Hotz, you dummy. The first page is the GI Testament in a letter written by President Roosevelt"

“Well, read the letter then. Hell, I know the first page is the Presidents letter,” I lied. I could hardly hear him as he started reading. He was so pale and getting weaker.

THE WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON
January 25, 1941

TO THE ARMED FORCES:

As Commander-in-Chief I take pleasure in recommending the reading of the Bible to all who serve in the armed forces of the United States. Throughout the centuries men of many faiths and diverse origins have found in the Sacred Book words of wisdom, counsel and inspiration. It is a foundation of strength and now, as always, an aid in attaining the highest aspirations of the human soul.

Very sincerely yours,
Franklin D. Roosevelt

After he finished reading the letter, we both fell silent for a long time, each deep in his own thoughts.

I raised my body and carefully looked in all directions. I desperately hoped to see someone coming for us. I looked carefully, but saw no one. I turned again to my friend and urged, “Go ahead and read some more. Why don’t you just close your eyes and open the testament. Read whatever page you turn to.”

“Good idea,” he answered. He closed his eyes and opened the testament. He began to read from Psalm 91.

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*

*You will only observe with your eyes
and see the punishment of the wicked.
If you make the Most High your dwelling—
even the LORD, who is my refuge—
then no harm will befall you,
no disaster will come near your tent.
For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways;
they will lift you up in their hands,
so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.
You will tread upon the lion and the cobra;
you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
"Because he loves me," says the LORD, "I will rescue him;
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.
He will call upon me, and I will answer him;
I will be with him in trouble,
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life will I satisfy him
and show him my salvation."*

It was near mid-day and still no one had come. I was extremely frustrated, very cold, and disappointed. I again raised my body as high as I could and looked for any sign of troop movement, none. Then suddenly, from the direction of the front, I thought I saw movement. I strained my eyes to the fullest, afraid to blink. Yes it was movement. I kept staring. Then I could plainly see a man.

"Thank God," I shouted. Then I saw another man. Two men were coming in our direction. But wait, my heart skipped a beat as I could see the German uniform.

"Oh, crap, it's Germans." I was overcome by helpless frustrations.

As the two soldiers approached, I could plainly see that one of them was an American. No matter who they were, German or American, I decided to call for help. I knew that my buddy needed help soon or he would die. I started yelling for help, as loud as I could. I waved my arms and held my garand rifle as high as I could to get their attention. They were now within 75 yards of where we lay. I could tell that they had seen us and were now walking briskly in our direction.

As they got closer and closer, it appeared that the German was a prisoner of the American. The GI had his rifle slung over his shoulder and the German appeared to be unarmed. They had now reached us and the GI spoke first. "How long have you two been out here? What outfit are you with?"

"We're with Company F of the 317th Infantry. We got hit yesterday and spent the night out here. Damn near froze. It's been cold as hell. We need help bad," I said. "I have a

busted knee and my squad leader has a bullet hole through his chest. You have to help us. We need to get to a doctor soon.”

The GI answered slowly, “I’m taking this German Officer back to the Battalion Headquarters. I’ll send some medics back to pick you up. They should be back soon. I promise to hurry.”

As they started to leave, I thought of the cold and said to the American. “Hey wait a minute. Make that Kraut bastard take off his overcoat and give it to my buddy.” The German Officer understood what I had said but made no attempt to take off his coat. I picked up my rifle and pointed it at the Germans belly. The safety on my rifle made a loud “click” as I pushed it forward. When the German heard the click, he hurriedly removed his coat and laid it over my wounded buddy.

They started walking to the rear and soon disappeared over a small ridge. My hopes were now high that we would soon be back to the aid station. I kept watching in the direction that they had gone. Watching and waiting, I expected to see a jeep coming for us at any moment. Nothing happened and no one was coming. Time was creeping, very slowly on, and still no one came.

I looked at my PX watch and it showed 1400 hours. It had now been about two hours since the American soldier and his prisoner had disappeared to the rear. I was feeling very low and dejected. I did not want to spend another night on the cold ass ground.

My thoughts were interrupted when my buddy whispered, “Hotz.” I could barely hear him as he spoke my name. I could hear the blood bubble in his chest. He was getting very weak. “I don’t think I can make it much longer,” he softly sighed. “I feel very bad. I’ve made up my mind; I’m going to try to crawl back to the aid station. I need help. Do you want to come with me, Hotz?” he asked.

I thought about my condition. If I tried to move, I would have to drag myself along on my back. Dragging the broken leg would be painful. My bleeding had almost stopped. I was afraid that the bleeding might start again. If the bleeding started, I could be in a risky situation. I still had some water in my canteen, but no food. I reasoned that I could survive for several days and sooner or later someone would pick me up. I made the decision to stay and wait.

”I’m going to stay here,” I replied. “Sooner or later, someone has to come along to help us.”

“Well, I’m going to try to make it back.” He said. “If I do, I’ll send help. You’ve been a good first scout, Hotz. I won’t forget you, good-bye.”

As we shook hands, I could see the pain in his eyes as he started to crawl slowly toward the rear.

“Goodbye,” I responded, “and good luck. When I am picked up, I’ll send the medics to look for you.”

I watched him for a long time, as he slowly crawled to the rear. He finally disappeared into some small brush about two hundred yards away. I never saw or heard from him again. As he disappeared from my sight, a wave of desperate loneliness and self-pity overcame me as hot, bitter tears filled my eyes. I lay back dead tired and completely exhausted. We had been in constant contact with the enemy for twenty-two days. We had been continually and rapidly moving forward and had gained many miles of valuable ground. But now, I was out of it.

I must have dozed off for awhile. I looked at my watch and it was 1600 hours. As I raised up on my elbows and looked toward the battle front, I saw three American soldiers walking toward the rear. They were about two hundred yards away and were coming in my direction. As they approached, I started yelling for help as loud as I could. I raised my rifle and started moving it to attract their attention. They saw me and turned in my direction.

“Hey you guys sure look good to me,” I shouted. “I need help, bad.”

“How long have you been out here?” one of them asked. “Looks like you’ve been hit pretty bad.”

“Yeah, my knee is busted up pretty bad. I got hit yesterday about 2 o’clock and I spent the night out here on this cold-ass ground. Can you carry me back to the aid station?” I asked.

“We could probably take turns carrying you but I’m afraid it would hurt you like hell. It could do a lot more damage to your leg,” one of them said.

Another one said, “I think the best thing would be to send a jeep back for you. That way they could give you something for the pain and then get you out of here.”

“We’ll you’re probably right, but I’ve heard that same old crap before. I’m not going to stay out here by myself any longer. One of you will have to stay with me.” I meant what I said.

“I have nothing to lose,” I said coolly, as I picked up my rifle and pushed the safety forward. “One of you is going to stay with me and the other two are going for help. I’m tired and cold and I want to get back to the aid station.” They knew I was serious.

“OK, I’ll stay with him and you two can go for help,” the youngest of the three said.

As the two soldiers started to leave, I begged, “Please hurry.”

They soon disappeared over the ridge and out of sight. The remaining soldier pulled out a pack of cigarettes, as he sat down on the ground. "Want a smoke?" he asked.

"No thanks, I don't smoke," I answered.

He laughed and asked, "Do you drink and chase women?"

"Only when I have the chance," I answered. I was beginning to feel better now.

We talked for nearly an hour and then he said, "I think I hear a jeep coming. I imagine that they will leave the jeep back of that ridge and then walk up here to get you. I feel pretty sure that the Krauts can see this area."

Sure enough, we could see two medics coming in our direction. I could now see them plainly. They had a stretcher and were walking at a very fast pace. For the first time since I had been wounded, nearly thirty hours ago, elation overcame me and I thought about going home to Texas. The two medics gave me a shot of morphine and lifted me onto the stretcher. It hurt like hell, but for the first time I enjoyed the pain. As they picked me up and started carrying me toward the jeep, I thought about my rifle.

"Wait, wait a minute. I want to take my rifle along," I pleaded. "I don't want to leave it out here on the ground."

"Bull shit," one of the medics shot back. "You better be satisfied to get your own ass out of here. Leave the goddamn rifle."

The other medic joined in and said, "He's just like all the other dog faced bastards. We risk our ass trying to get them out and patched up and sure as hell, they start bitching about something."

I really felt sad to leave my rifle. General Patton had said that "the M1 garand rifle is the best battle weapon ever built" and he was right. I wondered if it would be found and carried into battle again.

Suddenly, without prior warning, shells started exploding around us. Evidently the Germans had the field in full view. Several shells exploded very close and the medics hit the ground. I almost fell off the stretcher, but held on the best I could. The explosions made a sharp cracking sound. The bursts were smaller than the 88's and I did not recognize the type of artillery being used.

The shelling lasted for about five minutes. Again the medics picked me up and tried to run. As more shells came in, the two medics again hit the ground. For some unknown crazy reason, I started to laugh. "Look you two idiots, pick me up and let's get the hell out of here." It was ironic, I thought. After lying out all night, it would indeed be ironic if I got killed while being carried on a stretcher. Not very heroic and the very thought was hateful.

“Listen, at the crazy bastard laugh,” one of the medics said. “We ought to leave him out here and go on without him. What the hell’s so funny, anyway? Did you get shot in the head or did we give you too much morphine?”

I laughed again, “Ah, hell, I’m just trying to do my job. I was a first scout rifleman and the infantry manual says that a first scout is supposed to move out boldly to the front and seek to make the enemy disclose their positions. That’s what I’m trying to do now, make them disclose their positions.” I again laughed.

One of the medics also laughed and said, “We better get this damn fool out of here before he goes completely crazy. I think he’s bucking for a section 8.” With that remark, they again picked me up and started running toward the jeep. Soon we were over the ridge and at the jeep. They tied the stretcher on the jeep and started driving toward the aid station. Even though the bouncing of the jeep made my leg hurt badly, I was very happy and relieved to be leaving the battle front. I could feel the broken bones moving inside the flesh.

When we reached the aid station, I immediately asked if my squad leader had made it back. No one had seen him. I supposed that he was still out there, somewhere. My heart fell as I thought about him, out there and alone, perhaps dead. I kept insisting that someone go back and search for him. Finally, the medics agreed to go back. They took the jeep and left. I never heard from my squad leader again.

It was warm in the aid station. My body was beginning to warm up as I lay on the warm floor. At last I felt safe again. A medic came over to me and asked, “Where you from soldier?”

“Oh, I’m from Texas,” I answered, “and I wish I was there now.”

“Hey, me too,” he smiled, “I’m from Texas too. How long did you lay out there?”

“Oh, I guess it was close to thirty hours or so. I got hit yesterday and spent the night out there, seems like it’s been a week though.”

“Have you had anything to eat or drink?” he asked. “By the way, my names Menchaca, what’s yours?”

“I’m very glad to know you Menchaca, my name’s Hotz. Well I haven’t eaten for a couple of days now, but I did have some water in my canteen.” Suddenly I realized that I was extremely hungry. “Could I have something to eat?”

Menchaca opened two cans of C Ration beans and warmed them up for me. I ate the beans rapidly. They tasted wonderful. This was the best food that I had in a long time. I never knew that I could ever really enjoy C Rations, but I did.

It was almost dark now and I felt much better. The loneliness and fright was gone and I was warm. The medics were very efficient, friendly, and tried their best to make me comfortable. They made the decision to take me back to the mobile hospital for treatment. They loaded me into an ambulance which carried me back to the emergency hospital. We arrived at the hospital sometime during the night. At the hospital, they lay me on a cot and I slept till daylight.

November 30, 1944

When I awoke, I silently looked around the small room. There were several other wounded soldiers in the room. Nobody talked. It was very quiet. There was a strong smell of ether and rubbing alcohol. I looked at myself. I still had on my dirty, blood splattered, uniform. I had not been able to bathe or shave for over a month and I was a really pitiful sight. I still had my right combat boot on. My left boot had been taken off at the aid station.

A Chaplain walked into the room and talked to a soldier on the far side of the room. I could not hear what they were saying, but he soon came to my cot.

“Hi soldier, how are you doing?” he asked in a concerned voice. “Where were you hit?”

“Oh, I got hit in the right knee, but I’m sure that I’ll be alright now,” I answered.

“My name is Chaplain Stanley E. Anderson. I’m from Pendleton, Oregon. Where are you from?”

“My name is Hotz and I’m from Texas,” I answered, as we shook hands. His hands were soft and he had a good firm grip. I liked him instantly.

He came right to the point and asked, “Are you saved?”

After the Chaplain left the room, I had very little time to think. The door opened and a doctor wearing a white jacket came into the room. “O.K. guys, which one of you is Hotz?” he inquired as he looked around the room.

“I’m Hotz,” I answered, as I raised my hand.

“Alright Hotz. I’m a Doctor and we’re going to patch you up and put you back together. My name’s Major L. E. Williford. I’m from Houston, Texas. Where you from?” he asked.

“I’m from Thomaston, Texas,” I answered.

“Where in the dickens is Thomaston, Texas?” he laughed with a question in his voice.

“Oh, it’s between Cuero and Victoria,” I grinned.

“O.K. that’s right. I know where Cuero is. That’s the turkey capital of the world. That’s where they have the famous “Turkey Trot” celebration each year.”

“That’s absolutely right,” I replied. “I could eat some of that good old turkey and dressing right now.”

Our conversation was cut short by two “ward boys” with a stretcher. They carefully picked me up, placed me on the stretcher and carried me into the operating room.

Valie Hotz spent over a year in hospitals; first in France and then in the US. He had multiple surgeries and was left with a metal plate in his right leg. As a result of the surgeries, his right leg was three inches shorter than the left (personal communication, Bobby Hotz). I don’t know if he considered his injury the “million dollar wound,” that Dad was looking for but he must have been limited in his ability to enjoy sports and hunting as he told Dad that he wanted after the war.

Hotz had two years of high school in a one-room schoolhouse before the war. When he returned to Cuero, Texas after the war, Hotz finished high school with the help of his former teacher. He went on to earn a degree in Agriculture from Texas Arts and Industrial College in 3 years. He worked as a real estate appraiser and taught part-time at a local community college. The government sent him a check for \$90 each month for his disability. He never complained and was grateful to the Government for the funding offered through the GI Bill that allowed him to get a college education (personal communication, Bobby Hotz).

Hotz married Sallie Clifton on August 4, 1946 and they had three children: Roger (November 31, 1947), Robert (April 1, 1950), and Brenda (November 13, 1953). Every year after the war Valie and his son Robert went to west Texas to hunt mule deer during deer season which began after Thanksgiving. On one day of the year Hotz would not shoot a deer or even pick up a gun. That day was November 28, the day he was hit with shrapnel in France during World War II (Personal Communication, Bobby Hotz).