



#77

**R E S T R I C T E D**

b. This recommendation is not supported by official records.

3. Specific Data:

a. The date of action was 23 February 1945.

b. The action was located in the Pierer Wald, northwest of Selhausen, Germany.

c. (1) The terrain was characterized as flat with dense woods and river in immediate vicinity. Hostile observation was poor. The enemy employed mortar fire and antipersonnel mines.

(2) Visibility was poor; time of day, 0330. Atmospheric conditions, clear and cool.

(3) The enemy was located in concealed positions in the town of Selhausen, Germany.

(4) The morale of our troops was good considering the hardships encountered. Enemy morale, good.


(5) 52 casualties were sustained by Company "F", 45 in the mined area in the woods and 7 in the attack on the town of Selhausen, which was 36.1% of its foxhole strength of 144. Enemy troops, heavy.

(6) After pushing across the Roer River, the men of Company "F" encountered a heavily wooded area sown with antipersonnel mines which inflicted many casualties on the company and threatened to halt the entire advance. In extreme peril of his life, Technical Sergeant Kitchell after being wounded picked his way through a maze of trip wires and over antipersonnel mines in order to lead his platoon safely through the woods. Because of his perilous position at the head of his platoon, he was severely wounded a second time by an exploding mine but continued forward and brought his men through the woods in time for the attack upon the town of Selhausen.

(7) Detailed Resume:

Technical Sergeant Elmer (NMI) Kitchell, while serving with the Army of the United States, distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy. On 23 February 1945, at approximately 0330, Company "F", 120th Infantry, launched an attack across the Roer River with the mission of seizing the town of Selhausen, Germany, about 850 yards southeast of the crossing site. It was necessary for the company to advance in a southeasterly direction through the dense woods of the Pierer Wald, using the concealment of the forest to approach the line of departure which was about 500 yards away. The attacking forces entered the woods before daybreak. Although the night was clear, little light penetrated the deep woods. The weather was cool. Only after entering the thick woods did the troops become aware of the numerous antipersonnel mines with which the enemy had covered the entire area. Within the first few minutes after the men entered the forest, 45 casualties were suffered as a result of the exploding mines. In the section of the woods through which "F" Company passed, an area some 200 yards wide by 300 yards long it was estimated that at least 500 mines had been planted. Many of these mines were connected, forming a network so as to detonate a whole series when one trip wire was struck. Later the same morning 150 undetected mines were removed from the route through which this company passed. The enemy, alerted by the explosions of the mines began to pound the area with heavy mortar fire. The platoon leader of the 3rd

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 Platoon was among the first to be seriously wounded by fragments from a mine. T/Sgt Kitchell was also wounded at this time. It was immediately apparent that the entire attack might bog down, because of the disorganization of the remaining troops who were almost panic stricken by the sounds of the exploding mines and mortar shells, the cries of the wounded and the fear of hidden dangers which lay across their route of advance. Quickly sizing up the situation and disregarding his wound, T/Sgt Kitchell immediately assumed command of his platoon. Although his men were scattered and badly disorganized because they had not all embarked at the same time or at the same place on the shore, he carefully made his way in the darkness through the mined and shelled area, gathered his men and organized them to continue their advance to the line of departure. His calm and efficient manner quickly instilled confidence in the badly shaken men, and in a short time he moved the platoon into the woods towards Selhausen. Carefully advancing in the darkness through the forest he succeeded in taking his platoon through half of the treacherous area. Midway through, more mines and trip wires were encountered and T/Sgt Kitchell was again wounded, this time much more severely. Nevertheless he continued to lead his platoon until he collapsed from loss of blood. By courageously leading his platoon through the heavily mined forest, after he had been twice wounded, T/Sgt Kitchell brought his men to the line of departure in time for the attack. Because of the heavy casualties inflicted by the mines in the Pierer Wald, his platoon played an extremely important role in the ensuing attack because it furnished the necessary fire power for the troops as they successfully advanced on Selhausen.

B. P. PURDUE  
Colonel - 120th Infantry  
Commanding

5 Incls:

- 1 - Certificate of 1st Lieutenant Stoner
- 2 - Certificate of 1st Lieutenant Terry
- 3 - Affidavit of Sergeant Vore
- 4 - Affidavit of Private First Class McCoy
- 5 - Sketch of Action

A F F I D A V I T

(B)

When we crossed the Roer River on 23 February 1945 at 0330, T/Sgt Elmer Kitchell, 3rd platoon sergeant, was in charge of three alligators. Our platoon leader was a new man and had only been with us for about three days. There was a lot of shelling on the bank of the river, and when we got on the other side this shelling, with the darkness, made it difficult to organize the men. T/Sgt Kitchell, knowing every man in the outfit, took over the responsibility and really got things going. We hadn't gone more than 15 yards into the woods, which practically came up to the bank of the river, when we ran into mines. The platoon leader lost his leg and T/Sgt Kitchell was wounded somewhere in the wrist, or arm, I believe. He told us to keep going though, because we had to make the LD on the other side of the woods on time. He continued in the lead feeling for trip wires, and when we got about halfway into the woods someone behind us set off a mine, which knocked me off my feet and wounded T/Sgt Kitchell pretty badly in the hip. Even though he was hurt bad, he got up off the ground and told us to keep moving. Mines kept going off behind us. I guess the fellows were confused and weren't careful about stepping over the wires when they were pointed out to them. Then, too, it was dark and almost anything could happen. T/Sgt Kitchell kept going until we were about 3/4 through the woods and then he collapsed from loss of blood. When we left him behind, he kept saying we had to go on. We started out with 38 to 40 men and ended up with 12 when we got to the LD. If it hadn't been for T/Sgt Kitchell, I don't think any of us would have got there. I witnessed this action.

*Frank H. Vore, Jr.*

FRANK H. VORE, JR., 38693941  
Sgt, Co F - 120th Infantry

Sworn and subscribed to before me  
this 1st day of June 1945.

*Harry L. Jackson*  
HARRY L. JACKSON  
Captain - Infantry  
Summary Courts Officer

C E R T I F I C A T E

(C)

6 March 1945

On 23 February 1945, the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry was committed in an attack. Part of the Battalion attack plan called for Company F of this organization to cross the Roer River at approximately 07.7-52.7 and, proceeding in an easterly direction, enter the woods located to the south of Krauthausen, Germany. The company was then to swing to the right and, using the woods as a covered approach, move to the line of departure which was the southwestern edge of the woods (08.2-52.7). At H-hour, the company was to move out from the line of departure and attack the town of Selhausen, Germany, that was approximately 350 yards away. The crossing of the Roer River was to be made during the hours of darkness with the assistance of rubber and wooden boats and with craft known as alligators. This crossing was exceptionally difficult and hazardous due to the fact that the men were not too well experienced in the handling of the craft, the swollen swift waters of the river, plus the fact that it was dark and the enemy was harassing the area with mortar fire. The attack jumped off at H-hour and the crossing of the river was negotiated with some slight difficulty. After the troops of Company F reached the other side they proceeded in an easterly direction in order to enter the wooded area that was to be part of their covered route of approach. The enemy had foreseen such an advance and had very heavily mined and booby trapped this woods. As the forward elements of Company F reached the woods, the booby traps and mines were set off by the unsuspecting troops. These mines and booby traps caused severe casualties among the personnel of Company F. Among the first to be wounded by the fragments of the booby traps was the platoon leader of the 3rd platoon. T/Sgt Elmer Kitchell, who was at the time acting in the capacity of platoon sergeant, seeing the platoon leader hit, sized up the situation and immediately took the necessary quick and aggressive action. Disregarding his own personal safety and the fact that the area in which he was located was extremely treacherous to walk about in, he nevertheless began quick and efficient reorganization of the near panicky platoon. The enemy during this time was dropping mortar fire in the vicinity which added to the hazards that T/Sgt Kitchell had to work under. T/Sgt Kitchell succeeded in successfully getting his platoon organized and, taking over the job of platoon leader, led them forward in the continuance of the attack. It was not known until later that T/Sgt Kitchell performed this reorganization while he was wounded. The same booby trap that wounded the platoon leader also wounded the Sergeant, but he made no mention of the fact and carried on in the platoon leader's place. After the reorganization had been accomplished, T/Sgt Kitchell personally led the platoon in a southwesterly direction through the woods toward the line of departure. As the Sergeant was the foremost man of the platoon and as he approached the line of departure, more booby traps were detonated by the troops in the darkness. A shrapnel from one of these traps succeeded in again hitting the Sergeant, this time severely. The Sergeant wanted to carry on, but after being wounded twice, he was ordered by his superiors to be evacuated. It was the courageous and heroic action on the part of T/Sgt Kitchell that without a doubt brought his platoon forward when the advance threatened to bog down and succeeded in bringing them up

C E R T I F I C A T E

(continued)

where they were vitally needed in the attack upon the company's objective. This platoon later played an important part in the company's successful operation against the assigned objective.. I was an eyewitness to the above action..

/s/ George W. Terry  
/t/ GEORGE W. TERRY  
1st Lt - Infantry  
Executive Officer  
Company F, 120th Infantry

Sworn and subscribed to before me on  
this 6th day of March 1945, at APO 30.

/s/ Harry L Jackson  
/t/ HARRY L JACKSON  
Captain - Infantry  
Summary Courts Officer

THIS IS A CERTIFIED TRUE COPY

*Harry L. Jackson*  
HARRY L JACKSON  
Captain - Infantry  
Summary Courts Officer

# 3

A F F I D A V I T

D

I was one of the 12 men out of our platoon that got to the LD after going through the mined woods between the Roer River and Selhausen, Germany, on 23 February 1945. T/Sgt Kitchell was wounded by shrapnel from a mine after we had gone about 15 yards into the woods. This same mine blew the leg off our platoon leader. Our morale was pretty low, when we saw what we were up against, but T/Sgt Kitchell, although he was wounded, knew that we had to keep going and he told us to keep moving and wouldn't let us bog down. He took the lead and was doing all right until we got about half-way into the woods. Then someone behind us set off a mine. I got a small piece of shrapnel in my body, but nothing to worry about. T/Sgt Kitchell though was badly hit in the hip. Despite the pain of this wound and the shock of the explosion, he kept right on going and inspired the rest of us, although some of us were wounded in minor ways, to go with him. He had to drop out finally because he got too weak from loss of blood, but he kept telling us that we had to finish the attack before daybreak. Everytime a mine went off behind us, it seemed like it got four or five men. We had only 12 left when we got to the LD. Those wouldn't have gotten there if it hadn't been for the inspiring leadership of T/Sgt Kitchell. I witnessed this action.

*Melvin E McCoy*

MELVIN E. MCCOY, 33875878  
Pfc, Co F - 120th Infantry

Sworn and subscribed to before me  
this 1st day of June 1945.

*Harry L. Jackson*  
HARRY L. JACKSON  
Captain - Infantry  
Summary Courts Officer

(E)

C E R T I F I C A T E

After the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry, had captured Selhausen, Germany, on 23 February 1945, I took a squad of men at about 1000 in the morning to clear a path through the antipersonnel mines in the woods between the town and the Roer River. There were many wounded men still lying in the woods and it was necessary to clear enough of the mines so that the wounded could be safely evacuated. My men not only cleared this path, but helped some medics in removing the wounded. In the area in which we worked--a sector which measured about 200 by 300 yards and through which Company F had passed earlier that morning in the attack on Selhausen--we disarmed and removed about 150 mines. When the troops of Company F had gone through this part of the woods, though, they had set off a great number of these mines. I would estimate that there were originally a total of about 500 mines in this area. Many of them were arranged so that when one went off several others were detonated at the same time. These mines were made of concrete with steel casings. The trip wires were stretched parallel to the river line, and were set out in such a way as to create a net, which made it impossible to walk through the woods on a straight line without running into one of them. We also found two piles of mines, with about 100 in each pile. The Germans evidently hadn't gotten around to planting them yet.

*Robert H. Stoner*

ROBERT H. STONER

1st Lt, Co F - 120th Inf

Sworn and subscribed to before me  
this 4th day of June 1945.

*Harry L. Jackson*

HARRY L. JACKSON

Captain - Infantry

Summary Courts Officer