

Stan left while we were here for Paris. Was he happy! He had been slightly perturbed because he hadn't gone earlier. We didn't know it then but it was to be quite awhile before we saw him again.

We began to get settled quite satisfactorily. Movies were set up and we had regular church services. Being just like home, the place became our second home. There was a little talk about moving out and then we heard that we would stay about a week longer. No one knew for sure. The air corps was trying to knock out some dams that controlled the Roer River. We continued to look at our map at nights and to shake our heads as our eyes focused on the Hambach Forest.

Christmas was drawing near. I was at church on December 17th when the chaplain said that he hoped we would be around for Christmas. Big plans had been made for elaborate service for the entire regiment. Thinks I, "The Chaplain must know somethings we don't". It looked like we were going to spend Christmas in a half way decent manner. I left church about ten minutes to twelve. I immediately returned to our CP where Lt. Kennedy was putting down the telephone receiver. He told me that we were alerted and would probably move out that afternoon.

The previous day we had heard reports of paratroops being dropped in the area, but it hadn't bothered us too much or make us do much thinking. Air activity had been pretty busy, however, for the Germans.

No one knew a thing about where we were going or why. Sgt. Kirby left on a quartering party about noon. The battalion mounted trucks about 1700 that afternoon and pulled out at 1730. There was no question about German air activity that night. They were strafing the roads and flying around. Our route started south. We went through Aachen. About 2100 we found Kirby and by 2300 everyone was set for the night. At 2330 I received a call on the radio to be prepared to move immediately. I had released the trucks by that time so we were to wait until trucks could return to get us.

As is usual in the army, they had given us plenty of warning. The trucks

finally arrived about 0400. It wasn't good to be moving for the air activity was still very active. We started out. The trucks stopped. The first thing we knew we had lost contact with the rest of the "M" Company trucks, but we had contact with the engineers. I told Major Rogerson that on the radio. He said that was find, just stay behind them. We did. First one of them went to sleep and lost contact with the vehicle ahead of him. It was dark. We got them started once more. The next thing I knew we were going down a very poor road. I called Major Rogerson and asked him which direction we should be moving. His answer proved it, we must be on the wrong road. I had received no march order except to get ready to move, so after considerable discussion I arranged for a meeting place with Rogerson and proceeded to get the trucks turned around.

The turning around episode is a story in itself. We found a cross roads. Got the first truck turned around, but had the jeep stuck. I left McWilliams to work on it and arrived at the other turn around just in time to see the 2½ ton truck list to a 40 degree angle and run in the ditch. Planes were really circling overhead about this time. One of the colored drivers said, "If I don't die tonight, I ain't never going to die". What a time we had! The drivers were plenty scared and the road and turn-around was poor. We finally got the vehicles all headed back the right way and found Major Rogerson. Then we continued to our destination which was reached about daylight.

It was now the 18th of December and we still didn't know what all this moving around was about. Kirby had picked up a rumor that the 78th Division had lost a whole battalion as the result of a counterattack, but he also had heard that all the territory lost had been regained. We moved out again about 1230 as part of a task force. All I knew about the destination was that we were headed for an area somewhere near Malmedy. That was in Belgium. That meant we could fraternize once more and we would get to see some country.

About two o'clock the convoy was stopped. All the company commanders were



called together to receive the order. Col. Fitzgerald gave us the story. The Germans had launched a counter-offensive, how large no one knew. The best information had it that there were about 30 tanks heading our way. The order of march was changed. Company "I" was to lead the column by ten minutes.

Off we started once more. The advance was slow from then on. The point of the column was being cautious and they couldn't be blamed for that. They finally stopped at a small town called Stomount. I went forward to get the order. Sgt. Kirby was with me. Here was the story I got from Col. Fitzgerald. There was definite tank activity to our front. He estimated that there were about 30 tanks. He said he was going forward on a little reconnaissance. I could get the defense order from Capt. Stewart.

I got the rest of the information from Capt. Stewart. The other two rifle companies were going to set up in the main part of town. Our company would organize on the little knoll on the left. This part of town was called Rouat.

I went back and moved the company up to our area. It was dark by then and must have been at least 2200. We set up without much trouble. The anti-tank weapons set up in our area also. I went back to battalion to tell them our situation and to see if they had any more information. Kirby went with me again. Major Rogerson was sitting in the corner. He had the story that the tanks we could hear moving around were stuck down near the river. No one seemed to be concerned about the situation. Capt. Del Bene, the S-3, said "If they try to come after us in the morning, we'll sure give them hell!"

I gave my situation and went back. On the way, Kirby found the colored truck drivers and told them where to put the vehicles.

There was no question about the tank activity. There seemed to be plenty of it. I could hear the Germans hollering at each other. I spent the rest of the night getting anti-tank mines put out and answering the telephone. So ended the 18th of December. It had been a full day from midnight on.

No one who was present will ever forget December 19. Just before daylight I checked the men in position and changed some of them. Then four tanks arrived in our defense area which made us feel much better. All the men were alerted before daylight because we realized that anything might happen.

About 0830 tanks or halftracks began to come over the rise to our front. The tankers with us wasted no time with them. Two were knocked out and no more were trying to come over. We realized, however, that there were probably plenty behind. We knew this because they kept throwing direct fire rounds into our buildings. At the same time we could hear a hell of a fight going on to our right, in the area defended by Companies "I" and "K". About this time Lt. Parramore called me on the sound-powered phone and told me that these two companies were getting pushed back. That wasn't good because our flank would soon be very vulnerable. I immediately checked with battalion. They told me that there had been some trouble, but that everything would be O.K. I could hear the other company commanders on the radio occasionally. Discussion was held on use of Powell's stuff, which meant artillery. The answer seemed to be that it would be available if we could hold out an hour. The 81 mm. mortars were set up and could fire. Lt. Conway, the mortar observer, arrived at our CP about that time.

It was now about 0900. Lt. Parramore called me again and told me that Companies "I" and "K" were being pushed back again or still and that I had better find out what was expected of us. That was a mighty good idea and one that had been occupying my mind no little bit.

I called on the radio, "Hello, Thorn 3, Hello Thorn 3, we are concerned about the situation on the right, can you tell me what is going on?" Here is Col. Fitzgerald's answer that I will always remember, "I too am concerned - the situation is grave. You will continue to hold." So I told Lt. Parramore we would have to hold. I didn't like it any better than Parramore did only he had just a little more realistic picture of the whole thing because he could see the



men practically running to the rear.

I kept close to the radio. The Germans had by this time set up a machine gun or a tank just behind the rise to our front 250 yards and were firing machine gun fire down the street just outside our CP. About that time, I heard Lt. Kane, the company commander of Co. "K", call up very excitedly. I knew he was being over-run by plenty of tanks from his flank and rear. Our orders were to hold. It wasn't good.

About this time the tanks with us started to pull out. Now it was bad - very bad. I wasted no time in getting hold of the radio. I said, "What do you mean hold and you take the tanks away. What do you mean?". The answer, "Continue to cover the withdrawal of the battalion". Lots of things went through my mind in a hurry. It sounded like an order to sacrifice Co. "L" to save what they could of the other units. I asked, "Give me clarification. It is useless without aid of tanks. How long do you expect us to hold?" Then I got the answer I wanted, "I will have to leave that to your judgement," Col. Fitzgerald said.

My mind was made up. We had better get out in a hurry. Lt. Parramore had told me too much about the situation on the right to make the answer anything else. Everyone was to start working back in small units. The machine gun crew would cover us and then get back also. Kirby left with most of the CP group to let the rest of the men know about the plan.

It didn't take us long. We cleared out in good shape, not bunched up badly either. That machine gun was still firing down the street we were on. When I got back about 150 yards I found practically the whole company in one house. Everyone was pretty well frozen in position. No one dared to move. I talked to McWilliams the jeep driver about getting his jeep out. He said at that moment the anti-tank truck tried to pull out. The machine guns from the German tanks less than 200 yards from us now open up. The truck ran in the ditch. The driver had been killed.

I pleaded with the men, "We can't stay here. Let's go up this hill and into the woods". Lt. Kennedy told them we would have to do that and quickly. Only a few men started. Lt. Kennedy went and that helped. Some more men started. Then McWilliams said to me, "Lt. Know, what about the smoke grenades!". We all are thankful that the jeep hadn't left! Grow, from the third platoon, fired about 35 of them on that hillside. Now it was covered with smoke. I know the Germans were worried about a counter-attack when they saw that and our men were thankful that they were screened. Everyone was leaving now.

I hadn't left yet. I was worried about Parramore. About that time, Capt. DelBene called me on the radio and asked if we could set up a line on the top of the hill. It was too late for that now. Control of the company was lost. Lunt and I started up the hill. The smoke was rising. We really covered the territory. The tanks were shooting both direct fire and machine gun fire up that hill. Lunt began to falter. I was afraid he would pass out on me. I told him to throw the radio away. He began to cry. "I've never left one behind yet" he told me. I had to order him to get rid of it. So he destroyed it and we caught a breather in a little house which I was afraid the tank would blast to bits any minute. We were off again. We had picked up a boy by the name of Farmer and a wounded man. We carried the wounded boy to a small shack, made him comfortable and told him the sad facts. There was no way for him to continue. I gave him a canteen of water and told him he would have to let the German medics take care of him. We had to leave. We made another run for the woods. There was still 150 yards to cover to the beginning of the sparse woods. We went deep into the woods and then caught another little breather. I thought I could hear our tanks withdrawing so we headed for the road where we could hear them. We planned on catching a ride out. We started down the ridge and then I saw that big black cross which wasn't the white star of an American tank!! Up the hill we went again. They had seen us and put some fire at our feet. We were deep in the woods in

in nothing flat. We held a council of war and took off with the compass in my hand. Anywhere north and west should be good. All the rest of the men had left. I had lost my carbine when we picked up the wounded boy. Lunt, of course, had a pistol and Farmer had an M1.

We discarded our excess equipment and kept deep in the woods. About three o'clock we came out on a road. A house was across the field in an open area. We crawled out through the brush and had control of the road. A vehicle was approaching. What do you know! It was an American jeep. We talked to the officer in it and found out that our company was only about 300 yards down the road. We were happy to see them and they were all happy to see us.

A check of the company revealed that about 30 men were not with us. The mortar section, part of company headquarters, and a squad of the second platoon was missing. Sgt. Kirby was not present, Sgt. Wilson, Sgt. Swingle and the NCO's in the mortar section were missing as well as Lt. Kennedy and Lt. Kelly. That was a blow. A check with battalion revealed that we were by far the strongest company. The other companies had lost better than half of their men.

I'll never forget the welcomes that were given me by the various officers when they found out that I was O.K. Of course, the first check had revealed that I was missing and as each of them saw me they were both surprised and very happy to shake my hands. I remember particularly Teddy, the Dutch officer, when he saw me. Captain DelBene even gave me his field coat to sleep in that night. He said I would need it more than he.

Having no jeep, McWilliams went back after a new one and some ammunition. The Chaplain came around to visit with us. Our job was now to dig in with a First Army security force. The captain in charge of that force, of course, had not seen combat and was anxious for my suggestions on what to do. He told me that we were going to stop the Germans. I don't think he liked it very well,



but I looked up at him and said, "What have you got here to stop them with?". He wasted no time in telling me all about the 90 mm gun he had. That was fine, very good, but one wasn't enough - that was my point. I felt happier when he told me that an armoured combat team should be up very shortly.

We prepared our positions. Our men trained his men how to fire a bazooka and placed them in a fox hole for the night. I put a MG from "M" Company over on the left. About all the equipment any of the men had was their rifle and ammunition. They had to drop the rest in running up that steep hill out of town.

Capt. Stewart had taken over the battalion. Col. Fitzgerald had been relieved. I checked in with him and went back to my hole in the ground. It was about 2230. In an hour and a half it would be December 20th and I would be 25 years old. The armoured column was starting to roll by us. That made me feel much better. I dozed off for a few minutes sleep.

The next day, my birthday, was uneventful until about 1800. We were alerted to go back into Stoumount. It would be done that night, the Regimental Commander had said. We got ready and went to the assembly point. A sadder bunch of men I have never seen. Morale was low. They knew what had pushed them out of that town - Hitler's First SS Panzer Division. They knew how much armour was there.

Capt. Stewart wasn't in favor of the move. I knew that. To try to go in at night without getting a few more supplies, especially signal equipment, was not a good idea. He finally convinced Col. Sutherland to throw artillery in the town all night and try to go in the following day.

The company went back to the spot they had been. I went to the battalion CP to get the plan for the attack. The plan was changed about four times that night. Col. Brown was at battalion. It did our spirits a lot of good to see him and know that he was present even if he had no part in issuing the order.



Capt. Stewart, of course, asked Col. Brown for advice. An attack order was finally issued at 0530 the next morning. We moved out at 0630. It was very foggy.

Company "L" was naturally one of the lead companies in this affair because they had more men left than any other unit. By about 0800 we were in position above the town. It was so foggy that we couldn't see over 25 feet. It was about 500 yards down to the town. We were in the edge of the woods. The jump-off time was changed. It was finally set for 1245.

The artillery barrage started and we took off with it. No one showed any interest in going, but they knew it had to be done. It was so foggy that one of our men found himself 10 yards from a German MG before he knew it. Collins was the hero here; he knocked one position out with his BAR when it stuck. He grabbed the Jerry gun, turned it around and knocked the other crew out. There were still plenty in operation.

It was too foggy, the attack just wasn't working. I told Capt. Stewart that contact was lost on our right. There was nothing left to do but pull back.

The first plan was to go back in again - immediately. Everyone had been pushed about as far as he could be. Nerves were being broken on men whom one would have thought would never weaken. Finally we got word to hold up for the night. We organized with the light tanks and dug in. Would we ever get back in? I was really tired that night.

The next day, the 22nd of December, we got the order just after noon to jump off again at 1415. This time we would have tanks with us for sure. The usual artillery preparation would be given. Faces looked mighty scared. I wondered if the men would go. Woody was the bright spot in this affair. He told the men "Come on, these tankers are really doing a job. Let's go." That was probably one of the biggest sparks at that time. The men started forward

with the tanks. Company "K" was starting on our right. What do you know - - - they were moving across an open area and not drawing a round of fire and neither were we! The Germans had pulled out! We were soon in our old town and our jeep was still there. Those men were entirely different now.

So ended the story of Stoumount. It had been a rough one. We re-captured, or rather, found two of our men. They had been hidden in a cellar all the time. The Germans had not found them.

That afternoon the First Battalion dug in with us out in front of the town. We were just getting the platoon sectors designated when who should appear but Capt. Stanford. Good old Stan, after finding out what army corps and sector we were in he had finally caught up with us from Paris. We looked quite the opposite, I know. It was great to see him back.

Stan had been due to return to us on the 18th. He had returned to Kerkrade and found that we had moved out. He supposed we were getting ready to cross the Roer. It was news to him that there was a breakthrough. He hadn't heard, the lucky fellow. Paris must have been great. All Stan could find out was what has been mentioned. He didn't know where we were and couldn't get transportation to reach us. A little later he had found out that 40 of the men in the company were MIA. He was really beginning to wonder if he would have a company left by the time he reached us. For two days he stayed at the rest camp near Kerkrade waiting to get transportation. Finally on the third day he had reached us. He had missed a great three days.

The next morning, the 23rd of December, we took off for La Gleize. It had been a very cold night. Frost was on the ground. The three rifle companies were to approach the town over three different routes or roads. According to the map, it looked good - - - phase lines to check in on and all sorts of big plans. We started on the way.

By noon we realized that we were on about the only road there was and also



that the road we were on didn't seem to be on the map. It was very confusing. There was no route into town. Over on the other side of the next draw we could see a red parachute that had been used to drop supplies to the German troops.

There was supposed to be an air show that afternoon, but something happened and it didn't come off. This was the first good day since the breakthrough. The planes were probably used on more important objectives.

Night came and we ground-hogged for the night. The order came down that all troops would have gas masks by midnight. So G2 must indicate that they expect gas to be used. The Germans must be really making this thing "all out". Stan went back to battalion just after dark to get the dope for the next action. Zorena, the man who had become my runner before going back into Stoumount, helped build a lean - to. That whole night was spent in trying to get artillery lifted that was falling very near our third platoon. Everything was being dropped in La Gleize that night. Everything. As I shivered I thought, "Tomorrow is Christmas Eve".

We took off the next morning at about 0630. The 117th was coming in from the other side of town. What was left of Hitler's best was supposed to be pretty well cut off. "K" and "L" entered town at just about the same time. There was no fighting to do. We were soon to find out why. There were better than 200 men in that town - all badly wounded. The Germans couldn't take care of their casualties. A German medical officer met us just after we entered town. He was trying to tell Lt. Kane something about showing us where his wounded were. No one was too receptive.

Stan and I were together. We rounded a little corner and who should jump out of a cellar but Sgt. Kirby! That was a great feeling to see him and the rest of the man who we had lost. They had been prisoners. They had long beards, but were they happy! It was hard for us to express our happiness in finding them. They probably had a harder time expressing their relief in being retaken. One

hundred fifty men and four officers of the battalion were back with us.

It was a great take that we captured in that town. Kirby says he will never forget what was captured there - 28 tanks and 70 half tracks. That was a real haul. Lots of it had been knocked out by our artillery, which Kirby will state was very rough and the rest the Germans had destroyed themselves.

The Germans began to come out on the streets. These Hitler boys were sad looking sights. Heads bandaged and hands, legs, chests and backs were badly wounded. Here was proof that our artillery was wicked stuff. I would judge that all of them were between the ages of 18 and 24.

A chance to visit with Kirby proved very interesting. They had had very little to eat. The Germans hadn't fared much better because food wasn't available. Potatoes had comprised the main dish, raw "katafels" as they were called. The prisoners had been kept in two main cellars. At night they were used on details to carry food, gasoline and ammunition that might be dropped by air. They had also furnished the details to dig holes in the ground for the dead Germans.

We also recaptured a lot of our own stuff. A search of some of the half-tracks showed that the Germans had been living pretty well with a lot of captured equipment. I know that they had about four of my Christmas packages including some chicken my mother had sent me. We looted the half tracks and re-equipped ourselves. Zorena and I both took part of a large red parachute.

That afternoon our battalion moved back out of the town and set up a reserve line behind the other two battalions of the regiment. Everyone dug in. The CP was in a small church that had hay on the floor. That afternoon Norlie Williams went back to battalion and was given a battlefield commission. He came out a Second Lieutenant.

It was now Christmas Eve. It was the first chance we had to breathe a little easily for about a week. On Christmas we had turkey dinner and received



the first mail since leaving Kolsheid. I also received some packages. This was a real Christmas for us. To have the men who had been re-captured made it a truly great day. It was cold, so we build a little fire and sat around it. The Chaplain came down in the afternoon and conducted services in the little church.

The next day we pulled back and set up a line along the river below us. That was a real line. The Company line must have been about 1,000 yards. We were actually outposting the river. The 82nd Airborne troops were in the area. I figured Ray Wilson may have passed by us in a truck that Christmas Eve. Our CP was in Stoumount. It took the runners all afternoon to string the wire. We held this same line until December 28th. While here, we re-examined the area that we had been run out of. We found the body of one of the men a long way from the spot where I had last seen him. There must have been deviation from the Geneva Convention by Hitler's fanatics or he never would have been where we found him and in the condition he was.

On December 28th we moved to Ster, Belgium. Our battalion was placed in division reserve. At last there was a chance for all the men to get in buildings. By this time, snow was on the ground. It was rough weather to be sleeping outside.

New Years day the Germans tried a show in the air. Planes were flying very low and those black crosses really showed up. Our anti-aircraft men made a good showing. We saw them get a couple.

From here we were taken by truck to Spa for baths. What baths those were! It was a lovely place where people came from all over Europe to take mineral baths. We took them free!

January 2 we left and set up the CP at a little place called Mista. The company was holding a line between Malmedy and Stavelot. It was here that Lt. Parramore took off to get a prisoner. He tried hard, but didn't have any