

They started out together at Fort Jackson back in the States and fought their way across Europe until the faces were no longer familiar and you could count the old men on the fingers of one hand.

My Old Outfit

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MAASRICHT, HOLLAND—We walked at five-yard intervals on either side of the concrete highway and watched without much interest the Typhoons and P-47s that were strafing something off to the left.

The planes went into long dives and pulled out in tight circles to come back and strafe again. The sound of their machine guns reached us long after they had pulled out of the dives. We glanced occasionally at the ready-made German foxholes, dug by impressed civilians and lining the road every 10 yards. They were chest deep and round, with dirt piled neatly beside them; but every one was smooth on the inside so we knew that Jerry had never used them.

We plodded along past wrecked vehicles and modern homes with well-kept yards, and glanced at the terrain off to our left where the war was. Dutch kids by the side of the road, wearing bright orange bows in their hair or on their jackets, reached for our hands.

"Good-bye," they said. They say that either way, whether you're going or coming, as a greeting or as a farewell.

Hutch was walking behind me.

Hutch is Mack Pierce, a mortar sergeant in F Company. He used to be in A Company, where he was a line sergeant, then an artificer and finally mess sergeant. He was a mess sergeant for 18 months, and then he went over the hill and got busted. He transferred to F Company after that, and they finally gave him three stripes again but he didn't care. He never did care much for things like that.

This was our anniversary—Hutch's and mine. We had been in the Army four years. We were members of the Tennessee National Guard, inducted Sept. 16, 1940, among the oldest of the "New Army." Today we were moving up to an assembly area where our outfit—the 30th (Old Hickory) Division—would get set for an attack.

It was a bright day, as days go here. The 2d Battalion was two parallel OD lines moving across the brow of a hill up ahead and swinging around the shaded curve behind us. They were leaving Maastricht, a fair-sized town taken two days before. Now—after France and Belgium



To the kids "Good-bye" meant greeting or farewell.

and Holland — they were headed for Germany.

I was with Hutch down in F Company because Hutch is the only line soldier left out of the old bunch from the highlands of east Tennessee who came into the Army as Company A. There were about 150 of us then. Now there are only four in the regiment. There's Hutch, down in the 2d Battalion. Then there's Porky Colman, a mess sergeant now; Charlie Grindstaff, still cooking; and Herman O. Parker, still driving a truck. They're all that's left of old A Company.

We started out in the Army at Fort Jackson, S. C., when they were singing the song "I'll Never Smile Again." Lord, we were sentimental about that song. I remember Hilton was just married and was leaving his new wife. Crockett slugged the juke box in the drug store at Columbia; Tommy Dorsey's arrangement came out soft and smooth, and Hilton cried. We were all privates then, going into the Army for a year.

Since then, Hilton's kid brother had become a tail gunner in a Fort and had gone down over France. Hilton got out of the Army and his wife had a baby on the same day. Hilton stayed out of the Army for two years. Now he's in the Navy somewhere. Crockett went from a basic private up to first sergeant and then to OCS. Now he's a first lieutenant in an infantry outfit over here.

HUTCH PIERCE and I walked up the road. Somebody—a replacement—sang briefly and then stopped. The infantry doesn't sing much, especially moving up. Not after St. Lo and Mortain, they don't sing much. The replacement chanted: "Or you might grow up to be a mule. Now, a mule is an animal with long funny ears."

Hutch and I talked along the way. When we got a break we lit K-ration cigarettes and tried to reconstruct A Company.

It was a picturesque outfit. Those originals were close-knit, clannish and independent as only hill people can be. It was a company with a heart and a soul. Its code was "Independence." Its motto, in our own language, was "take nothin' offen nobody." That was a philosophy that needed tempering. It works better in combat than in garrison. We had our troubles.

I had seen Col. Crumley in London. He's had a desk job there now since his lungs finally took him out of the field into the hospital. He was a first lieutenant when we went to Jackson, then company commander and then battalion commander. We talked about the old company before it broke up. Crumley was hard, but he loved the company. He was a better soldier than any of us, but he was proud of us—a man who lived by our philosophy and tempered it, too. We learned to take a lot, as the infantry does.

It has been three years since Crumley was with us as a company officer, but Hutch said: "When you're out here you appreciate a man like him."

We tried, Hutch and I, to tell each other what little we knew of the men who came in with us. The outfit had deteriorated slowly in the natural process of transfers and discharges, like an eroded hillside gradually falling away.

Harry Nave, the company clerk, went into the Air Forces as a cadet and got killed in training. Lardo Boring went into the Air Forces, too, and the last we heard, he had pulled his missions and was back home. Lardo used to be in the machine-gun section.

Earl Marshall went into the Paratroops, and so

gun section.

Earl Marshall went into the Paratroops, and so did Bill Longmire. Elmer Simerly was in the Airborne Infantry. Bill Potter went to OCS and the last we knew he was in New Guinea. Red Mason was a lieutenant over there somewhere. Ralph Snavely was one of the first to transfer out. He went down to the Southwest Pacific, too. Lucian Garrison went to Italy and got wounded, and so did Capt. Ritts. Ed Mottern was in Iceland for a long time but he's probably over here now.

Hutch had seen Pony Miller on the beach back in June. Pony is a first now, and an executive officer. Hutch said he'd heard that Howard Fair went in with the 1st Division on D-Day. Charles Hurt got his jaw broken on maneuvers just before A Company came overseas, so he stayed in the States.

Doc Sharp was transferred; he's down in the Islands with a jungle-training unit, still letting the cards fall the same as always. Jack Ellis came over with another regiment in the division, but he got wounded and we lost track of him. Fred Davis was a captain in the TDS the last we knew.

A COMPANY came to England with only 12 of the old National Guard bunch still left and just a few of our first and second batches of selectees. Now there's only one line soldier left from the first group of selectees we trained—a boy named J. C. Wright. Wright was wounded some time back, but he rejoined the company later as an acting platoon sergeant. Then they got a new

lieutenant, and he and J. C. had an argument. J. C. is platoon guide now.

The outfit came to France on D-plus-9. Three weeks went by before they hit it rough. Then, on July 7, the regiment spearheaded the way across the Vire River and fought down through the hedgerows toward St. Lo.

It was a war foreign to the sage fields and pine thickets of South Carolina. It was a war from one piled-up mass of earth and shrubbery to another, with the Artillery blasting savagely and the infantry moving up 50 yards behind it. Those hedges are old, and the decay has built up at their base to form solid walls. Each one of them was a wall of fire, and the open fields between were plains of fire. The flanking hedges on either side belonged to him who could cover them.

Two of the boys from the hills stopped there. One of them was Bill Whitson, black-haired, with a face so dark that his teeth seemed whiter than they really were. He was built like a god—broad and tall. He lived like a happy devil, untamed and untameable. Whit never took anything very seriously. He moved with the corded grace of a panther, lethal and full of power. He could make the sling of his '03 rifle crack like gunfire when the leather hit the hardness of his hand.

Whit raised his head out of a foxhole and a piece of shrapnel caught him flush in the temple. He died somewhere northeast of St. Lo. Bull Bowers got hit there, too, the same day.

Bull is a big boy, almost pudgy, with round cheeks that are a perpetual cherry red. His name is James, but he's always been called Bull because when his voice changed it came out low, deep and throaty, so that whatever Bull said he said it in a rumble with a drawl.

Bull is easygoing. He never pushes anybody unless somebody pushes him. His make-up is not the make-up of a tough platoon sergeant. Bull's a platoon sergeant who swore softly rather often, but never with very much conviction.

So when they pulled Bull out of the foxhole, after the shrapnel had gone into him, he looked at his legs and then said to nobody in particular, without a great deal of violence and in a slow rumble: "Them gawdam sons o' bitches."

Bull was evacuated. Two days later Dale May left the outfit because of sickness. He had stomach trouble—ulcers or something.

Dale got to be a sergeant right after we came

Col. Franklin killed the Nazi tank crew with a .45.



into the Army because he was one of the few men in the outfit with service in the Regulars. He had pulled a hitch at Schofield Barracks, and he told us stories about the Old Army—of afternoons off, tailor-made khaki blouses, white gloves and chrome bayonets, and how he was pulling KP when his discharge papers came through and he could go back to the mainland.

Dale was a tech sergeant when he left A Company. The boys in the kitchen hear he's in a Quartermaster outfit now.

THE regiment's objective was the high ground to the west overlooking St. Lo. They took it, so they were a protective screen for the outfits that went into St. Lo itself. Then A Company moved south toward Tessy-sur-Vire.

On July 28, the regiment hit trouble. The next day the 1st Battalion went in to attack near a place called Le Mesnil Opac. There were hedgerows again, and a long slope exposed to observation and heavy fire. One of the men wounded in the action was Pfc. James R. Baines.

We always called him Beans. He had been a tech sergeant but had got busted. When he made platoon sergeant he told one of the boys who got another rocker with him: "Well, they made



The battalion said "Go to hell" to surrender talk.

everybody else, now they made us." That was back in the States. Nobody cared much for stripes back there any more than they do over here now. Too many people on your back, too much worry, too much bother.

Beans got hit by shrapnel and was evacuated. The next night Clyde Angel was killed.

Clyde was blond and fair. He talked with the nasal twang of east Tennessee. He was a mess sergeant and before that he had been a cook in the company, just as his brother Monk had been a cook for us before him. There were two other cooks, men who had come to the company later, who were killed with Clyde.

The kitchens were dispersed and everybody was dug in. Charlie Grindstaff said Clyde had the best shelter in the area. He and the other two dug a deep one and covered it with logs and dirt. Then Jerry came over, dropping big-stuff bombs that straddled the shelter. The concussion killed all three of them in the hole. A Company's kitchen was blown to hell. Now Porkey is using the blackout tent of battalion headquarters for his cook tent. It's better than the old one.

The next night the regiment made its objective beyond Tessy-sur-Vire and later moved on to relieve elements of the 1st Division near St. Barthelmy. St. Barthelmy is close by Mortain, not

far from the base of the Cherbourg peninsula. It was between Mortain and Avranches by the sea that our armor had roared southwest into Brittany after the break-through at St. Lo. At St. Barthelmy A Company gave everything it had. It was there that the regiment was hit—hard.

THE SS had counterattacked with tanks, and the German artillery was trying to cut through to split our forces in Normandy and Brittany. The Germans hit savagely. They ran over A Company and C Company. The regiment fought like animals with everything that would fire and then fought hand-to-hand with the German infantry that poured in behind the tanks.

Jerry almost made it. The fight went on for four days while the division struggled and gave ground but never broke. Then, on the fifth day, the power was gone and we went back into St. Barthelmy. The SS spearhead was blunted and then broken off. But Bud Hale was gone, and Ed Markland.

Bud was the top kick. He was a little guy with delicate hands and a skin that stretched tight across the cheekbones. His eyes were the eyes of all his family. At home the Hales have eyes that are all alike. Frances, Virginia, Luke, Sara, Bud, Mary, Nell and Sonny—they all have eyes that are their medium of expression. Bud played football at home the year we won the state championship and before. He was the kind of boy who drew people to him. Over here one of the new boys in the kitchen put it right: "We had to take the chow up to the line, and when I could see Bud I felt like the whole company was there."

After the SS ran over the company, Bud was listed as missing in action. So was Markland.

Ed and I were mortar corporals together for a long time, and our anniversary today would have been a great day for him. The division commander came around this morning presenting medals to a few officers and men in the regiment. The general order for the award of the Silver Star included T/Sgt. George Edward Markland "for gallantry in action in France."

The day after Angel was killed Ed's outfit had been held up by fire from a dug-in position. Ed crawled up ahead, "consistently exposed himself to murderous enemy mortar and artillery fire." We adjusted our own artillery on the strongpoint and the attack went on. Ed wasn't here to get in on the little ceremony by the road this morning, but he may catch the later one. A Company doesn't refer to Bud and Ed as MIA but as captured. Jerry got a lot of prisoners that day. Ernest Oaks was hit there, too.

When the SS overran our antitank positions and knocked out four of the guns, Oaks had to be evacuated. He had been in A Company for a long time—part of the triumvirate of Potter, Oaks and Russell. When we came into the Army none of them was 20. They were wild. They laughed and did insane things. Russell—we called him "Reb" although all of us are Southerners—was wide-eyed during our training on the machine gun. The nomenclature delighted him. One day the section sergeant had us naming the parts of the piece and he picked up a tiny pin and asked Reb to identify it.

Reb gazed thoughtfully at the pin.

"That," he said, "is the forward cam lever for the plunger guide on the barrel extension with the swivel pawl."

ST. BARTHELMY-MORTAIN was the division's great trial. It was infantry against armor, and the division fought for survival. Col. Frankland, the 1st Battalion's commander, saved his own CP by killing the crew of a German tank with his .45. Parts of five German *Panzer* outfits hit the division, striking along the main highways and the back roads. The division was committed to the last man. The artillery was overrun and fought as infantry. The engineers

and cavalry were on the line. Thirty Jerry tanks were destroyed. The engineers got a Mark IV with a bazooka. An AT commander stopped another with a bazooka and killed the crew with a carbine as they tried to get out.

In the fog of the morning of Aug. 7, the regiment and division survived. Our artillery, TDs, rocket-firing planes and armor were thrown in to add strength to a line that was thin. A Company survived.

One battalion of a sister regiment was isolated for three days, cut off on a cliff and blasted mercilessly. When the Germans came forward under a white flag to talk surrender, the battalion said: "Go to hell."

OUR 2d Battalion—Hutch's outfit—helped get them out.

Hutch has had the experiences of a line soldier. A machine-gun bullet burned the back of his neck. The blast of Screaming Minnies cartwheeled him off his feet. A little piece of shrapnel cut across the top of his foot, but he didn't bother to have it treated.

Hutch laughed and said: "The damndest thing I've seen in combat happened that day. We went up after the battalion that was lost. There was a goat up there. He was a sorry-looking goat, sort of a dirty gray.

"Well, we were getting artillery, and every time a shell would come in this goat would dive for a foxhole. Then he would raise his head up and if he didn't hear anything he would come out. There were plenty of foxholes and he knew what they were for. He'd do it every time."



Both had stood all they could stand for a while.

We laughed at the picture of a bewhiskered goat in a foxhole. One infantryman said: "Yeah. The reason he beat me into one was because he had four legs and me just two."

A Company had two of our originals left in the line after St. Barthelmy. Now both of them are gone—perhaps to come back to the outfit, perhaps not to come back to it at all.

Both went back with fatigue, with nerves that had stood all they could stand for a while.

One of them left just a few days ago, after a river crossing that stirred up a fight. It was a fight like a dozen others the company has had. But it was one too many for him.

The other one who went back is a twin. He and his brother are identical. There were some of us who had soldiered with them every day and still couldn't tell them apart. They're squat and tow-headed and when they laugh their faces crease into a fan of wrinkles from the outside corners of their eyes. They grinned almost always, but when they got mad their lips quivered and they trembled all over, and we were surprised that they did. Not long before the company left the States, one of them was transferred and the other stayed on alone. But part of him was gone.

Yesterday, in a courtyard, Parker and I lay sprawled on the trailer of his jeep and watched as the infantry went past on the outside lane. It was a patrol coming in. "Hit anything?" somebody asked. A voice answered: "Nuh." The patrol went by silently.

"Was that some of us?" I asked Parker.

"Doggone," said Herman, "I don't know. I don't know anybody in the company any more."