

Oct 2nd

"SIEGFRIED ATTACK"

Co. B - 117th Inf

30th Inf Div.

- MORTAR SECTION -

I. The approach to the River (Wurm).

A. We leave the town of , following a disappointing air-support attack.

1. As we advanced behind our own shell-fire, many thoughts skimmed through my mind.

a. I became aware of an intense love and longing for life.

b. "Will I make it" pounded in my brain.

B. We begin to cross beet-fields and plowed ground.

1. Walking with my load of mortar ammunition is very difficult on this terrain.

2. The shelling from both sides is now greatly intensified.

a. Shells begin to drop around us in great numbers.

b. I hit the ground as a shell lands nearby — smashing my poloroid glasses with my helmet.

c. I see a man heading for the rear, his hand hit by shrapnel. (He returned to us from the hospital only two days before.)

C. Sniper fire becomes intense as we approach some buildings to our left front.

1. We are sniped at from both flanks.

2. Bullets from the buildings (now left of us).

a. The man in front of me has a hole shot through the stock of his rifle.

bb. Bullets kick up the dirt around my feet.

3. My squad (1st) got by that spot with no casualties.

a. Some men lost in the second squad.

b. All but sqd leader and one man from 3rd sqd.

4. We are pinned down now by fire from the front.

a. Mortars are set up here for the first time.

b. From here I get a glimpse of the assault squad using flame throwers and pole charges on the pillboxes.

D. We gain the edge of the river.

1. The two remaining mortars are set up on this side.

a. Shells and sniper fire from our front make it hot.

2. There is no foot-bridge at river as had been planned. I hope that one had

a. One by one we drop into river and wade, waist deep, to the opposite bank. Most of us soak our cigarettes, etc. break for the railroad across

II. ? Hours at the River (Climax of day's events)

A. Sniper bullets whistle over our heads, frequently hitting the other bank.

1. Those who try to observe over bank are forced down.

a. Someone up front yells for a medic. wounded man huddled in a hollow.

2. Men advancing along opposite bank are forced into river to wade along

edge. I keep running as bullets hit the dirt nearby.

B. Artillery barrages more frequent. exhausted, we look back to see an air-

1. Bank gives protection from snipers — not much from shells.

2. Tanks with bridge-building equipment approach river from the rear.

3. Many shells land close by.

a. Shrapnel flies in all directions.

4. I start digging into the bank — many follow suit.

a. We stop every few minutes to hug bank as artillery lands about us.

1. My shovel lands in the water. as a best-field, and up the hill.

b. Someone in the rear yells for a medic. (3) wounded man — tended

5. To calm myself, I take out my pen, and begin to sketch the front terrain on a post-card. field which we ran across was, I later learned, quite

6. A shell lands in river at the bend.

a. All are shaken, and impatient to go ahead to shelter of railroad track. until dark,

b. Sketch is finished — I light cigarette.

III. We leave river, reach Railroad.

A. Word comes back — we prepare to advance.

1. Shell lands in river 6 to 8 feet from me. — about 1/2 mile past

a. We all hit the ground under blast.

b. Large hole blown in opposite bank.

c. One man hit a few feet back.

d. I remember saying to myself (without a smile) "I hope that one had my name on it!"

2. One by one we take our load and make a break for the railroad across the open field.

a. Sniper fire made it look like a mile.

b. Forced to hit the ground — dead cow a few feet away.

c. Halfway across I see four or five wounded men huddled in a hollow.

d. One by one we make the last dash — at least 100 yards.

1. I keep running as bullets hit the dirt nearby.

3. As we reach the railroad bank, exhausted, we look back to see an air-burst barrage of terrific intensity over the river.

IV. Railroad Track to Pillboxes.

A. We are able to rest a little at the bank.

B. Artillery bursts creep back closer to us.

1. A barrage bursts on and about the track.

C. We make a break for the top of hill.

1. We run, single-file, over track, across a beet-field, and up the hill.

a. In a bomb-crater by the track, I see three (3) wounded men — tended by a wounded medic.

b. The beet-field which we ran across was, I later learned, quite heavily mined.

2. Upon reaching the top of hill, we took shelter in bomb-craters. Remained until dark.

a. Artillery has lessened a great deal.

b. There is machine-gun fire, and eleven Jerries are taken prisoner from a pillbox about 50 yards to our right front.

V. At dusk we move out to our assigned assembly area -- about 1/2 mile past pillboxes.

A. As we pass a pillbox, I see a G.I. sprawled pitifully on the ground, his face in the dirt -- helmet on the ground near his head. Bulging from each hip pocket is a never-to-be-eaten K ration.

1. Thank God I made it!

B. We are assigned our positions in a field near a church.

1. As we dig into the muddy ground, the pleading voice of a wounded man cuts the stillness of the night -- help! -- help! -- Medic! -- help! -- Why doesn't somebody help him?

Pfc Richard Lowe Ballou
4 November 1944

The foregoing is a true copy of the original manuscript, which was mailed to the author's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Harold Ballou, 19 Laura Street, Providence 7, Rhode Island.

Franklin Ferriss,
Capt., AUS