

# **U.S. Army Life of Vernon Kent Motter**

*5/27/1918-5/4/2013*

## INTROUDCTION

I feel that I wrote this very poorly. I'm sure that my English teacher would have given me a failing grade if it would have been a school project. At least I should have known how to spell awkward and vehicle.

I tried to put into words a picture of my experiences and what I observed during the days in combat, but I am not satisfied with the effort. Only those of us who were there can see it as it really was and that is what drew us close in friendship.

## PROLOGUE

The following pages are an endeavor to record and preserve some of the memories I have of a special period in the younger years of my life. I would like to share these memories with anyone who might be interested.

In reading this, you will soon realize that I was no hero. I never shot any Germans, but I had the honor of being with those who were there heroes.

For many years it has been in my mind to sit down and write about my life in the U.S. Army. It began 65 and-a-half years ago, and lasted for a period of four years and seven months. Some of the things are still very clear in my mind and others are more like a dream.

It really started for me in 1940, when the Selective Service Act was passed and I had to sign up for the draft. I received my draft and of course I was 1-A.

On March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1941, I received a letter in the mail. It began:

To VERNON KENT MOTTER,

You have been selected for training and service under the Selective Service Act of 1940. You will receive an order to report for induction on March 13, 1941.

I was completely stunned. This was the first draft call in the county and they had picked me along with 17 others. It was supposed to be a lottery and if it was, it is the only one I have ever been a winner. If I would have made out a list of a thousand things that I wanted to do in my lifetime, joining the army would never had made it. I had always been satisfied to live at home and work with my father, but that was not to be.

On the morning of March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1941, my parents escorted me to the town square in front of the Favorite Hotel in Piqua, Ohio. Here I said my goodbyes and boarded a bus with 17 other lucky winners. I knew only one of them. I've got to say, the goodbyes were tearful. I for one did not want to leave home. I'm sure the feeling was mutual with the entire group.

Two hours later we were across the Ohio River from Cincinnati in Fort Thomas, Kentucky. One of the first things that happened was the swearing in. Hundreds of us were crowded in an area and repeating the oath after the officer in charge. I do not remember one word of it, but I understand if you did not obey it, you would be in big trouble. Most of my stay in Fort Thomas was a like a dream. My parents drove down to visit me on the weekend, but I was only able to be with them a short while. I do remember the first meal at Fort Thomas. I went through a line with my tray and I don't remember what it was they served, but when I got thorough the line it was all in one stack, with the dessert on top.

I do not remember much about my stay, or exactly how many days we were at Fort Thomas. It was less than a week. I was still with my original group. One forenoon

about 1,000 of us were loaded on a train and we headed west. The next morning, near Springfield, Missouri, the train stopped and we were allowed to detrain and walk around for a while. Then it was back on the train and last that afternoon, we arrived at our new home for the next few weeks, Camp Walters, a brand new training camp. We were the first to occupy it. All of our trainees were new also, we were the first recruits. Camp Walters is near Mineral Wells, Texas, which lies between Dallas and Fort Worth. It was in a barren part of the state, with a lot of sage brush and no trees. This was the end of phase one of my journey, and the beginning of phase-two for me.

I made up my mind that I would work hard, get my year in, and then go home. The training platoon to whom I was assigned was all Ohio boys, including the ones from Miami County that had left from Piqua.

Basic training was easy for me. We would fall out for reveille at 7:00 AM. We would do one-half hours of calisthenics, and then go to the Mess hall for breakfast. The rest of the day was a lot of close order drills (marches) etc. We stood numerous inspections and went on hikes. We learned how to aim, load, and fire mortars and also hand grenades. I fired the Springfield 03 on the rifle range for record for and made expert sharp shooter. It was a little awkward firing a bolt action left handed, especially rapid fires. I fired a few rounds with the Browning Automatic Rifle (B.A.R.), but was stopped because it is too dangerous to be fired left handed. I also got to fire a light machine gun at a mile away target. Every few rounds was tracer ammo and you could see it going toward the target.

Three of my friends and I would go to the Baptist church in Mineral Wells on Sunday and spend a little time in town. Mineral Wells was the home of the famous Crazy Water Crystals. I was picked as one of a special platoon to march in the Memorial Day Parade in Mineral Wells. I felt proud that I had been one of the 50 out of 3,000 in camp.

In June, my parents along with my brother Raymond and his wife Thelma came to Mineral Wells to visit me. I got to spend one weekend with them to do some sightseeing in the area. The last week in June our basic was over and some of the boys started getting their assignments. Woody Saul and Adrian Rowell from St. Paris, Ohio went to Fort Benning for paratroop training. One of our group that had worked at the Piqua Daily Call went to the signal corp, where they learned to send message at Fort Dix, New Jersey. By the middle of July, after 16 weeks there was only a few of us remaining. Finally, early on a Sunday morning, all that were left were loaded in a truck and joined into a convoy heading south. This was the end of phase two of my journey.

I remember it was a beautiful day. At noon, the convoy stopped and most of us got out, stretched our legs and relieved ourselves along the roadway. We were given

sandwiches and water and we were on our way again. It was late in the afternoon when our convoy arrived at its destination. I, with my barracks bag, was escorted to the second floor of the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon of Co A 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry division. I was now part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> infantry division. Only one other person was assigned to A Co. He would be later transferred because of bad feet. His name was McMillan. Pauli Rice and Emerson Stein were assigned to B Company. Emerson would become the Mess sergeant of B Company. These were all that were left of the Piqua group. I did forget to mention that my pay through basic was \$21.00 per month. Now I had gotten a raise to \$30.00 per month. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was based at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. I could not believe my eyes when we arrived there. It was beautiful. Everything was green. There were trees and a large parade ground and this Sunday evening everything was quiet and empty. There was not a soul in the barracks when I got there. Everything seemed so fresh and clean. I do not remember very much about my first day in Company A. I did meet Sergeant Joserand, who would be my platoon sergeant for a few days. I had just turned 23 years old in May. The sergeant was regular army and had been in the army for three years and was only 20 years old. One of the first things the sergeant did after I joined the company was borrow money from me. This happened almost every month, and he would always pay me back on pay day. And a few days later he would be asking for another loan. At this time, most all of the non-commissioned corps were regular army, but that would change quickly. On that first day, I also got more shots and had more clothes issued, including 2<sup>nd</sup> division shoulder patches. On that 2<sup>nd</sup> day in the company, I got the greatest of all the many good breaks I received while in the Army. A Company was on guard detail for the entire post and since I was not yet attached to any squad the sergeant explained I was “super numand.” I didn’t know what that meant, but he told me to report to the kitchen for extra duty.

There I met Sgt. Bethany, the Mess Sergeant. He scratched his head, thought a couple of minutes, then led me to six marmite containers, which are used to keep food, hot or cold, in the field. He supplied me with Brillo, steel wool to clean the cans, a pad, soap and water, and paper towels. As I have done all my life, I worked hard all day, only taking a short break at lunch time. I was working outside on the back steps of the Mess Hall. About 5:00 PM, Sgt. Bethany came out and looked at my work. He looked them over and turned to me. His exact words were, “Hell those marmite cans never looked that good when they were new. How would you like a steady job in the kitchen?”

So like I said, this was the first of the many breaks I received. This was more like a job. I didn’t have to fall out for drill. I worked shift work. The kitchen is set up with the mess Sgt. In command. One first cook (a sergeant T-4), a second cook (corporal T-5), and two cook’s helpers (Private First Class) were on each shift. Your shift starts at noon after lunch. You prepare the evening meal, breakfast the next morning, and lunch at

noon. The next 24 hours are yours. That's while at the post. When on maneuvers or while in combat, everyone is always on duty.

The first Louisiana maneuvers started right after I joined the company. During the maneuvers I only got to be in the kitchen during rest periods. Since I had been in the army I had written letters home nearly every day and it was during the first Louisiana maneuvers when I started writing my poetry. I was really very lonely and homesick the first year. It was also during that time that I grew my mustache and I got my Private First Class (PFC) promotion. My pay now was \$36.00 per month.

After the maneuvers were over, I was enrolled in cooking and baking school, which I attended when I was off shift. Any other free time I had I spent in San Antonio at a movie or on the River Walk. My friend Charles Crawford from Piqua was stationed at Dodd Field right next to Fort Sam and on Sundays we would go into town, get a milkshake and go to a movie.

In October I got my first furlough, which is a vacation, and went home to Ohio for two weeks. I was the best man in Lloyd and Virginia Smith's wedding. I really got a good reception from everyone and it was sure nice to be back home.

Later in 1941, a lot of the higher non-commissioned officers went to Officer Candidate School (O.C.S.) and some went out on training cadres, which is when a unit forms a new division. Our first Sergeant Marshbanks left. Sergeant Bethany went to O.C.S and four of our top cooks went out on cadre. That meant a lot of promotions were coming. Homer Rhodes got promoted to Mess Sergeant. I was promoted from Private First Class to technician 4<sup>th</sup> grade "Sergeant" and 1<sup>st</sup> cook. Gilbert Green, the only regular army left in the kitchen to 1<sup>s</sup> cook. Earl Rohrbaugh from Hanover, Pennsylvania was promoted to 2<sup>nd</sup> cook and Ray Jennings was my 2<sup>nd</sup> cook.

On Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, Charles Crawford came by and we went into San Antonio to a movie. When we came out of the movie at 2:30 PM, two military policemen stopped and asked if we were service men. We were in civilian clothes. They informed us about Pearl Harbor and told us to get back to our base and get out of civics (civilian clothes). They said the whole area was under alert. That was the last we ever wore civilian clothes and it was no longer one year and go home. Now, it was until the duration of the war.

In February 1942, my parents and my good friends Lloyd and Virginia Smith came to visit me. Gas was rationed, but some way my father managed to obtain enough gas ration coupons to make the trip. While they were there, we went sightseeing. We visited the capitol building in Austin and all of the five missions (the Alamo) in and around San Antonio. In July, we were back in Louisiana again on maneuvers. This year, they lasted two months.

In September 1942, I was detached from my company for six weeks. I was sent to Camp Bullis as Mess Sergeant at a training camp for new recruits. I did not like this detail mainly because I didn't like being split up from my friends and then there's Camp Bullis. It was a tent camp with everything that crept and crawled. It was during this time that I wrote the poem about Bullis.

In November, 1942, the 2<sup>nd</sup> division left Fort Sam Houston and the beautiful city of San Antonio and moved to Camp McCoy. Wisconsin. It was a two day train ride. We spent time in St. Louis switching tracks and again a lot of time doing the same in Chicago. We got off the train at Camp McCoy treading on snow covered ground and cold temperature. In all the time I had spent in Texas, I had never worried about cold weather.

At Camp McCoy, the barracks were relatively new. I had my own little room in the end of one of the barracks, along with some of the other noncommissioned officers. Our kitchen was different at Fort Sam, where we had gas ranges. Here at Camp McCoy we had coal burning ranges with no heat controls, and coal isn't the cleanest fuel. It didn't take us long to learn how to operate the,. We now had a baker and he was really good, turning out pies, cakes, and even bread. He was from Duluth, Minnesota. His name was George Viton. George and I got to be real good friends. we also had a new First Sergeant. He was from Bellefontaine, Ohio. He and I were the only Ohioan's in our company. Sergeant Ivory took good care of me many times. He gave me a three day pass along with a weekend pass and I had plenty of time to make it home and back with time to spare.

Sparta was right outside of Camp McCoy and LaCrosse was about a 30 minute bus ride. A lot of times when we would come off shift at noon, my 2<sup>nd</sup> Cook Ray Jennings and I would get on the bus and spend the afternoon and evening in LaCrosse. Passes were always available. at this time, the company was training on skis and snowshoes. In February, we were on a train on the way to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan for winter maneuvers. We got off the train in a rural area near the town of Sidnaw. The temperature was 40 degrees below zero and there was 48 inches of snow on the ground. When our kitchen truck arrived, we pitched a large tent, set up our field ranges inside the tent, and following orders we endeavored to prepare and serve a meal. We peeled frozen potatoes, opened frozen no. 10 cans (gallon) of vegetables, and melted snow to make coffee and use for cooking. Our water cans were frozen. When we served the food, it would freeze in the mess kits before it could be eaten. The coffee stayed hot only a few minutes. I didn't see many happy faces in the chow line. In the two weeks we spent there, this was the only meal we prepared. All the troops were issued new warm clothes. It consisted of thermal underwear, the first time I had ever seen. Down filled trousers, and a down filled parka. Also, wool socks insulated some packs with liners and mittens with wool liners. I had never seen such warm clothes.

Then, each of us was issued a double sleeping bag. The inner line was down filled. Last, but not least, we were issued some new rations called mountain nations. A small Coleman cooking kit was issued for each two men, who used it to melt snow, to make coffee, and to heat their rations. Those two men dug out a space in the 48" deep snow large enough for them to stay in out of the extreme cold. They covered the area with pine boughs and it was nice and snug in their sleeping bag on the bare ground. During the day, the company was on skis or on snow shoes pulling toboggans. We the cooks never left the area of our kitchen. We spent our time enjoying the skiing equipment also toward the latter part of the two weeks that the temperature got up above zero and it seemed like summer. I made the trip back to Camp McCoy in the back of a truck. The bed of the truck was covered with straw and I remember it was a long, cold ride. I arrived at camp ad ay before the troops got there. We had to turn in every piece of our warm clothing after we got back to camp.

During the next 5 months I received a 15 day furlough and three of those weekend plus three day passes. I could get on a train at Camp McCoy, be in Chicago in 4.5 hours, change trains there, and be in Lima Ohio in less than four hours. My father would pick me up there. Twice I rode the Trailblazer a crack Pennsylvania R.R. Train that stopped only once before Lima. I remember I rode all the way in the observation car. The company was going through some very intensive training all summer. Early in September, rumors were going around that we would be leaving here soon, probably for overseas. On a Saturday evening in the middle of September, 1943, we the kitchen crew were told we were going on a 25 mile hike with the entire battalion. Everyone had to make this hike before we went overseas.

So, on this Saturday evening, with a full field pack, a canteen of water and a M1 rifle, we started off. We marched all through the night. we got a 10 minute break each hour. The entire hike lasted 10 hours. On the last break, I didn't sit down and the last leg I carried my friend Jesse Weatherholt's rifle along with my own. He said he was going to fall out and I talked him out of it and told him I would carry his rifle. I was really beat, but I would not admit it to anyone. I took a shower, got cleaned up, got on a bus, and went to LaCrosse.

The last week in September, we were ordered to disperse of everything except our regular issued clothing and equipment. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, the division boarded a troop train. We left Camp McCoy and seemed to have spent a lot of time again in Chicago switching tracks. Our trip from Chicago took us through Ohio. I know we went through Continental, which was 30 miles from where I was born. Our trip continued on through Cleveland and through some beautiful fall country in upper New York, arriving in Camp Shanks, New York on October 4<sup>th</sup>.

I do not remember very much about Camp Shanks. Our equipment was rechecked and they made sure all our shots were up to date. On the afternoon of October 5<sup>th</sup>, six of us got a pass to go into New York City. We boarded the Weehawken Ferry and got off at the end of 42<sup>nd</sup> street. At that time, it was the widest street I had seen. We all walked down 42<sup>nd</sup> street to a subway station and rode the subway for about 80 city blocks. One of our group was a native of Brooklyn and this was his idea. He escorted us to an Italian spaghetti restaurant where we all had a meal. I stopped at a drug store in the area and purchased some stationary and I wrote a letter home to my parents. I told him that I couldn't disclose to them where I was going. In fact, I didn't even know where I was going at the time, but when they hear from me the next time they would be surprised. We all got back on the subway and returned to 42<sup>nd</sup> street. We spent the rest of the night at Time Square, until the wee hours of the morning. New York at that time was in the black out mode, but it didn't look dark to me. To date, this has been my one and only trip to New York City.

We were instructed to remove all of our 2<sup>nd</sup> division shoulder patches so German spies did not recognize us, and at about 2 AM in the morning on October 7<sup>th</sup>, I, along with about 6,000 other soldiers were going up to the gang plank of the Thomas H Berry, on which we were about to spend the next eleven days. All I was carrying was a light weight barracks bag. Our rifle and other equipment had been turned in to be reissued later.

At daylight in the morning, we were out in the ocean with other ships all around us. we were in the largest convoy up to this date that had ever sailed. There were 102 ships in our convoy, some were military units.

Our company was split up on the ship. Half of our company was assigned quarters in G dock in the rear of the ship. The remaining half was on A Dock. Every 24 hours they were supposed to exchange positions. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, I was down to G dock. Everyone was seasick, laying in the bunks moaning and groaning. I made my way back up to A dock and spent the rest of the trip up there. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, I went down to C dock to the dining room. I got a tray of food and stood at one of the bar height tables. My tray slid back and forth due to the rocking action of the ship. That was my first and last trip down to the dining room. I stayed up on A dock, played Pinocle, watched the other ships all around us. I virtually lived on candy bars (Babe Ruths, Mounds Bars, and Chocolate Bars) that we could get out of the vending machines. My good friend Earl Rohbaugh found me a few times and told me a lot of people were looking for me. I told him to tell them that I was OK and was going to stay up on A dock. On the morning of October 18<sup>th</sup>, I looked out over the railing of the ship and all of the ships were gone. That afternoon, we docked at Belfast, Ireland. For the life of me, I can't remember anything about the trip from the ship to Tyman Abbey, that was our camp. It was



between Armagh and the Irish free-state border. In fact we were 3 miles from the border.

Armagh is a very old city. It is the burial place of St. Patrick. Our billets (the buildings we stayed in) at Tyman Abbey were in crude Quonset huts. Our bunks were made of planks with straw ticks and very scratchy wool blankets. I slept in my fatigues to protect my skin. Our drinking water and the water we cooked with came out of a shallow pond behind the hut that housed our kitchen. We boiled and doubled chlorinated the water for drinking. In our kitchen we had cloth bags over the spigots. Each day we removed them to clean out the bags. One morning in the first part of January, I was called to the orderly room and was surprised to see my brother Donald standing there. He was stationed in England. He had come to Belfast and through the Red Cross had located me. Since we had arrived here, no passes had been issued but Sgt. Ivory gave me a three day pass and Donald and I got to spend time together in Belfast. We slept at the Red Cross and ate breakfast there. They served us hot cakes with lemon sauce, instead of syrup. I brought this idea back to our kitchen and we used it all through combat. I had many good comments about it, even after the war was over at our reunions. The company was going through very intensive training. We cooks even had to take part. For all of this, we were issued the combat infantry badge, which increased our pay. My base pay as a Sgt. was \$78.00 plus longevity for being in the service 3 years - overseas pay. I was now getting \$105.00 and sending most of it home. If I won a little playing blackjack or poker, I would send that home too.

One Sunday in February, a lot of us went to church in Armagh at St. Patrick's Cathedral. They told us the building was over 600 years old. It had the largest swinging door I had ever seen - *they were very thick double doors, each one was over 4-feet wide and 12-feet high*. Colonel Humphry, our regimental commander, preached the sermon on this day. In March, the entire division was back in Armagh. We didn't know why we were there but we soon found out. We had a special speaker. It was General George Patton. If you saw the movie Patton, and remember the speech he gave at the beginning of the movie, it was almost the same speech he gave us.

In mid-April, I was called to the orderly room. I was told that we were moving and I was going with the advance detail to our new quarters. It was a motor convoy. We were loaded on a Jerry boat in Belfast and landed in Northern Scotland. I was driving a jeep. We drove south and stopped at a military camp, where we were fed an evening meal. We stayed all night there and after breakfast, continued on to Pembroke Dock Wales. It was a week before the company arrived. I got to do some sightseeing. I visited an old castle and took a few pictures. The camp we moved into was on a high cliff and down below there were a dozen enormous seaplanes at anchor. Occasionally one would take off and return a while later. The kitchen we had was out of this world! We had steam cookers. We could cook 100 lbs. of potatoes in 20 minutes. I used 100 lbs. of

fluorite to make biscuits. We fed 1,800 people at a meal - we had steam tables to keep the food warm.

I was there less than two weeks. We knew the invasion was near. Jim Thompson and I were called to the orderly room and told that we were leaving with the kitchen truck and equipment and would join back up with the company later. They didn't tell us that it would be in France. We traveled in Convoy to Bournemouth, England. It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of June. There all the jeeps and trucks were waterproofed - this meant that some dark putty-like gunk was put around spark plugs and distributor wires. We helped do this and were instructed that it had to be removed after coming out of the water. The vehicles were parked in underground garages and we had to check our units each day, which was the kitchen truck, our trailer, and a jeep. Bournemouth was a fancy resort city with beautiful hotels and beaches. The beaches were off limits because they were all mined. Every night the air raid sirens would go off, but I never heard any explosives. I was in a room on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of a hotel and when the air-raid sirens sounded, we were supposed to find a bomb shelter. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, I just stayed in my room. Everything in this area was total blackout, as in all of England.

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, we heard rumors that the invasion was on and the sky was full of planes. All our vehicles were pulled out and we went to South Hampton. We boarded a ship, staying with our vehicles. We stayed in the harbor at South Hampton on June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. Buzz bombs were going over us continuously and one did hit a ship in the harbor. We still didn't get any news about the invasion. There were rumors on the 9<sup>th</sup> we were leaving, but we didn't leave the harbor until after dark on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, we were about a mile off shore from Omaha Beach. Our vehicles along with us were unloaded off our ship on a landing craft and we were on our way toward the shore. When the landing craft touched bottom, the front gate dropped. I drove a jeep off in the water that came up over my feet, up on the beach and was waved up to the top of the hill a couple hundred feet above the ocean. There I removed the waterproofing. After I had finished, I went looking for and found Jim Thompson and our kitchen truck. Just before dark, our trucks and jeeps were lined up in a convoy and we went forward through a couple of little villages where a lot of people cheered and waved to us. It couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 miles until our kitchen truck and trailer pulled off and was parked in an apple orchard. In a couple of hours, all that remained of our kitchen crew was back together and they brought me up to date on what had happened the last few days. Four of our kitchen staff had been wounded - Ray Jennings, Maurice Flaurie, Jesse Weatherholt, and my good friend, George Viton had lost a leg. Our company Commander Capt. Ray K. Cowan had been wounded. Two other officers were wounded and one was killed. Sgt. Joseand's 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon was all gone, captured, wounded or killed. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, there had been over 70 casualties. It was like a dream to me, in fact these last 10 days all seemed like a dream.

On June 15<sup>th</sup>, we got a supply of rations and we cooked our first meal. I took it up to the front line. It was less than a mile from our kitchen truck. The front was at St. Georges D Elle at the base of hill 192. The hills were names for their height in meters. At St. Georges D Elle, I found Jim Cartwright. He had been the company runner ever since I had been in the company. When I had saw him last, he was a PEC. Now, he was a staff Sgt. By the time we would reach Czechoslovakia, he would be a first lieutenant. Jim was sitting on a box behind a church. He had a fire going and was roasting a small pig on a handmade spit. He did accept some of the food I offered him and had a few stories to tell me. I was glad to see my good friend.

Colonel Humpries was with A company leading the attack but was recalled back to regimental headquarters. The next day, Major Henry Spencer took over the command. On June 16<sup>th</sup>, Colonel Fuller, our regimental commander, was relieved because of the decisions he had made in the June 12<sup>th</sup> attack where Company A had lost so many men. Colonel Fuller was 55-years old and had been a captain in a machine gun company in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry during World War I. Colonel Jay R Loveless was our new regimental commander and would be with us until V.E. Day. On June 18<sup>th</sup>, our Battalion got 75 new replacements. As they were on their way to the front, an enemy shell burst and wounded nine of them. This left the battalion still under strength. A company alone had lost seventy on June 12<sup>th</sup>, and about ten since then. These replacements were all privates and not officers. On the morning of June 19<sup>th</sup>, the most terrific artillery barrage you could imagine began. We were warned about this and were told to stay in our fox holes. It was our artillery; twenty battalions from three separate divisions: our division (the 2<sup>nd</sup>), the 1<sup>st</sup> division, and the 29<sup>th</sup> division. We could hear the big guns fire behind us, hear the shells going over us, and hear and see the puff of exploding shells as they landed on Hill 192. It lasted nearly an hour and then the attack on the hill began. This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt and it failed again. The 1<sup>st</sup> battalion was one of the three battalions in the attack. The other two were from the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry. One new Battalion Commander was seriously wounded and two Captains were killed. Our battalion Commander, being Major Henry Spencer. A Company was the battalion reserve company and they had two casualties. B Company was the lead company and they got hit the worst.

Our kitchen truck and trailer remained parked in the same apple orchard from the time we arrived there until the captures of Hill 192. One thing I have never told anyone, until now, is about my first night in France. After hearing about all my good friends being wounded, killed, or captured, I was really scared. We were told that each of us had to do guard duty around our kitchen area during the night hours. My first night on, early in the morning (around 4 AM), I was awakened from my sleeping spot under the truck and the Sergeant of the guard took me to the far corner of the orchard to relieve someone already standing guard. My instructions were to challenge any intruder and if they did

not know the password to shoot them. There I was, all alone, one of the darkest nights I can remember. I started to hear something moving around some distance from me. I know I was supposed to call out "halt," but what if it was the Germans? They would probably start shooting. I really did not want to shoot anyone and I definitely did not want to get shot. I thought, I will just keep quiet and maybe they will go away. The noise did not go away and did not get any closer. Finally, it started to break daylight and straining my eyes toward the sound, I saw there were three cows eating grass. This was the first and only night that I ever pulled guard duty.

After the June 19<sup>th</sup> attacks on Hill 192, we were back in the defensive position again. We got new replacements, including a new company commander and three extra officers "2<sup>nd</sup> infantries." I did not recognize a single name on the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon roster.

Some intensive training went on, most of it getting ready for another attack on Hill 192. On the morning of July 11<sup>th</sup>, another terrific artillery bombardment occupied. What is known as a rolling barrage began. 25,000 rounds were fired. The 3<sup>rd</sup> battalions of the 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry went up the west side of the hill and three battalions of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry went up the east side. By 2:30 PM, the hill was ours. A lot of German prisoners were captured and many more were killed or wounded. A Company lost 32 men in the attack—two were new officers and most of the others were new replacements. I do not remember if it was before or after we took Hill 192 that the bombing of St. Lo occurred. This time also, we were warned to stay in our foxholes. You had to see it to believe it. There were at least 200 heavy four motor bombers dropping bombs. We were less than ten miles from St. Lo. We could hear the loud explosions when the bombs hit. I saw five bombers get shot down. When we went through St. Lo a few days later, there was nothing left but rubble.

On July 26<sup>th</sup>, we were back on the offensive again. St. Lo was ours. The fighting in the hedgerows was undesirable. The hedgerows were from ancient times made for property divisions. They were from two to eight feet in height, overgrown with very thick foliage. The Germans were well dug in behind them. Small advances were made each day for the following week after. The third of August, the Germans seem to be retreating faster. Our kitchen was now moving everyday. One day in the first part of August we moved five miles. That evening, I was sitting on a water can, cleaning one of the burners from our field ranges and looked up to see Maj. Hinsch, our Regimental Service Officer, standing in front of me. I saluted him and he said, "good evening sir." He had a question for me. He said, "Sgt. Motter, where is Sgt. Rhodes?" I pointed to a lump in a rolled up blanket by the kitchen truck. I said, "he's over there sleeping." Maj. Hinsch walked over, reached down, and grabbed Rhodes. He told him to get up and get his helmet and come with him. It seems as if we had left our last area so quickly, we had failed to fill up our garbage pit. Maj. Hinsch took Rhodes back and made him fill up the garbage pit. Homer Rhodes, being the Mess Sergeant, was the one who got blamed.

Maj. Hinsch informed him if this should happen again, he would find himself on the front line with a M-1. Maj. Hinsch was always very friendly to me. I guess that was every time we would see each other. I was busy working when I first brought the kitchen in to that apple orchard in Normandy. Rhodes came to me and said, "Motter, if you take charge of getting the chow up to the front line, I will see that everything is taken care of back here." In all of the time we were in combat, Homer Rhodes never once went up to the front to feed the troops. It was myself or Jim Thompson. *A note about the garbage pit; the first thing we would do when we got to a new area was dig a large garbage pit. It was our place of safety when the shells started to fall around us and it happened a lot of times.* One sad thing I failed to mention is on June 21<sup>st</sup>, Colonel Humphries was killed by a sniper at the foot of Hill 192. He and about 50 others from Company A are buried in the cemetery on the hill above Omaha Beach.

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, our division was pulled out of the front line. We were at the town of Linchegray and Normandy was ours. On the same day, we got a lot of replacements. One of them was my good friend Maurice Fluries who had worked with me in the kitchen since Fort Sam. He had been wounded on June 12<sup>th</sup>, in the first attack. He had some news for me. He had seen and talked to my brother Donald at the replacement center. When they were calling off a list of names, he heard Donald's name. He told me that the landing craft Donald was on during the landing on D-day had been hit and Donald had been sent back to England and now was on his way back to his unit and he was okay.

Our new company commander refused to let Fluries come back tot he kitchen, since he said we were already overstaffed. So, Fluries said to me, "Motter, I'm not staying here. I got hit pretty hard in the back with shrapnel and I'm going back tot he aid station and tell them my back is hurting me." The next morning Fluries was gone and I did not see him again until 1974 at our 2<sup>nd</sup> Company reunion we held in Cleveland, Ohio.

General Patton had raced across part of France and cut off the city of Brest and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division along with the 9<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Division was sent to capture the city and the port. We left the area after dark on the night of August 19<sup>th</sup> and arrived at our new bivouac area. The morning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, our company had spent 71 days in combat in the campaign of Normandy and now they were ready to start another one.

The first 3 days the kitchen stayed in the same area as the company and I found time to catch up on my letter writing to my friends back home. The company then moved to a forward area and I was again taking the food up in mormite cans.

On the morning of August 28<sup>th</sup>, when I was serving breakfast, the 1st Sgt. told me to make sure the evening meal was up here by 4 PM. I neglected to mention we only served two hot meals a day.

The company had dug in emplacement all around a farm, The company C.P. was in the farm house and there was a large farm and a straw stack, it was on high ground and you could see a long ways.

The Jeep drivers and I pulled into the barnyard a few minutes before 4 PM and the company was gone. They had jumped off in attack. Looking down the hill, we could see them about 1,000 yards away. they were on the right side of a tall hedgerow and the Germans were on the other side. There were all kinds of gunfire and hand grenades were exploding on both sides of the hedgerows. Shells were landing around us also. Alton Anderson, the jeep driver, and I made good use of the straws stack from our ringside crew. We watched until dark and when the shooting quieted down, we got in the jeep and eased down the narrow road that paralleled the hedgerows. We went about a mile and stopped and I started out in the direction where we last saw our company. There was still some shooting going on and tracer bullets were flying overhead. I finally found one of my company and pointed out where I was setting up the chow line. On my way back, I stumbled over a body and got a shock. It was Armon Bayless, a very likable guy from Arkansas. When we landed on Omaha on the 7<sup>th</sup>, he was a PFC. On the 13<sup>th</sup> he was a staff Sgt. and now he was dead. It was such a terrible sight. Both of his legs were gone and also one arm. I will never forget this sight. It took over two hours to feed the company. They came in one squad at a time and during the two hour period, shells were buzzing over us continuously. I felt too bad to be scared. All I could think of was Bayless. He had given me a letter to mail to his wife the night before. It was nearly midnight when we loaded up to return to our kitchen. It was about five miles back. I do not know how Alton Anderson could find the way over the narrow roads in pitch dark, with no lights on the jeep.

I did not get any sleep that night. We had to clean up the mormite cans, prepare breakfast, and load back up and go back to feed the company again. This trip we were taking a new replacement with us. It was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant. We were going down the hill from that farm toward the area where I had fed the company last night when a shell buzzed over the top of the jeep. We glanced back and the Lieutenant was gone. I do not know how he got out of the jeep so fast, but he was lying in a prone position in the ditch. Alton and I just sat there and I looked at him. Finally he got back in the jeep and we continued on. There was a ring of anti-aircraft guns around the city of Brest and the German defenses had good visibility. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry took the highest one, Hill 154. The 23<sup>rd</sup> took Hill 105. It was at the bottom of Hill 105 where Bayless was killed along with others. The progress was really slow, but each day we gained a little. Our kitchen stayed in the same spot for almost three weeks. The big guns of the ships blasted the

city from the sea and all three divisions' artillery pounded from the land side. The German positions were so good it did not seem to phase them. At first, our daily progress was only a few hundred yards a day.

It is odd some of the things you remember. Once we took a lieutenant back to the kitchen with us because he had a toothache. He stayed there four days and never went on sick call. I would tell him every day the company commander was asking about him. Finally, he decided to come back up. Either his toothache was better or he had finally recovered his nerve. One day on the way back to our kitchen, we were going down the narrow road only a few miles per hour when the jeep came to a sudden stop. We were bumper to bumper with another jeep coming toward us. We were always in total blackout.

About the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, our forces finally reached the ancient wall that surrounded the City of Brest. From then on it was house to house fighting. After it was all over, I heard many stories from the boys. One was when this one soldier entered a house and opened fire on a figure down a hallway and realized that he had shot his own image in a mirror. I spent one night in the city. The jeep driver and I arrived with the food and we could not find our company. It was dark when we got there and no one met us. Every street we started down was impassable from bombed buildings. We finally found our battalion S-4 officer, Lieutenant Ball. He was also lost. He suggested we stay right where we were until morning. He said the guys had probably found houses to spend the night and some of these houses were occupied by the enemy. We finally found the company the next morning and fed them cold food. They ate for breakfast what they were supposed to have for dinner last night. Lieutenant Ball, the S-4 officer was our lifeline. When the kitchen changed areas he designated our new spots. It was his duty to see that we got all our rations and supplies and he was the liaison between us and our company. He was the coolest person in combat I ever saw. I was in contact with him nearly every day. There were a few times we would be standing, talking, and a shell would explode a short distance away and it would never interrupt the conversation. He always had a unlit cigar in his mouth and I never failed to offer him a match. I never did see him light a cigar. He was a good officer and my favorite. On September 18<sup>th</sup>, thirty days after we had left Normandy, Brest surrendered. There had been over 50,000 enemy troops at Brest and about 30,000 were taken as prisoners. The rest were killed. Our company lost about 30 men during this campaign. When Brest fell it was like the war was over for us. The blackout was lifted. This was the first time we could use lights at night since we had left New York one year ago. Our kitchen moved up with the company and set up in a park in the suburb of Brest. There was food, wine, and lots of souvenirs. I acquired four pistols. I put them together out of a junk pile where the Germans had dismantled them before surrendering. I still had my burp gun I had gotten when we had captured Hill 192 back in Normandy. We had a lot of contacts with

civilians. One day a little girl about nine years old and her younger brother were hanging around our kitchen and I gave them some food. The next day, they were back. The girl brought me a little picture of her and her brother with their names on the back and a small French bible. I still have both of these items in my possession. We spent about ten days here. We had showers, clean clothes, and lots of relaxation.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, we started back toward the war. We were now 700 miles from the front lines. Our convoy took us through the outskirts of Paris. There were civilians crowded around our trucks, handing us loaves of French bread, rolls, and flowers. Some of the boys even got hugs and kisses. We arrived in the area of the Siegfried line on the German border on October 3<sup>rd</sup> and had our kitchen set up when the company got there on October 4<sup>th</sup>. Ray Jennings and Jesse Weatherholt, who had been wounded in Normandy, were back with us again.

I want to mention the reason we did not take the meals up during daylight hours was because of enemy artillery. All through Normandy and Brest, any vehicle that moved in daylight was generally fired at. We found out about that later in Germany. The company moved through elements of the 28<sup>th</sup> division and took over their position on the Siegfried line and the kitchen was about two miles in the rear. We dug an oversized foxhole about eight foot square and deep enough to set up in and put in a thick layer of straw and when we were not busy, we would relax in there. We had found boards large enough to cover it and piled part of the dirt on top of the boards for our protection.

About twice per day, the Germans would fire off what we called "Screaming Mimi's." They would come in about nine rounds at a time with that loud screaming noise and land and explode a few hundred yards away from us. It always made us dive in our foxholes. About the third day when this happened, Ray Jennings took off and I never saw him again until the 1950's when he came to visit me in Ohio.

We had been in this area about a week when I was called to the Company C.P., which was in a thick forest area about 500 miles from the pillboxes on the Siegfried line. There was a group of engineers there cutting down some of the tall pine trees, after that was finished, a lot of the other guys and I started digging. We dug a hole like a basement about 24 square feet and about six feet deep. I think it took us about four days to do this. The engineers laid logs from the trees they cut across the hole and covered the logs with lumber. They had setup a sawmill back at St. Vith to make the lumber. Over the lumber they laid tar paper and covered the entire surface with about two foot of soil; this was to house our kitchen. We set up our field ranges and did all the cooking using Coleman lanterns for light. We built bunks and that was the home for all of us cooks until December 12<sup>th</sup>. The engineers also built the same kind of bunkers for the rest of the company, only they were smaller. In one corner, we left an opening and used a ladder to enter and leave.



Our position here was not visible to Germans because of the forest, but below us there was an open space down a sloping hill and beyond that were the pillboxes and our dug in outposts. We fed hot meals to those in the company area and company runners would go with the jeep driver and take hot food to the outposts before daylight in the morning and after dark at night. There could be no movement in that area during the daylight hours. The ones manning the outposts would stay in their foxholes all day. The personnel in that area was changed every three days and that is one area I never visited.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, the 99<sup>th</sup> division came through our lines and took over our position. We had been there over two months. At that time the 9<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Infantry had gone into the offensive, attacking around the dams on the Roer River. They wanted to keep the Germans from blowing up the dams and flooding the whole area. The 23<sup>rd</sup> was the reserve regiment. On December 15<sup>th</sup>, buzz bombs kept going over us every few minutes. We could hear them coming and watch and listen to them as they flew over us. We heard the motor stop on one of them and we looked up and saw it peel off into a hill about 500 yards from us. I have a picture of the crash site in my album.

Word came down that we would be joined by the other two regiments in the Roer River area on the next day, December 16<sup>th</sup>.

It was cold and the ground was covered with snow. That night we cleared off a spot next to our kitchen truck and spread out a couple of blankets and huddled together and covered up with the rest of our blankets. There were five of us in the group. It snowed more during the night and in the morning. Our blankets were covered with snow and Steve Kachut was out in the open covered with snow; he was almost frozen. We cooked and fed our two meals that day and loaded up our kitchen truck and trailer and around dark we were lined up in a convoy. No one seemed to know what was going on. We would move a short distance and stop. This went on all through the night. Just as it was breaking day, all hell broke loose. Shells were landing and exploding all around us. One lit about ten feet behind us, over a truck and Steve Kachut got hit by shrapnel. I was sitting next to him and he started to moan. Two of us got out of the truck and dropped the end gate and we could see an ambulance about six vehicles behind us. We carried Steve back and put him in the ambulance. That was the last I saw of him until 1974 at our 2<sup>nd</sup> Company reunion that we held in Cleveland, Ohio; that was Steve's home.

The shells kept falling and we were right on the edge of the small town of Hunniger and our part of the convoy continued into the town. We prepared breakfast, but were unable to feed any of our company. They had hastily dug in positions around the perimeter of the town, all the time shelling continued. We were being fired upon from three sides. We located a house which was a cellar that had a concrete ceiling. We

unloaded our field ranges and put them on the main floor of the house. All the time we were unloading we were being fired at by tanks on higher ground about a mile from us. there was a collie dog in the house and we learned that every time he headed for the stairway a shell was on its way. We were not far behind him. Out the window of the house, I could see one of the machine gunners from our company fire burst after burst. He claimed he killed more than 50 Germans during the day. Our entire battalion was in this little town and the Germans never broke through our lines. We got some help from P-47's who would peel right off move our heads and dive bomb the tanks. We prepared another meal in the afternoon, but were not able to feed this one either. Every time one of us would open the door of the house to go outside, the tanks on the hill would fire rounds at us. Our kitchen trailer parked in front of the house had both tires flat. Lieutenant Ball checked on us a few times during the day and told us things did not look good. He said the Germans had us completely surrounded. When darkness came the shelling stopped and the small arms fire calmed down also. Our kitchen crew was all in the cellars at 2100 when Lieutenant Ball came and told us to load up we were getting out of here, there was no way we could take our trailer with flat tires. All my pistols and other souvenirs were in the trailer, but that did not seem to be very important at this time. I thought I would probably never see them again. I left my German burp gun in the trailer. In case we would be captured by the Germans I did not want to get caught carrying it. The trucks finally all lined up in a convoy, but they did not move. The word came back we had run into small arms fire. Finally on orders to once more board our trucks was passed down the line. We had ran smack dab into our 38<sup>th</sup> Infantry. As we drove through them on the way to Elsenborne Ridge, we were warned to stay in the middle of the road, as mines had been laid on the edge of the road. The tail end of our convoy was captured by the Germans. For a while that night I thought I might be spending Christmas in a Prisoner of War camp.

We found out later that the Germans had broken through in the same area where we had been relieved by the 99<sup>th</sup> Infantry on December 12<sup>th</sup>. The 99<sup>th</sup> lost two battalions and the 23<sup>rd</sup> lost most of it's 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. Maj. Hinsch was killed at the bulge; he had become a regimental commander.

Back at Elsenborne we were not out of the fire yet. Headquarters realized there was a chance that we could still be overrun by this attack. Two kitchens and half the kitchen force was taken farther back to the rear. I was left with A Company kitchen and Emerson Stein was left with B Company kitchen. We would feed the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and what was left of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. They had lost all of their kitchen. When we got back to Elsenborne on December 18<sup>th</sup>, my kitchen was set up in one of the large warehouses. I will try to explain what they were like. Each building was partitioned off in rooms about 50 feet wide. There was a 12 foot space open at the front of each room for vehicles to pass through. I do not remember anything about preparing a meal on the

18<sup>th</sup>. I do not remember receiving any rations, which we normally did each day. I do remember the night. I lay in that large room, listening to shells coming into the area and exploding near us. These building had no ceilings and had red clay tile roofs. When a shell would hit one of the tiles, a large portion of the roof would come in. I had one other person with me that night. It was Alton Anderson, one of our jeep drivers. He had his guitar and did the talking blues all night. He had found something to drink and he was higher than a kite. He was an artist doing his talking blues. He contained all the incidents we had been involved in the last 2 days and what was going to happen in the future. His prediction was not good. I did not sleep at all that night, and was glad when daylight came.

The next morning, we moved our kitchen to a different building. Emerson Stein set up his kitchen in the first room in this building and I set up our Kitchen in the second room. Earl Rohrbaugh and I were the only cooks left here from A Company. The rest of our crew had been taken back to Belgium. I would not see them again until the first of January. I had two cooks from officers mess assigned to me. They were formally members of A Company, and good friends of mine. A Company and B Company kitchens were now cooking for the entire 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, plus some other units. Earl Rohrbaugh and I found a place we thought would be safe from the shelling to sleep. It was like an oversized well pit about six feet deep and large enough to stretch out in. We were still being shelled and once even one of our planes strafed us. There was a large American flag spread out on the ground. The pilot either did not see it or did not believe it. Anyway, he circled a couple of times, then peeled off and came in with his guns chattering. Most everyone was diving for cover, except one guy, Coates. Coates was from Dayton, Ohio and was C Company kitchen truck driver. Parked near us was a jeep that had a 50 caliber machine gun mounted on it. Coats hopped up on the jeep and opened fire on the P47 and I do not know if he hit it or someone else did, but it started smoking and the pilot bailed out and the plane crashed. Everyone was screaming at Coates that it was one of our planes. Coates reply was, "If they shoot at me, I shoot back." That day, the 50 calibers were removed from the jeeps. Our rations were coming again, and I roasted nine turkeys for Christmas dinner. It was packed in marmite cans and distribute to the troops who were scattered over the whole area. On December 26<sup>th</sup>, the day after Christmas, I went to the kitchen to relieve the on duty cook around 1:00 PM. Rations had been delivered and we had been issued beautiful roasting and frying beef. I chatted with my two friends I was relieving while unpacking the beef, placing chunks in the large baking pans in the top of the field ranges. My friend left and was sprinkling some diced up onions and putting some canned tomatoes over the chunks of beef when a large section of the room fell in. I ran next door to B Company's area and the floor was covered with broken roof tile. Emerson Stein was standing there like he was in a trance with a pipe stem in his mouth. The rest of his pipe was gone. The whole end of the building was blown out. I continued outside and there laid two friends and

three others. They were all killed from the blast. I knew only one of the other three. His name was Charles King, he was a cook from C Company. He had been working with B Company kitchen. The other two, my friends, were Tom Garthwaits and William Pryor. I had known them for over three years.

After this happened, they moved us out of the warehouse buildings to an open field where we dug a large square hole for our kitchen.

I never heard the shell coming that hit the end of our building. I do know that after it happened, I was in a daze, not really believing it. When I got back to my area, I found the floor in the room covered with broken tile. The range tops were open, and the pans of meat were covered with pieces of clay tile. Today would be a ration day for our troops.

Our company was scattered over a large area and we tried to get one hot meal a day to them. Some of the places were tough to get to. There was a lot of snow on the ground and it was cold. We had a detail at division headquarters and I took food back to them. A truck would pick me up and we would load up the marmite cans with the food. With the truck would be four or five other cooks from the units and their food. On one of these trips, the truck dropped me off with the food and failed to come back to pick me up. I slept all night on the floor of a castle at division headquarters. The truck picked me up the next night.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, our company was all back together again. The Germans had failed in their attempt to break through the lines. It was really a surprise when our kitchen trailer was returned to us and everything was still there. I had not lost any of my souvenirs!

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of January, our regiment left Elsenborne and went south back in offense. By January 20<sup>th</sup>, we had taken back five small villages and taken nearly 400 prisoners. By January 20<sup>th</sup>, we were back in the same area where we had spent the two months on the Siegfried line. The forest area looked very familiar. Each night, we would be with the company and feed an evening meal and then in the morning, breakfast, sometimes it was a very early breakfast.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, we reached the Roer River and we were held up there for about ten days. The Germans had blown the sluice gates on the dams and the area was flooded. We crossed the Roer River on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, and we were on our way to the next obstacle, "The Rhine." It was still dangerous for vehicles to move during daylight. We found that out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March. A jeep was guiding our kitchen truck to an area where we were to meet and feed our company. We came out of a forest on a narrow road and found that we were on a high hill. It was really like a high bluff. From up there, you could see for miles. When our truck got to the end of the bluff where the road

curved to go back down the hill, an armor piercing shell hit us. Our kitchen truck was 6x6 with tandem dual rear wheels. The shell hit the center of the front duals just like it was shooting at a target. You never saw 8 people leave a truck as fast as we did. The truck came to a stop immediately. Homer Rhodes was riding the cab with the driver and I think the six of us in the rear won the race, getting out of the truck and down the hill. Our destination was a small village about a mile down the hill. Since it was all downhill it did not take long for us to get there. The company arrived late in the afternoon and wanted their food. No one seemed anxious to go get the truck. I finally volunteered and Red Delano, our kitchen truck driver and I took a jeep and eased back up the hill. It was beginning to get dark by the time we reached the truck. I remember we had stopped the jeep a couple of hundred yards down the hill and walked the rest of the way. Red started the motor and found that it would move in a low gear. Red babied the truck down the hill following me in the jeep. We unloaded all of our kitchen gear and set it up in a vacant house and cooked a late meal for our troops. Red took the truck and got it repaired at the service company and it was all ready to go the next morning.

Each day, after that experience, we moved forward with no problems. On the afternoon of March 7<sup>th</sup>, all the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion kitchens were in a convoy on a well-constructed highway and all through that afternoon we met groups of German soldiers coming toward us with their hands above their heads. There were hundreds of them. About 2:00 AM the next morning, we pulled in the town of Zinzig. The last few days, whenever we pulled into a town, we would look for a vacant house to do our cooking and spend the night. In Zinzig, the first house we tried was occupied. We pounded on the door and a crying baby and her daughter came to the door. They were really frightened. They were Germans and we were the enemy. I felt sorry for them and we went to find another house. It wasn't hard to do. The place was like a ghost town – dark and eerie. We picked a nice looking house with a good view of the Rhine River. It was vacant so we just moved in. When daylight came in the morning, we had company. A person introducing himself as the Bergermeister informed us that we were in his house and we would have to leave. My good friend Jesse Weatherholt from Louisville, Kentucky, did not agree with him. Jesse displayed a pistol in the Bergermeister's face and uttered a few unkind words and that was the last we saw of him. During the day, we watched the 2<sup>nd</sup> engineers construct a pontoon bridge across the Rhine River. They worked under a smoke screen. We were only one block from the entrance to the bridge. Late that afternoon, we moved about three miles north of Zinzig into a five story hotel, right on the river. One more mile north of us was the famous Remagen Bridge in plain view. Every day, we watched German planes coming at treetop level trying to bomb it, but while we were there, they were not successful. Our fighter planes were trying to shoot down their bombers and I saw two of our P-38 fighters collide in midair above the bridge and I only saw one parachute open. Someone had discovered a cave full of barrels of cognac near our area and a detail from A Company was picked to guard it.

Now I did not take part in this, but when chow was taken to feed the guard detail, it seemed that some of our water cans came back full of cognac. After three or four days, we were running out of water cans. We did dispose of it before we left the area.

Some of our division crossed the river on March 10<sup>th</sup>. We crossed on the pontoon bridge on March 23<sup>rd</sup> and established a bridgehead at Remagen. After the entire division was across the Rhine, the 23<sup>rd</sup> went on the offensive working with the 9<sup>th</sup> armor division. The Germans did not put up resistance as we moved through the first few towns.

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, the 28<sup>th</sup> Infantry leading, following the 9<sup>th</sup> armored division, moved northeast from Remagen, a distance of 5.5 miles, on the 30<sup>th</sup> they moved 30 miles. We were at Warberg, Germany on March 31<sup>st</sup>, and stayed there about three days, letting our supply line catch up to us. We were having trouble keeping up with the 9<sup>th</sup> armored. We were now entering a heavy industrial area. It was all level terrain and there were thousands of anti-aircraft flak guns. They were mostly manned by 15 to 18 year old kids and they did not want to give up. With the help of our artillery and the 9<sup>th</sup> armored and our infantry, the guns were finally destroyed. It took eight days to get back from Gottingen to Lipzig. Merseberg was the hardest to take. It was saturated with Flak guns. Some of those guns were being fired by women. After Lipzig surrendered, our division moved south and east to the Mulde River. The 23<sup>rd</sup> was south of the town of Grumma. The division had received order to hold there and wait for the Russians, who were now at the Elbe River about 20 miles east of there. We were there for ten days and thousands of German soldiers surrendered to us during that time. They did not want to be captured by the Russians. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, we moved 200 miles south to the Czech border and on May 7<sup>th</sup>, the 2<sup>nd</sup> division was in Pilsen. We had little or no resistance in our long move, but a lot of Germans surrendered to our troops. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 23<sup>rd</sup> arrived at the small town of Rokycany about 15 miles east of Pilsen and we were there on V.E. day. There were not many civilians in the town and we did the same as we had been doing the last couple of months and made ourselves at home in the house. The second night we were there I went in this nice large house and found a nice bed with a feathertick mattress and I crawled in the bed and went to sleep. When I woke up in the morning, there was a man and a woman in bed with me. I eased out of the bed, picked my clothes and shoes up, and tip toed out of there and went to find another place. The citizens of this town were starting to come home. On our rations day, we had been issued nine large hams and I was removing the heavy rind from them and was about to throw it in the garbage when a man, who was watching me, motioned that he would like to have the rinds. I gave them to him and two days later he brought me some of the best smoked sausage I have ever tasted. Somehow he had used the ham rind in his sausage.

There was about a five acre pond at the edge of where the locals would take their geese and ducks to swim. About half the families in this town had a flock of geese and each day, they would walk to the pond with the geese following them and an hour later they would return. I found out there was some fish in the pond and from someone I acquired some fish hooks and line and I went fishing. The only thing I caught was a small carp and they would only bite just before dark. There was some small deer in the woods near the town and one afternoon we heard machine gun fire and one of the boys from Texas came back with a deer. It was a startling sound when we heard that machine gun. The next day, all ammo had to be turned in.

There was a canal on the outskirts of town and John Belizzi, who had joined our company after the bulge, and I were walking along the canal and we met two nice looking girls. John was from New York and was quite an operator. He finally got these two girls to understand that there was going to be a dance tomorrow night at the local town hall and he wanted them to come. They seemed to understand and John was sure we had a date. Well, the girls did show up and they were beautifully dressed and they were also accompanied with their boyfriends. I think John did get a chance to dance with them though.

It is hard to explain the feeling I had now. The war was over and I had made it. I didn't worry now about what was going to happen tomorrow. There were fourteen others besides myself who had been here since Omaha Beach. Four of those had spent time in the hospital. Our company had over 800 casualties. Some were only wounded, but there were many buried in cemeteries between here and the beach. That part left a sad feeling.

We stayed in Rokycany for about two weeks and then they moved our company into a large hotel in Pilsen, where we had nice beds and nice bathrooms. We had some German prisoner doing K.P. in our kitchen. Someone in our company had somehow obtained a large cache of money. It seems that one of the many German units that surrendered to us had 90,000 Kronen. Our company acquired part of it. Enough to purchase a 12-ton truck full of bottled beer. The truck was parked at our hotel and there followed a happy beer party. Also, some cases of 32 caliber Belgium pistols were made available to us and I got one of those. That brought my number up to eight pistols.

In Pilsen, they opened the movie theaters and were showing American movies. On more than one occasion, Czech people would come and ask to go into the theater with us. On this one time it was a man and a woman and they spoke perfect English. I was in line to go to the movie and the lady tapped on my shoulder and asked if they could go in with me. The movies were free, but only to the military and their guests.

We were in Pilsen for almost a month and I do not really remember very much about the city. Homer Rhodes left to go home from there. He had about 20 more points than I had. He had saved a soldier from drowning during part of our training in Northern Ireland and received a soldier's metal for that.

On June 18<sup>th</sup>, we started our 4-day train trip back to France. We had traveled 1750 miles from Omaha beach to Pilsen. We had fought in five campaigns and had been in combat 327 days, 320 of them in contact with the enemy. Our longest continuous period in combat was 209 days. In Normandy, we were in combat continuously 71 days. Our division had captured over 70,000 prisoners and had suffered over 15,000 casualties. Now it was over and our thoughts were toward home. The trip back to France for me was by train. The reason it took four days was because it was a single track and traffic was going both ways. We had to wait more than a day just to cross the Rhine River. We arrived back at Remis, France, on June 21<sup>st</sup>, and I stayed with A Company until July 5<sup>th</sup>, I went with the truck one day to pick up our kitchen rations and while we were there I saw some prisoners transferring a load of German parachutes from a truck to a boxcar. I walked over to the truck and pointed to myself and then to the parachutes. The prisoner tossed one to me. I picked it up that afternoon along with some souvenirs. One was the new 32-caliber pistol I had gotten in Pilsen and I shipped it home. I wrote a note and sent it with and told them to be careful when they unpacked it. I had left the pistol loaded. Dumb me.

I was called to the company C.P. and was offered a promotion if I would sign up for the duration. I had this offer twice before to leave the company and go out on a cadre. This time it was to stay with the company. John Belizzi went back to the states as A Company's mess sergeant. He had joined the kitchen after Victory in Europe (VE) Day.

I was transferred to another unit while waiting to come home. I am not sure what outfit it was, but a lot of the guys were from Michigan. I did not have any special duties. I played softball a lot and one of the Michigan group members was a good checker player. I played a few games with him and never won a game. I got to spend a day in Paris seeing the sights. I ate in a fancy restaurant, saw the Eiffel Tower, Arch of Triumph, and the convoy of trucks that brought us to Paris parked right near the Alexandria Bridge over the Seine River. I still remember the large beautiful brass lion heads on the bridge. I also rode the metro - "subway" to a lot of different places.

July went by and then August came and went. In August, when Victory over Japan Day (VJ) occurred, I thought if I would have stayed with the company, I would probably be home by now. Finally, about the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, my order came and I was taken to Antwerp, Belgium. I was only in Antwerp about three days, I lost my nerve there and left the burp gun I had carried all through combat. I really felt bad later, not so



much about the gun, but I left my diary there in which I had made entries on every day since Omaha beach and even before. I still had my six pistols hoping to make it home with them.

My transportation home was a liberty ship. The ship was the Thomas H. Bartlett. There were 65 of us on board that were going home and none of them were from my division. We had no kitchen. We ate some new type of rations, called 10-in-1, which were not bad at all. There was always a large vat of hot water to heat the rations and we had a free coke machine. All the way home we had music. I sure remember hearing Rum and Coco Cola over and over. It took us 17 days to reach Boston. The first couple of days we were in a maze of canals.

When we docked in Boston Harbor, we were greeted by a large boat with a band playing and people waving at us. We were all taken from the harbor to Camp Miles Standish, where we were billeted in a large building with about 100 bunks. We were warned that we would be having a shakedown inspection while we were here. I had heard that same warning in Antwerp. To be on the safe side, I removed my six pistols from my bag and hid them under a mattress in an empty bunk. The inspection never happened.

Next I boarded a train in Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. There I was issued a 6-day pass to go home. They explained that it would take that long to let our records catch up so we could get our discharge. At Indiantown Gap, I ran into a guy by the name of Toomey. He was from Dayton and had been in basic training with me at Camp Walters. Together we took a bus into Harrisburg and found a restaurant and had a steak dinner before getting on the train for our trip to Ohio.

Six days later I was back at the Gap. I had to sit through a session where they tried their best to get me to sign up for the reserves. They sure failed. Before I got my discharge, I had to turn in all issued clothing except the uniform for the day. In October, it was O.D.'s. I hadn't seen the rest of my clothing since I had left France. I had turned in my barracks back there. I was guided to an enormous warehouse where there were thousands of tagged barracks bags. It was pointed out that mine was somewhere in that stack of bags. There was about a dozen other guys looking for their bags. Each one of us called out our names and about 15 minutes later someone called my name. We were told that we would have to pay for any shortages. They went down the list and the only thing I didn't have was a rain coat. I did not have to pay for it. I told them I had lost it while I was in combat.

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, I was handed my discharge. After four years and seven months, I was again a civilian. It was a good feeling. I took the bus into Harrisburg and purchased my one way ticket home. Military fare was half price. I remember the ticket home cost

less than \$7. On the way home, I stopped in Tyrone, Pennsylvania, to see Homer Rhodes. I had given him a pistol to bring home for me, but he claimed he had lost it on the way home. He had been home for 3 months and was back working at his old job at a paper mill.

## EPILOGUE

At the age of 22-years, it was not my choice or desire to serve in the armed forces. That attitude would change for me after my basic training ended and I became a member of Company A - 23<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

I cannot find the words to express my feeling of the closeness of the friendships between those of us who served together. This friendship grew more and more as time went on. It was greater to me than any family friendship I have ever known.

Many of my friends now lay under white crosses in cemeteries across Europe and those of us who survived have continued our friendships. Only a few of us are left now.

A lot of time during the war, it seemed like I was a civilian spectator watching the action from a distance. Like the morning of October 7, 1943, when I looked out over the rail of the Thomas H. Barry and saw more than 100 ships around us. And that apple orchard in Normandy, when I watched 200 four-motor bombers destroy the City of Saint Lo. And then at Brest when Alton Anderson and I stood by the straw stack up that hill and watched A Company going down the hill on one side of the hedgerow fighting the Germans on the other side. Later that night, I knew I was not a spectator when I stumbled over the lifeless body of my good friend Armon Bayless.

I dream a lot about being back in the army. In my dreams I am going through tents or barracks, looking for my friends, but I always wake up before I find any of them. I am proud of the four years and seven months I served in the army. I feel I never once shirked my duty. It taught me a lot of things, but it never did teach me to swear. I know it changed the course of my life and I think it pointed me in the right direction.

One of the memories I hold dear is from back at Fort Sam Houston. I remember lying on my bed listening to the beautiful sound of Taps being played by Wilson, our company bugler.

When I am laid to rest, it would be nice if someone would pick up a bugle and play taps once more for me.

I assure you, if they do, I will be listening.

**-Vernon Kent Motter**