Filling the Gap of World War II

1941-1945

Prologue

My records of WW II service seem reasonably clear as an officer because I have a 201 (personnel) file that is accurate. But the enlisted phase has been blank. That mystery has finally been solved.

My "Long Short Story" of six closely typed pages in May 1945 is very condensed. So I shall go back to the past, compare with the present, and try to update my military life -- for posterity.

1941

On May 8, 1941, after having volunteered for the draft, I was inducted. at Fort Dix, NJ. World War II was raging in Europe and there was no doubt in my mind that the U.S. would be involved only I could not predict how soon. I vaguely remember filling out a questionnaire at Fort Dix for the benefit of the classifying officer, Lt. Col. Dixon. We recruits boarded a large passenger train at. Fort Dix and had a long overnight ride to Camp Blanding, Florida. Colonel Dixon stayed up all night with the questionnaires, assigning people to various units. When we reached Camp Blanding the following morning, our names were called out and our unit assignment was announced. I was in Headquarters Battery, 2nd Battalion, 35th Field Artillery Regiment.

The cadre was waiting for us, and we formed the first troops assigned to the regiment for basic training. We were at the bottom of the ladder of rank: our pay as recruits for the next four months was $21 per month. After that we would all get a promotion to the rank of private with a pay check of $30 a month. We got our food and clothing but a trip to the Post Exchange for such necessities as shoe polish, brass polish and tooth paste were our expense. Everybody griped. I sweated it out and did not have anyone to come to for a stipend. Nor would my pride let me if I could.

Four months passed, basic training was over and promotion time came along with the promised "pay raise." In my case it was slightly different because my rank became "corporal" with two stripes on my sleeve and a pay slot of $54 per month --more than double! I could now afford to take a bus to Jacksonville on a weekend.

The months dragged on and the U.S. was still at peace. Filler troops from Fort Bragg, North Carolina expanded our units. A policy of sending home the "older men" over 28 was established and over the next few months three groups went home. I was still at Camp Blanding, in the fourth and last contingent scheduled to leave (I was 29). The day was Sunday, December 7, 1941. I was leisurely heading for the train station to buy a ticket for New York when there suddenly came loud blasts from every radio in existence: the Japanese had made a sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii inflicting heavy damage to our navy. I quietly headed back for camp, knowing that the long-awaited day had arrived.

The activity became more intense. Every "older" soldier sheepishly returned to camp, but not by choice. As a heavy artillery regiment, our basic artillery piece was the 155 mm long range gun (the "long tom") as distinguished from the 155 mm howitzer, same caliber weapon but with shorter range. Some of the old French WW I guns were shipped to the regiment and we were afraid of them -- not having been fired for some twenty years. But the time had come to test them and we were scared that they would blow up in our face.

Everybody turned out at the gun position. A crew opened the breech, rammed the 155 mm shell home, a long powder charge was inserted and the breech closed. The crew joined the spectators in relative safety. A West Pointer, rank of Captain, volunteered to pull the lanyard to fire the gun. That was a real act of leadership under difficult conditions and I admired him. He pulled the lanyard and with a deafening roar the gun was fired and the breech opened. Smoke poured out of both ends. The Captain repeated the same process with each gun and everybody was relieved to know that these were usable artillery pieces. Now the outfit could train with real guns.

The 35th FA and 17th FA were regular army regiments. Together with the 178th FA National Guard regiment from South Carolina, they formed the 13th FA Brigade. The latter two were 155 Howitzer units. The time had come to expand the army in preparation for war. The brigade formed an Officer Candidate Review Board and invited all interested personnel to apply for officer candidate school. The brigade had over 2000 men in its ranks and I applied along with 150 others. We were all interviewed, questioned thoroughly, and assigned numerical position grades.

In January 1942 the first call came for Officer Candidate School and three men went from the 35th. A second group left for Fort Sill, Oklahoma several weeks later, and I waited impatiently for my turn, which never came. In April I was restless and went to the regimental commander, Colonel Barnes to inquire about my status. He pulled a long list of names from his desk drawer, scanned it repeatedly, with no results. Finally, in exasperation, he started with name number one and went over each name slowly. Suddenly he stopped short with his finger near the top of the page. My name was number 10 in a list of 150. He told me to file another application which I did. It reached Corps Headquarters just as my first approved application was on its way down to regimental headquarters. Why the delay? I was a naturalized citizen, born in the United Kingdom (not Germany, Japan or Russia). A strange army.

My specialty was the fire direction center and I became instrument sergeant with a pay of $78 per month. I was really in the chips, and had three stripes on my sleeves. The outfit left, Camp Blanding early in 1942 for Camp Shelby, Mississippi, This was the beginning of many address changes and until my return to the States in October 1945, I was never in one place more than three months. In June I entered officer candidate class No. 29 at Fort, Sill, Oklahoma.

Two weeks into the class they wanted to drop me. Despite studying every night till midnight, the subject of "motors" was not my forte. I pleaded with them to be patient, that gunnery and fire direction center were my strong areas and the six weeks of classwork in that subject would tell the difference. They relented and I breezed through the most difficult part of field artillery. On the other hand, many others didn't and the dropout rate was high. The remainder of the 90 day training was in tactics, and that was easy. I was discharged as an

enlisted man on September 9, 1942 for the convenience of the government and commissioned a 2nd Lt. in the Army of the United States effective September 10th.

The next shock came when I read my orders: 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Camp Livingston, LA. I asked why not an artillery unit? They said I was too old for field artillery. Actually, I was not alone. The TD Command officer candidate school was new and there were no graduates yet.

Leadership

And now, my pet subject. Being assigned as platoon leader to a tank destroyer company meant resentment on the part of the platoon sergeant. I don't blame him because I had a lot to learn. But I will advance the time to late November 1942 when I asked the battalion commander, Lt. Colonel S, for permission to go to New York to get married. Permission denied. Why? What is so important about a 2nd Lt. leaving a company for a short leave? We had gone to Camp Carabelle, Florida for amphibious training -- a camp that was two blocks deep and 50 miles wide along the Gulf of Mexico. So I did the next best thing: brought my bride down to Tallahassee, Florida with her parents. The best man was an ex-mayor of this Florida capital, who was kind enough to arrange a rabbi in a synagogue that had only one additional stranger present. We were married on Saturday night, December 5, 1942 and my new wife stayed in a furnished room in Tallahassee.

Sound romantic? I was grudgingly given one-half day off on Saturday afternoon for the purpose of getting married. So, as a penalty for having taken that Saturday afternoon off, I was made Officer of the Day for the entire weekend! My new bride witnessed the changing of the guard -- when I relieved the men on guard duty and inducted the new crew. I replaced myself.

Not having had reason to be in contact with Lt. Col. S, I wonder why he refused my first request, then penalize me in such cruel fashion? We were attached to the 38th Division, Indiana National Guard. Lt. Col. S was a NG officer (read it both ways). But I have a serious fault: if I don't like something or someone, I can't hide it. My next encounter with this Battalion Commander came when I was called into his headquarters for what he called a difficult assignment. There was a private who was constantly A.W.O.L. No sooner would they get him back to the company when he would disappear again. His mission was to get an "incompatibility discharge" (neither honorable nor dishonorable). The battalion objective was to have him dishonorably discharged, but previous recommendations were denied.

When I interviewed this soldier, he was arrogant and defiant. There was no doubt that he was ready to run away again at the first opportunity. I wrote up my findings: "This man is an insult to the soldiers in the unit and his constant escapades are a detriment to the morale of the organization. Therefore I recommend that he be given a general court martial and dishonorably discharged from the United States Army."

The battalion commander read my report, which he was required to endorse and forward to higher headquarters. He rebuked me for a terrible job and said that any repercussions would fall on me. But the Corps Commander who reviewed my write-up accepted my report and a general court martial dishonorably discharged the AWOL private. Shortly afterward Lt. Colonel S. became a full colonel, overgrade in his job. Generally it is the opposite situation: first a person

performs the duties of a higher rank then hopefully gets a promotion to fit the job. A few months later Colonel S disappeared from the scene.

Going back in time to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, I talked to M.W. who was in HQ Btry of the 2nd Bn 35th FA (later the 977 FA Bn). He was a Master Sergeant with a fire direction center specialty. I had left the unit for OCS and the old artillery regiment was streamlined to fit WWII requirements by making two separate battalions, numbered 976th and 977th FA. A new battalion commander (Bn CO), a Lt Col. from the National Guard was put in charge and there was obviously a serious personality conflict. I was shocked to hear (50 years later) that as a punishment, M.W. was reduced to the rank of private from Master Sergeant and transferred to a gun battery while on the Anzio beachhead in Italy. This is an abuse of power, in my opinion, and a dictatorial decision was rendered with extreme punishment. Was this action in the best interest of the battalion command? Obviously not, and it must have been a blow to the morale of the unit. And now, back to Camp Carabelle, Florida and our rigorous ranger training.

I was put in command of Company A for training on many occasions, and on this particular day I drew a paper bag luncheon, the same for all personnel. In it was a soft roll with nothing but a dab of apple butter inside. I approached the mess sergeant and asked him why he prepared such a poor lunch for a company of hard working men. His unbelievable reply: "If you don't like it, make it yourself." Certainly this attitude justified severe punishment, but my concept of leadership was different: what action is in the best interest of the men?

I assembled the company in a semi-circle and showed them the soft roll with the dab of apple butter which I considered inadequate for a lot of hard-working soldiers. Then I told the men of the mess sergeant's reply to me. Next I opened a book entitled <u>The Articles of War</u> and read the punishment that I could impose on the mess sergeant for insubordination to an officer. He turned pale. However, I said I would give the mess sergeant another chance provided he put more effort into supplying better meals for the men. The difference was great the very next day and there were no more food problems afterwards. Mission accomplished. Any commissioned or non-commissioned officer must think of the troops under his/her command as an obligation of leadership.

<u>Back to basic Training</u>

The Army Ground Forces commander came to inspect the 38th Division for possible deployment to the Pacific Theatre. This division performed so poorly that they were sent back to Louisiana for more training. In the meantime the days were passing and we were still stateside, not overseas. We went to southern California for desert maneuvers. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. D, had a. big ego -- nobody could be as good as he was. I had been promoted to 1st Lieutenant and was battalion intelligence officer. Other officers were held back in promotions so a few reclassified officers were assigned to the unit beause of vacancies in the Table of Organization. The CO had to put them in a job commensurate with their rank and they were not nearly as good as the officers he had, whom he had not promoted. A painful lesson. to him, but it was too late. Nobody liked him. Lt. Col. D went to school at Fort Leavenworth. Captain P, who was plans and training officer went to another school. The acting commanding officer was a reclassified engineer, Major M. The jobs of S-2 and S-3 (intelligence and operations) were turned over to me while they were absent. Fortunately for me -- and the battalion -- the engineer major didn't interfere with me or question what I was

doing. In the desert, I worked out a day exercise where the troops were assigned to four separate hilltops. The weather was always sunny there, and everybody enjoyed it. Imagine their surprise when I checked up on them in a Piper Cub plane (piloted by an Air Force officer) who flew over each position at my direction! When we left the desert, I chatted with the new outfit which was coming in for desert maneuvers and mentioned the best camouflage color to paint the tanks based on my air observation and they followed my recommendation.

Our next station was Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. It was Spring 1944 and D-Day in June had not yet occurred. I decided that we could not wait forever so I put the entire battalion through weapons familiarization training. We had rifle marksmanship, bazooka launching (anti-tank), grenade throwing (live grenades) and every weapon firing I could dream up. Seven days a week, day and night, I was working on the training schedule. Supply ammunition headquarters complained that I was using up the year's ammunition allotment but I didn't care. If it saved the life of one man, I felt, the expenditure of ammunition was worth it. My right hand man was a Tech Sergeant, who realized what I was trying to accomplish and each night, after supper, he joined me voluntarily. I was grateful for his capable assistance.

In September 1944 the battalion went overseas. D-Day landing in France was June 6th. We landed in Cherbourg, Normandy, France. This brings me up to "Long Short Story No. 1" of 1945.

As a postscript to the end of the first story, I was awarded a bronze star medal for my participation with the 5th Armored Division in the final combat phase of the war when we reached the Elbe River in East Germany. I had West Berlin showing in my map case (a gift from the British Army) but General Eisenhower had ordered all American troops to stop at the Elbe River and await the arrival of the Russian Army approaching from the East. They arrived about 7-10 days later. My memoirs continued during the Occupation of Germany in a separate story while I was Prisoner-of-War Hospital Security Officer for Third United States Army under General George Patton. At that time the American occupation forces went to Bavaria and my zone of responsibility covered all Prisoner of War Hospitals from Munich south to the Austrian border.

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Is World War II important or is it just a piece of information in the history books? We had a war in Korea, followed by a messy war in Vietnam. Then Operation Desert Storm erupted in 1990 and finished in 1991 (or is it finished with Saddam Hussein of Iraq still in power)?

As future years pass by, the map of the world will continue to change, but WWII was historic in many important ways. The lessons of WWII gave birth to the United Nations, a world body where nations meet and formulate international law. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed, a powerful body of 14 European nations augmented by the U.S. and Canada to bring the total member countries to 16. Europe was proud of NATO because it kept, peace in Europe for more than 40 years. Strangely, Germany, the hated enemy of WWII, became a cornerstone of strength in the new 16-nation consortium. When in Germany for a visit in 1984, I was amazed at the number of American bases in that country. There were nine bases in Stuttgart alone! And there was Third Army still in Bad

Tölz, the old German army headquarters.

Don't write off NATO yet even though the Warsaw Pact went the way of the Berlin Wall. In Desert Storm, Turkey, a member of NATO, supported the U.S. against its Iraq neighbor and allowed us to use its air bases. Troops and equipment, from Europe, were quickly transferred to Saudi Arabian bases to support the war effort. Other NATO nations joined the U.S. in the U.N. coalition against Iraq.

We are on the threshold of another major change in Europe, when the 12-nation EC countries, with 340 million people, form the EC union in 1992, with many other countries clamoring to join.

World history is to be continued, endlessly.

David Saltman
Lt Col, AUS (Ret)

Wantagh, NY
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David Saltman
P. O. Box 7127
Wantagh, N. Y. 11793-0727

Training a Battalion for Overseas

by Lt Col David Saltman

The date was early Spring 1944. We were stationed at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. The 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion commander had enrolled in a 3-month course at the Command and General Staff school at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The Plans and Training Officer (S-3) knew that there was no one in charge of the unit, so he decided to go to school (so he said), and disappeared! He did not care about his duty to the men in the battalion. Nobody knew where he went.

I was a 1st lieutenant in a captain's slot as battalion intelligence officer (S-2) and was placed in the S-3 (Plans and Training) job by the acting battalion executive, a "reclassified" engineer major who had been assigned to the outfit. This new officer had neither leadership nor command ability. He had to fill the Plans and Training Officer gap, which called for a major's rank, and he placed me in the job, regardless of my low rank and inexperience for the position. He gave me no instructions because he did not have any knowledge whatsoever of what an S-3s job required.

The company commanders, all captains, were compelled to follow the weekly training schedule prepared by the old S-3. These schedules were weak, a re-hash of the two previous tours of Louisiana maneuvers. Now I was placed in the hot seat to train a battalion of more than 500 men with absolutely no previous experience in this area. Prior to being assigned to the tank destroyer battalion, I was an enlisted man in a heavy artillery unit, commissioned in the Field Artillery officer candidate school at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in September 1942.

It was early 1944 and the expected amphibious invasion of Europe did not take place until June 6, 1944. I was in a quandary about how best to train the battalion and resolved to do my duty as an army officer and give these 500 men the best training schedule possible. The battalion commander would not be back for three months. There was no one to whom I could turn for help or advice.

Considering the length of time for which I was responsible, I decided to give the men a refresher course in small arms firing. This consisted of rifle shooting, machine gun firing, grenade throwing – all with live ammunition. This created another duty I had to learn – the supply job of how to requisition live ammunition for the entire battalion. The supply source complained that I was requisitioning an entire years' supply of ammunition to be consumed in just a few months!

I moved into the S-3 office and was pleasantly surprised to have the assistance of a Tech Sergeant (5 stripes) who was very capable of performing any task to which he was assigned. What a blessing! I made plans to split the men into even groups, to rotate them in the tasks of rifle shooting, machine gun firing and live grenade throwing. All plans and paper work were done at night. During the day, from 8 A.M. to 5 P.M., I was making the rounds of each unit to supervise the training. Every night and weekend was devoted to planning and paper work.

After supper each night, I received another surprise. The Tech Sergeant voluntarily came back to the S-3 office to help me. I not only valued his company, I was also grateful to receive his capable assistance.

As the weeks went by, and with the training satisfactorily under control, I decided to add another skill – bazooka firing. This was an anti-tank weapon used by a soldier, dismounted, firing at the side of a tank. In World War II the allied forces faced a super-heavy German tank with an 88 mm gun. This tank was built with heavy armor and its front sloped in such a manner that direct fire from an allied tank shell ricocheted harmlessly away from its turret. The vulnerability of the side of a tank to bazooka fire was a very important consideration.

In training, however, live bazooka ammunition was not feasible. I ordered a replica of a tank silhouette made of plywood and towed by a 2½-ton truck. For training purposes we used the actual bazooka with a dummy shell. This proved very satisfactory and provided training that would not otherwise be possible.

In combat, all weapons skills are invaluable so that soldiers can better protect themselves and be prepared for any eventuality. The battalion went overseas later in 1944, to Europe, and saw combat in Germany as well as in Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

When the battalion commander returned from Fort Leavenworth, the old S-3 (training and operations officer) suddenly reappeared from his hiding place and I stepped down to a 1st lieutenant's job as liaison officer. A "reclassified captain" had been assigned to my old position in the battalion to fill a Table of Organization vacancy! If I had been promoted to captain, this would never have happened.

I felt that as a commissioned officer, I had followed my conscience and given the battalion the best training that could be given in preparation for an overseas assignment. It is impossible to determine how valuable the preparation had been but probably some lives were saved and the enemy suffered a few more casualties at the hands of American soldiers.

Memoirs of The Bulge

December 1944 - January 1945

by Lt Col David Saltman, AUS (Ret)

In December 1944, en route back to my unit in Germany after a refreshing shower at a coal mine in Holland, I radioed my unit and got a sharp, unexpected message from the battalion commander: "Silence your radio and return immediately. Out." About twenty minutes later I came across the 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion passing me in the opposite direction. I made a U-turn and joined the column, which I later learned was en route to Belgium.

On the outskirts of Liège, I took advantage of traffic halts and talked to some of the people. They were wailing and moaning about the massacre at Malmedy. I didn't have the faintest idea where it was nor did I know anything else about the current situation. We wound around narrow country roads en route to the town of Marche. We were attached to the 84th Infantry Division and all of us arrived there, confused about the current situation. German troops had been there the night before. It was foggy and very cold.

On our first day of arrival, I met MGEN Bolling, the 84th Division commander. He spotted me with a radio inside a halftrack and asked if I had communication with any of my units. When I explained the mission of the Recon Co. of a TD Bn, he asked me to stay in contact with them so that he could find out where the enemy was in order to plot it on his map at the command post. The various Recon platoons had spread out to Rochefort and beyond, and radio contact ranged from difficult to impossible. I stayed up all night until 6 A.M. in the freezing cold.

The Germans lost no time greeting us with artillery fire. Late one night I had found refuge upstairs in a 2-story house, hoping to get some sleep. I was in the process of undressing when I heard a loud explosion, and shattered glass and debris from the window showered me unpleasantly. That was too close for comfort so I headed downstairs. The native population knew better and had been in the cellar for hours. I got as far as the stairs only -- no room down below. The battalion radio operator came to join us after his light armored vehicle had been splattered with shrapnel. When the shelling stopped, the radio operator went back to his vehicle, and I went back upstairs. This time I kept my clothes on.

The next day was a beehive of activity. Troops pulled out of town and the civilians left in droves. The 84th Division headquarters pulled back, felling trees as road blocks. Daisy chains (several mines set up on a board with a string attached) were preparad. We found another house which the owners had evacuated and used

the cellar only. The Stars and Stripes newspaper showed Marche taken by the Germans, but we held it, a strategic road hub.

The fighting was fierce. Task forces were sent out in every direction and the American soldier performed far beyond expectation. Our soldiers were civilians converted by necessity into fighting men, demonstrating many times their "yankee ingenuity" in facing new problems and solving them quickly.

The "front line" was a semi-circle around Marche with the Germans holding the high ground. They had complete control and knocked out two of our TDs, burning in an open field I went up a dirt road heading for high ground in a jeep, past the burning vehicles. A doughboy frantically waved at me to get out quick since the "krauts" had us under constant observation. I leaped out of the jeep and told my driver to get the vehicle down the hill fast, out of sight. He did, and a German tank shell fired at me, lost its target and exploded down the far side of the hill. Fortunately my driver and I escaped unharmed. There were many close calls like it in the Battle of the Ardennes.

With all of the roads cut off by the enemy, I had no choice but to go back where I came from. This time I managed to keep in radio contact with our units and relay communications in the midst of some very strong engagements.

In the next seven days we changed from the defensive to the offensive and captured that important ridge line. The siege of Marche had ended. The civilians knew it, too, and came back to their houses, smiling and happy.

The weather became very cold, as low as -20°. Water in my canteen froze into solid ice. A company commander accused me of having a soft job as a liaison officer (I was a 1st lieutenant). Since the activity had slowed down on both sides I thought it was a good time to visit our forward elements. I took a halftrack and invited one of the medical personnel to take the front line tour with me. He looked at me, his face white as the snow on the ground and asked: "Are you scared?" I looked him straight in the eye and said: "Of course not." That did it. He replied: "If you're not scared, I'm not scared" and off we went.

We raced across the road at fifty miles per hour, stopping at each company along the way. I figured that enemy tanks would have a dificult time tracking me at that speed, even though I was a perfectly open (but moving) target. There are many names you can use to describe this action, but the first one that comes to mind is "Russian roulette."

Buzz bombs flew 100 feet overhead, probably headed for England where they did considerable damage on impact. The front lines on both sides were the respective gun positions, but the weather called a temporary halt to the hostilities. It also was a blessing for our men because they took advantage of the situation and caught up on some desperately needed sleep.

Some days later, in another sector near Laroche, I was making a call on my radio when a tank backed up into a stock pile of hidden mines. Never mind the deafening noise that resulted; pity the poor crew that met their untimely end. The explosion was so deadly that the turret separated from the tank and the 30-ton vehicle itself did a somersault. It was too gruesome to describe.

How do you drive at night along dirt roads in a blinding snowstorm? The roads wind without rhyme or reason with zero visibility and many a vehicle went into a ditch and couldn't get out. Carefully, with tops down for visibility and green "cat's eyes" used for identification, I had to walk on the road many times to lead the way, with vehicles following at a speed (?) of two miles per hour. Many of the ditches had been mined by the retreating enemy and there was never enough time or personnel to dig them up. Perhaps even worse, mines can be buried in a roadway, where one or two tanks pass over them safely then the third one makes its deadly contact. War makes its own definition of the word "fate."

Talking about fate, I had my lucky charm, too. Slowly but surely we drove the Germans back with heavy casualties on both sides. On one occasion, I was driving along one of the many dirt roads and as I rounded a curve, I jammed the brakes. A tree had been felled across the road just in front of me, a perfect trap for a waiting enemy machine-gunner. I felt stupid. Fortunately for me, the Germans had retreated so my life was spared. . . .

Let us now look at the Battle of the Bulge from another perspective. Hitler had made a bold and desperate move, employing many tank and infantry divisions along the mountainous territory of the Ardennes. By rule, tanks must never be roadbound in a combat action. In the Ardennes, tanks were forced to use the roads in their drive toward the Belgian seaport of Antwerp. They overran an American division that had seen little previous action and they were well on their way. The Ardennes Mountains were in the First U.S. Army sector, with Patton's Third Army to the South and the U.S. Ninth Army to the north.

I was with the 638th T.D. Battalion, attached to the 84th Division, in the Ninth Army sector. The sudden call to reinforce the outnumbered troops of First Army was issued to many units in both the Third and Ninth Armies, a maneuver that spelled the turning point of World War II. With the front line straightened out in late January 1945, we went back to our previous stations with Ninth Army. We were greeted with propaganda leaflets dropped by a German plane, which read: "Welcome back to the 84th Division. The 10th Panzer Division is waiting for you."

Of particular interest in this battle was the Belgian city of Bastogne. While the Germans were overrunning Belgium, the 101st Airborne Division was surrounded, completely cut off in Bastogne. When the Germans demanded the surrender of the town, MGEN Anthony McAuliffe, the division commander, gave his famous reply,

"Nuts!" Bastogne was one of the few Belgian cities that was never occupied by the Germans, and its inhabitants are eternally grateful. Units of Patton's Third Army drove north and made contact with the 101st, breaking the German encirclement.

In 1984 I was touring Europe and rented a car in Luxembourg. My wife accompanied me on a trip to Bastogne, Belgium where we saw a statue of General George Patton, erected by a grateful city. Someone was handing out leaflets advertising the 40th Anniversary of the Battle of the Ardennes in a special convention area at the edge of town. They had carefully constructed exhibits to commemorate the occasion, and I also picked up a copy of "La Meuse", a Belgian daily newspaper dated January 10, 1945. For the sake of tourists, they printed both French and English versions of the news in that issue.

After a lapse of 40 years, I was desperately trying to reconstruct some of the French I had learned in school, along with the knowledge gained in WWII. I stopped at a souvenir table and admired a beautiful hand engraved plaque, created for this occasion. The artist could not speak a word of English, but I caught the gist of his remarks about the special record book in the main office for veterans like myself. There, after a brief conversation, I made some written comments in the record book in English and French. Bastogne is one of the few areas where Americans are appreciated by the residents who remember World War II.

On a personal note, the Ardennes offensive affected me in a different way. I was in a dead-end position with my unit and was trying hard to get transferred out. One day I met the 84th division anti-tank officer and confided to him my dilemna. He remarked that the 6th Tank Destroyer Group commander was looking for officers to fill a vacancy and he promised to talk to the commander. The CO of the group checked with my battalion commander. The group commander, a West Pointer, was convinced that I was the type of officer he was looking for and he planned to have me transferred.

Fate again intervened when the Bulge erupted and before he could act, I was in the First Army sector. When the Ardennes was contained, we went back north to our previous position and I was now in his domain. He lost no time having XIII Corps issue orders transferring me to the 6th Tank Destroyer Group and I joined them the next day. Three months later, on May 1, 1945, I was promoted to captain. A dream had been fulfilled.

April 1945 -- Final drive to the Elbe

by Lt Col David Saltman

I was in 6th Tank Destroyer Group headquarters, a unit of XIII Corps, Ninth Army. In order to facilitate communication with Corps HQ in the final drive east to link up with the Russians, I was assigned as a liason officer with the 5th Armored Division. I volunteered for Combat Command A (CCA) a unit commanded by a brigadier general and the one likely to see the most action. I took a half-track vehicle, two radio operators and a driver, and reported to the unit commander.

The first day was dull because CCA was in division reserve. Two parallel combat commands, CCB and CCR moved cautiously but steadily eastward with two infantry divisions behind us. About noon on the second day, CCA sprang into action. With a deafening roar, every tank and armored vehicle started their engines and CCA passed thru to take the lead in the offensive. When the column halted at night, explosions were seen everywhere. The Germans were blowing up many bridges to hinder our advance.

At daybreak CCA resumed the advance, with momentary halts only to reconnoiter ahead and blast away at enemy resistance. Progress was rapid and we moved continuously, on through nightfall. At 11 P.M. I got worried that we were running out of gas in the vehicle's 50-gallon tanks so I ordered them refilled while still on the move. Riding on cobblestone roads, our vehicle swayed from side to side. Half of the gasoline went into the tank and the other half spilled on the floor. The gas fumes were heavy and at midnight, the driver, fighting to keep his head up, braked to a stop and collapsed over the wheel. We pulled the driver out of the seat and I put one of the radio operators in his place. In the meantime, I lost track of the tanks ahead of us and our vehicle had stalled the armored column following behind us.

We raced ahead, causing quite a ripple in the column following but luckily I picked the right road and caught up to the main body. It was well past midnight, and streams of German soldiers passed alongside of us with their hands clasped above their heads in surrender mode. We kept going to accomplish our mission of demoralizing the enemy -- taking prisoners was out of the question. The infantry, 20 to 40 miles to the rear, were cussing out the armor because they had to mop up and corral the prisoners.

Our progress was rapid. At daylight, we stopped at an airfield temporarily. German planes flying low overhead were amazed when met with a hail of machine gun fire. We knocked them

out of the sky, bagging six enemy planes in two hours. We reached our final objective at the Elbe River at Tangermunde, where a fight began for the bridge across the Elbe. At that time I turned on my radio, a huge device where we hand cranked the controls to reach a desired frequency. My intention was to report the situation to Corps HQ and also advise that we badly needed reinforcements to handle the prisoners. There was a deafening explosion. The general's aide came rushing up and told me to turn off my radio. The bridge had been blown from the east bank, a move which the general had anticipated.

We liberated about 500 American prisoners and some British. Some of the British POWs had been captured five years earlier. Many of the Americans had been captured in North Africa. There were 1200 other captives who had been evacuated by the Germans to the east side of the Elbe before the bridge was blown. Enemy artillery fire, which was heavy the first day, began to taper off. The Germans were squeezed by U.S. troops on the West and the advancing Russians on the East. This time we took many German prisoners and collected all weapons.

General Eisenhower had ordered all troops to stop at the Elbe River and go no further. Winston Churchill disagreed. He felt that we should advance as far east as possible and shake hands with the Russians when we met them. I had West Berlin on my map case, not realizing at the time that we were ordered to stop at the Elbe and wait for the Russians to link up. And wait we did.

Day after day I walked up to the bank of the Elbe River looking for the Russians. All was quiet, with no Russians in sight. It was a week to ten days later that the Russians finally reached the east bank of the Elbe River. The Russians were content to stay there, but the U.S. command was not.

The final plans laid out by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had partitioned Germany into post-war occupation zones. The Soviet Union was to take over East Germany and the Americans were to occupy southern Germany. I have often reflected, in hindsight, what would have happened if we had stayed at the Elbe? The former Soviet-occupied East Germany would have been only half its final size for more than four decades. . . .

David Saltman
P. O. Box 7127
Wantagh, N. Y. 11793-0727

FOREWORD

In the following story I am attempting to describe Germany as I found it in the four months following the end of the war in Europe. It is the result of my experiences as Prisoner of War Hospital Security Officer for Third United States Army and detailed investigation, interrogation and criticism by both Americans and germans. The story is short and concentrated. It contains nothing which has not been verified to the best of my knowledge and belief. Unfortunately I have not had the time to gather more material, nor have I been able to travel into all zones of occupation to further verify my findings. I might add, however, that I have questioned germans from every part of Germany.

The latter part of the story is the product of an interview with a "good german" -- a german who is one in a million, who has never belonged to the Nazi Party and who has the welfare of his country at heart. I accept all responsibility for everything he has said.

A STUDY OF GERMANY

from

V-E to V-J DAY

Now that World War II has come to an end, what do we find in Europe today? We find Germany thoroughly whipped -- physically. But do we find a real sense of guilt for having started this war? I say "No!" There are still too many germans who have too many excuses to offer to justify german aggression. They always turn back the clock and point to past history. They justify the attack on Poland because they wanted to get back the "corridor" which separated them from East Prussia. They justify the building of the Siegfried Line because of the existance of the Maginot Line -- but neglect to account for the fact that the Siegfried Line extended far beyond the Maginot Line. They justify the acquisition of the Sudetenland in Czechoslavakia because of the German population, but do not account for the rest of the country. They insist that they had no desire to conquer the world, yet they cannot justify the attack on France, Belgium, Holland and Norway. I am convinced that the people of Germany were misled in many ways by their leaders. But I am also convinced that the taste of victory was sweet and pleasant to the average german.

Perhaps it will surprise people in the outside world to hear that over 95% of the german people did not know of the atrocities of the concentration camps. This was always kept a closely guarded secret by the SS concentration camp guards. When the Americans came and revealed these atrocities, the average german was shocked. The fact that the german people did not know of these atrocities greatly surprised me. When I showed them pictures of some of these crimes, their reaction was one of genuine amazement. They could not believe their own eyes. So I decided to go a step further and arranged a meeting for the purpose of interviewing some SS men from the concentration camps of Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz. The pictures were verified as being true beyond a doubt. It was further brought out that no one was allowed to visit these camps - not even officers of the wehrmacht! Thus the sweet taste of victory cannot be properly associated with the inhuman bestiality of Himmler's SS.

When the war ended it was only natural that I should have a certain amount of hatred for the germans. This feeling is understandable, for one must hate in order to kill. This hatred, even at the end of the war, persisted, for the memory of the war was something that could not be dismissed overnight. I did not have the desire to learn the german language despite the fact that I had five books sent to me from the United States for that very purpose.

As I continued on my job my hatred diminished. In fact I put aside the feeling because I knew it was wrong. The war was over and we must once more become normal. But to this date I have not yet returned to normal. I cannot return to normal because the german people prohibit me from doing so.

The war for Germany is over. A few months have passed and already the people dislike the sight of the german uniform. Yet I find them a strange people indeed. Never have I met such a large mass of people who had so much to hide. Overnight everyone seemed to have lost their membership in the Nazi Party, despite the fact that to belong to the Party was the most natural thing in the world for a german. If the average german wanted to get somewhere in business or political life they had to be Party members. They were quick and eager to join the ranks of the Party when it swept the nation; now they are even quicker in their attempts to denounce it.

For some strange reason which I have yet been unable to fathom, the average german cannot be trusted. I have been told most simple lies at the slightest excuses. Morally the spirit of the german seems to be broken; his future is a blank. He is not amenable to verbal orders but is very attentive to physical violence. In other words, the average german has to be kept under one's thumb. He is used to that because he has done it so long - and what's more, he likes it.

In my administration of Prisoner of War hospitals, one of the strict rules was "No Visiting". Time and time again American guards would tell that to the civilians but they paid no attention. But fire one shot in the air and watch them scatter like a bunch of scared rabbits. In the city of Munich many people would stalk through the rubble of bombed-out buildings and try to sneak into the hospitals, knowing full well that such a thing was not permitted. Nurses and civilian employees would give their passes to civilians to get into the hospital, and many people would try to forge the signature of an American officer on a blank pass form. These violations were too numerous to mention.

And so I became hard against the german people -- after the war was over. To give a verbal order to most germans is meaningless. In military fashion, it must be enforced with physical violence. Despite all the orders given to chief doctors, which in turn were passed down to the medical staff, nothing whatsoever was done to eject the visitors that had successfully used some subterfuge in entering a hospital.

So if we cannot trust the average german, can we trust Germany as a nation? I say flatly and unequivocally that we CAN'T.

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The german people are like children. They like a leader, and they like to follow a leader. When they have faith in someone they will back him to the limit. Thus it becomes easier to stand behinh a "Fuehrer" than to think for themselves. The german likes to work hard and obey orders.

There is also a love of country that seems to transcend all else. I am thinking particularly of the many clergymen who fought in the war as combat soldiers. It is true that the german army did not use as many chaplains as we did, and that everyone was drafted for war service. However, when clergymen were drafted into the army, I do not understand why they did not insist upon serving in a non-combatant status. Every army must have medical aid men and general service troops. As far as I can determine, it was possible for most clergymen to request non-combatant duty because of their spiritual beliefs. But in this strange country, there have been many instances where patriotism seems to come before belief in God. The best example I can cite in this case is that of a pastor who fought throughout the war as an anti-aircraft officer -- and finished his army career with the rank of major. Upon questioning this individual, he states that he had a commission in the Army Reserve and so it is only natural that he fulfill his duty as a soldier.

Another feature of interest is the german short-sightedness and mentality. Very vividly do I recall when the American Ninth Army reached the Elbe River, for I was with an armored spearhead at the time. We fought hard to get a bridge intact, but the germans blew the bridge in our faces. A week later whole german divisions were desperately trying to surrender to the Americans because the Russians were approaching them from the rear. But how can you transfer a whole division across a wide river when you have no means for them to cross? Not only that, many germans swam the river and crossed by the most primitive means because they were afraid of the Russians. . . . We have german hospitals without a single book on the subject of medicine. The books were in buildings which were bombed out, I am told. Yet many Nazi Party and gestapo records were carefully preserved in the recesses of salt mines -- preserved for the American forces which captured them intact. . . .

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Post-War Europe has its own problems. Millions of slave laborers had to be repatriated. Families are torn apart with no means of communication to determine whether or not their beloved ones are still alive. The ground -- so badly needed for growing food -- has been utilized for planting mines and pillboxes, or is torn or flooded by the ravages of war. And in Germany there is another problem of which nothing has yet been said -- What will the german soldier do now?

In order to build up a large army Germany conscripted all available manpower. German youth was drafted from the school into the army, and now that same youth, matured into manhood by seven years of war, finds himself without any skill. For a great many of these young men the problem does not concern them immediately for they will remain as prisoner-of-war labor and help rebuild war-torn Europe. But those who have already been liberated find that they have no other profession than to be a soldier -- for that is all they have been taught. And what future can German youth have now? The outlook is very dark.

All of Europe is a turmoil of hatred. With each succeding war the map of Europe is changed and another grievance springs up. Nationals from every part of Europe are thrown together; but instead of merging into one nation, as we do in America, there remains a series of disunited peoples. Centuries of wars and feuds are the background of Europe AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE UNTIL ALL OF EUROPE UNITES INTO ONE.

As I look at present-day Europe, I find that the war's end has not solved any problem other than to cease hostilities. As mentioned above, Europe is a turmoil of hatred. The French hate the Germans, and the Germans hate the Russians and I cannot speak for Eastern Europe because I have not been there -- but I can very well imagine. But one fact does stand out: France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg get along with each other -- so Germany must be the black sheep in the family of Western Europe.

To dismember Germany is to create only more hatreds. Yet we will continue to do so. And somewhere there will be other "Hitlers" and "Mein Kampfs" unless we take drastic measures to prevent this. To this extent we talk of re-educating Germany. Human beings and germans being what they are, it seems quite obvious to me that to try to re-educate the german people to be "good" and therefore not wage war any more is virtually an impossible task. If it is the will of the United Nations that Germany never rise again, then it becomes necessary to enforce this decision by physical means. The german people, as I have tried to point out above, are more susceptible to physical violence than to soft-spoken words. Therefore we must back our decisions with hard-headed realism and not benevolent idealism.

But lest I paint the picture too black, let me hasten to state that there are some good germans -- although they are hard to find. And to the good germans that I have found I am indebted for the information I have received which has made possible the writing of this epistle. Yet strangely enough I find that many of these "good germans" would like to come to America at the very first opportunity. To this end we must extend our welcome to these people and invite them to the Land of Freedom -- that same land where their ancestors came for the very same reason. It is our proud boast that the United States has long been a haven for people who fled from the tyranny and oppression of the Old World. And it is also well to point out that the german people who emigrated to America made good American citizens.

In conclusion, we may well ask, "Is a Third World War possible?" It is very simple to say that there have always been wars and there always will be wars and let it go at that. But such an attitude can only belong to the Defeatist. Life is not perfect; it it were, it would be awful dull. But all civilized humanity realizes the horror of war and therefore continually strives to prevent it. In this regard we cannot praise too highly the work of the San Francisco Conference toward World Peace.

In thinking of world wars, the spotlight falls on Europe. And when we think of war in Europe, we think of Germany as the place of origin. And peculiar as it may seem to the outside world, there are still lots of germans who will offer some sort of belated argument to prove that Germany never started any war. And it is this strange belief that means we must be careful if we are to avoid the pitfalls and mistakes that occurred after World War I.

Germany needs strong, honest leadership. She needs teachers of the sort that agree that Germany can and must become a nation willing to live in peace. But at the time of this writing I am very pessimistic about this ideal being accomplished. I hope I am wrong. When the peace is signed, and the proposed german territory is taken away from the Fatherland, how then will the germans react? Certainly not favorably.

And so it is with the map of Europe. No matter what boundary lines are drawn, no country will ever be satisfied. Turmoil, jealousy and feuds are indigenous to Europe. The natural hatred engendered by one country for its next door neighbor will always continue and past history will always provide justification. Europe will always be a conglomeration of discontented nations.

Therefore I say that the only solution is for a Pan-Europe of some sort wherein smaller nations combine to form a larger one, commensurate with the changing times. To accomplish this may require another war. . . .

And now let us hear what an honest, patriotic anti-nazi has to say about Germany. In the story which follows, this german, a man whom I would describe as <u>one in a million</u>, gives his viewpoints in answer to my queries.

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<u>Female Influence to Keep up Nazi Spirits</u>

"It has been my experience after the war that a <u>man</u> is likely to build a new life and start over again. Even if he was a strong nazi, a man with some intelligence is much more likely to forget about the past than a woman is. The main reason is female vanity. To prove this I want to delve into the heart of the SS problem.

"One of the most important factors we have in this area are the wives of the SS leaders. Lots of them were pretty girls from a small middle class family. They were never accustomed to wealth and luxury. They were married to their black shirt men and thus got wealth, luxury and something else -- Power, which every german woman loves. These women did not mind becoming child-bearing machines for nazism. They all knew that their husbands were coming home only two weeks each year in order to produce another child. TWO WEEKS EACH YEAR THE SS WOMAN KNEW THAT IT WAS HER SOLEMN DUTY TO BECOME PREGNANT! This may sound very cruel and hard BUT IT WAS AN SS PRINCIPLE! Now here they are with their many children. Their black paradise is closed forever. They have no luxuries as in former times; no fur coats or diamonds from Paris, no truckloads of foodstuffs from H olland and Denmark. And their power is gone, too.

"Is there anyone naive enough to believe that the SS women would forget about their lost paradise? Even though they live better than most of the german people today -- and in several cases it is known that SS women have supplemented their diet with American oranges and chocolate -- they will never forget that they had to step down from their former exalted position.

"These women still have their pride as SS women and show their feelings openly. They still like to repeat the rank of their SS husband. They are astounded to learn that the SS are treated worse than the wehrmacht. They consider the SS the elite of all german troops. Without exception they all pretend that they know nothing about war crimes, concentration camps, race hatred, etc.

"Sex and Sympathy are the two principal weapons these women use to influence both Americans and germans. For example, when an SS woman comes to an office she will be accompanied by her pretty daughter (if she has one). The daughter has nothing to say -- her sole duty is to display her figure.

"Let us look into the case of a man who always claimed to be an anti-nazi, a man who was very active during the first ten weeks after the cessation of hostilities, assisting the Americans in the discovery and seizure of SS goods. This man came to my house last week and asked if the Americans would object to his entertaining socially some SS women. He also told me that these women appealed to him, asking him questions as to how they should behave in order to keep on the right side of the Americans. I was astounded. I replied that unfortunately the SS women lived under the same laws as other german citizens, and therefore I did not believe the Americans would object. To entertain SS women, I said, was a matter of taste. He left in a very happy frame of mind. Several days later, when I accompanied an American reporter to the home of a high SS woman, I found this same man having tea with her. Another "anti-nazi" of my acquaintance came to the house of a very sexy, "high-ranking" SS woman, seized two rooms in the house and moved in. I will leave the rest to the reader's imagination.

"Up to this time we have always tried hard to concentrate the SS women for two reasons -- to eliminate the possibility of their propaganda and to control the education of their children. We have already indicated that most of them have 3 to 8 children, according to the SS child-bearing principle and we do not want to miss the chance to make good, democratic people out of them. Until now we have not been very successful in this work. We tried to concentrate the SS women in one house but each time we tried we had orders from higher authorities that no more than two families could be in one house. When we think back on Dachau and Buchenwald, such a thing as only two SS families in one house is ironical. Himmler did not ask why all his personal enemies were bunched together like cattle; however we don't want to use Himmler methods and mistreat the SS women -- we just want to watch and control them.

"At the same time this would eliminate the possibility of American soldiers fraternizing with SS women without knowing who they are. We don't envy the oranges and American cigarettes that they have but we become angry at the thought that an SS woman would never realize the consequences to Germany if the United States would feed American troops on german food just as Hitler fed his troops on the food of the countries he conquered.

"The SS women do not have enough pride to refuse an American orange but they are proud enough to continue to use their nazi propaganda. In spite of the disappointment we have had in our efforts to wipe out the nazi spirit, we won't give up trying to concentrate them and find a way for the many small SS children to become separated from the nazi influence which their mothers undoubtedly will force upon them as soon as they are old enough to absorb it."

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

"For 12 years children were educated under Hitler's regime to live and die for nazism. The highest goal they could attain in life was to become a nazi soldier and die for the Fatherland. The children have lost all respect for their family. Therefore they have lost all sense of human decency. They were taught that Hitler was God. Religion was replaced by Hitlerism. When they reached the age of 10 years they had to learn how to march and become soldiers. Military training began in Germany at the age of 10. The main problem now is to teach the children that all they have learned was wrong, that they must learn how to live as decent human beings, that they are no better than any other nation or race in the world. They must forget race hatred. This problem is not a difficult one because a child is easily

influenced by a teacher and it is the responsibility of the victorious nations to provide good teachers and good books in good schools.

"The children of the SS and other high nazi leaders should not be separated from other children. They should not have the feeling that they are now inferior to other children but the education they receive in their homes must be rigidly controlled. The children should have governesses who are absolutely reliable and these people must control the mother's evil influence. It is contrary to the principles of Nature to take a child away from his mother. These governesses must control all conversations and live with the families as part of them. This can be done only if the high SS and nazi leaders' families are concentrated -- otherwise it would be an enormous task.

"I was in a car with the daughter of a high SS official when our attention was drawn to a strange figure emerging from a military government building. The individual was dressed in black, had a long beard and wore the typical hat of a Jewish rabbi. The girl, aged 14, stared curiously at this man and asked me what sort of creature this was. She was most interested to hear that he was a Jewish rabbi. This was the first time she had ever seen or heard of such a being. It had never occurred to her that such a human being existed. The only picture she had ever seen of a jew was in one of Julius Streicher's newspapers showing The Jew as an enormously fat banker with many diamond rings and a big fat cigar in his mouth. The only thing she and all other Hitler youth knew about jews was that they were devilish creatures who were supposed to be killed. There is no doubt in my mind that only a very short time would be required to teach these children the truth, for as I have said above, a child is very easily influenced by a teacher."

There are Nazis in the Hills

"The war in Europe came to an end in the Alpine area and a great number of SS and concentration camp guards settled down in the mountains. Many of them were caught and taken prisoner but we know that there are still a few hiding. We do not know how many there are but the mountains in Germany differ from those in America in that there are many huts and lodges where people can hide in Germany. Americans do not like to climb mountains -- they only like to go to those places which are accessible by "jeep." Therefore it is necessary that some native germans who know the terrain cooperate with them in finding these people. It is also a known fact that many of these nazis used to live in the northern part of Germany and are therefore not accustomed to a hard, mountain life. With the approach of winter they will be forced to come out of their hideouts into the towns where they will have another opportunity to hide or even to obtain jobs with the assistance of unreliable german authorities -- and there are plenty of these who have done a good job in fooling Americans as to their true identities and beliefs.

"A few weeks ago an SS man from Himmler's Elite Division was found. He had three cars and a motorcycle for his own use. He was selling wine and food supplies and was generally engaged in black market activities. He had plenty of false papers to indicate his being an innocent merchant and had written permission from the Americans to drive a car. While one may say that the number of people hiding in the hills is very small, nevertheless they are the real security threats. They know what is in store for them if they are caught."

Evils of Memorial Celebrations

"The burgomeister has informed that there were a few efforts made to have memorial celebrations for the dead german heroes. I strongly feel that such a thing should not be permitted because such an affair would never end without a

speech. And if there is a speech there would be a flag of some sort, and if the germans see a flag they would be likely to march in military style even if they had just come out of church. One of the principle things to teach germans to forget is marching. If they want to celebrate the memory of their dead, it is alright if they do it in a church in a quiet manner but they should not be allowed to conduct a memorial festival with speeches and flags and trumpets. Already there is too much talk from the germans that the war was lost only because of American air superiority and quantity of materiel. THIS SHOULD GIVE AMERICANS SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT BECAUSE THE NEXT LOGICAL THOUGHT WILL BE THAT THE GERMAN SOLDIER WAS NOT BEATEN, JUST AS IN 1918. The germans must never forget that they have lost the war, that they are beaten forever, and that any semblance of militarism such as memorial celebrations can never be sanctioned".

GERMANY HAS FORGOTTEN THE WAR AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS

"When the American forces first came everybody was waiting to hear and see pictures of the atrocities committed by the nazis in the concentration camps. Every woman was afraid that she would have to go to a movie theater where she was going to see the horrible acts of nazi cruelty which she had heard about every day on the radio. But no such thing happened in this area. Only a very few people have seen pictures of the atrocities taken by the Americans. These pictures are very small and are not available to the public. To see a starving man and other cruelties on the motion picture screen produces much more effective realism; such horrors are not easily forgotten. Enlarged pictures should be shown on every corner of town and these should be rotated to remind people of the sort of leaders they had. I would like to have my wife spared from this terrible sight, but if it were made compulsory for everyone to see these pictures, it might prove an effective blow toward erasing the lingering nazi spirit which is still prevalent.

"Such people as town leaders and other employees, who ere arrested and transferred to camps, are considered almost as martyrs by a large part of the population. people are interested in knowing when they will come back. Therefore if people were influenced by American propaganda and made to hear and talk more about concentration camps and the war atrocities, it might change their attitude. It might remind them that these is a reason why these people have been arrested -- a reason which they have already forgotten. I also miss in the American-controlled german newspapers the constant reminders to the people of the millions of human beings who suffered and died under Hitlerism. Every day people stand on line waiting to buy food and they talk about the possibilities of Bavaria's being taken over by the Russians or the French or the English and how the Nazi Party members are being treated. But nothing is said about the county leaders being responsible for the millions of people who are now dead or crippled simply because of such nazi fanatics. Nor does anyone talk about the horrors of the concentration camps.

"Nature makes people forget such disagreeable things in Life very quickly, but this time it is advisable to work against Nature as far as Nazism is concerned because Nazism is not natural".

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"If all german people do not have to starve today, it is only because of the generosity of the victorious nations who provide their own food and do not live off the conquered country. This is something that the germans do not understand or appreciate."

Who are the Good Germans?

"Since we are talking about good germans I will start with the best germans. The best germans are the ones who, from the very beginning, knew who Hitler was and what Hitlerism would mean to Germany. They are the people who hated Hitler from the start and never voted for him, who never sold their opinion for personal profit and were never induced to change their minds in order to get a better job or earn more money. These same individuals tried, whenever possible, to counteract the nazi system even at the risk of everything personal and dear to them, and now they are glad that Hitler is gone. They never tired of working toward the objective that Hitlerism and Prussian Militarism would never again rear their ugly heads in this country. These are the best people.

"In my opinion you cannot judge a good german from a bad one by the mere fact that he was in the Nazi Party. For instance, I regard a small official who earned about 100 marks a month and had a family to support as being compelled to join the Party under threat of losing his job. He can be a man who was a bitter enemy of the nazi system, and it has been evident in many cases that such people tried to counteract nazism right up to the very end. I do not consider such a man a bad, but a good german.

"On the other hand there is the man who was quite wealthy but just not interested enough in political affairs and therefore did not apply for Party membership. He also proved to be a good nazi in his everyday talk and actions. He had nazi friends who helped him to increase his income. I regard such a man as a very bad german. Another example of a bad german is a man who was never a member of the Party, but who took the first opportunity to buy a house or seized a factory formerly belonging to a jew.

"Country people who have been in close contact with Nature all their lives are more religious than city people and among them can be found the largest percentage of good germans. These people are most apt to hate Hitlerism as being a system of oppression because it is unnatural. And as I have said before, Hitlerism is most unnatural.

"Today the small man must pay a higher price for his nazism than the big man. The latter has more opportunities to hide. A small man cannot buy a certificate that he has been in a concentration camp because this certificate costs a very high price on the black market. The "big man" can also buy a certificate stating that he has saved some foreign workers from nazi persecution."

Pan - Europe

"If you compare the map of Europe with that of the United States it becomes evident that the whole map of Europe is a heterogeneous conglomeration of people and countries. It was not built by a mad professor of geography but by the history of 2,000 years. We may feel that now, more than ever, a Pan-Europe is the goal for which the inhabitants of Europe must strive. But unfortunately, after this war, we are further away from this goal than ever. Most of the European countries have suffered severely under Hitler's army of occupation. Yet to have a Pan-Europe without Germany would be like a human being without a stomach -- which is impossible. Nevertheless if you would ask the European countries to form a Pan-Europe with Germany now, who would say yes? So here again we see that the first step for a Pan-Europe is to wipe out Nazism and Prussian Militarism. Only in this way can we regain the confidence of the world and then start to think about a Pan-Europe. Therefore I do not think it would be a step backward to separate South Germany from the North. We would like to get rid of Prussian leadership and ideas; then we won't hear any more about Frederick the Great and Ludendorff.

"Some people may think that Prussian leadership in Germany might be eliminated or destroyed by cutting off parts of Prussia from the map. But Prussian leadership is not so much a matter of the size of the country as it is a mental

question. So if, for the time being, there would be one more European country by dividing Germany, if the people in the South would be a state independent from Prussia, that might weaken the Prussian mentality and therefore would be a step forward towards Pan-Europe, paradoxical as it may sound."

American Methods -- How They are and How They should be

"Considering the fact that the Americans are in a foriegn country only four months, they have done a pretty good job. The fact that there is no starvation, and the first signs of the return to normal conditions are in sight, is the proof. However it is obvious to a german what mistakes have been made and knowing the german people well, it is also obvious what corrective measure should be taken.

"In the first place the treatment of active nazis is not strict enough. Fanatic nazi women are not touched at all because America is a very polite nation with a high respect for women, a trait which we admire very much. The Europeans could learn a great deal in this respect. But we do not like this politeness at the present time because we consider the active nazi women just as guilty as their husbands, and therefore feel that they should be punished also.

"Secondly, the Americans should realize that when life begins anew, after such a breakdown as the germans have suffered following their humiliating defeat, the worst elements are always pushing out in front. Therefore the Americans should be very careful whom they trust. There is no doubt whatsoever about the fact that good and important positions have been given to people who do not deserve them. At the same time, some people have to stay behind as ordinary citizens in order to wipe out nazi spirits and rebuild the country.

"It is the responsibility of Military Government to weed out the good from the bad. If a man has proved himself honest and trustworthy, and has not worked selfishly for his own personal gain but for patriotic reasons, he should be given more authority.

"In conclusion, THE AMERICANS SHOULD ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THAT THE NAZI SPIRITS ARE NOT YET BROKEN BECAUSE THE GERMANS HAVE LIVED TOO LONG UNDER HITLERISM".

David Saltman

DAVID SALTMAN
Captain FA

Bad Tolz, Germany
16 September, 1945

David Saltman
P. O. Box 7127
Wantagh, N. Y. 11793-0727

File

A LONG SHORT STORY

Inasmuch as there is a lull in the events of the days, and as Military Occupation in Germany continues in its very dull routine I have decided to make up this letter of experiences to satisfy the many queries from people who want to know what I'm doing, etc. Actually I'm doing nothing and never did do much at any time. I wear no decorations because I don't deserve any, having done my duty and my best at all times, which was still not of sufficient distinction to warrant any awards. But I have a sense of guilt about me, the sort of guilt that results in painting a picture of a half-truth. Everything I state below is the truth and the whole truth; but when mentioned alone and put into writing with some seemingly descriptive adjectives the result, to the person who has not been under actual combat, is something heroic. I cannot emphasize too strongly that SUCH IS NOT THE CASE!

Censorship now permits me to reveal many things that have hitherto been impossible to mention. I can now say, for example, that I left New York harbor early in September, 1944 in a convoy. Having been selected to precede the main body of troops for some strange reason — I was Finance Officer for the trip — I found myself on board ship a full day ahead of everybody else. Due to chance I got acquainted with the Navy commander on board and we discussed the prospective crossing. And so we hatched out a plan for the use of army troops to augment the regular navy personnel on watch — on watch for submarines and torpedoes. The plan was approved by the commander of troops and a lecture on detection of submarines and torpedoes was given to the troops by the navy. We had our submarine scares — real ones — but we got thru alright which is all that mattered. But it is interesting to mention in passing that we were the first convoy to attempt a direct run thru the English Channel. At that time Brest and several other channel ports had not yet been taken.

When we pulled into the harbor at Cherbourg the first vivid memory of war confronted the men. Here there were small craft flying the French flag and there were British craft there too. All waved their cheery welcome. But to these green troops it was an impressive sight. Impressive, too, was the wreckage in the harbor, the burned and bombed-out buildings, the concrete pillboxes. It was the first time that we saw first-hand what we had been reading about. Impressive, too, was the wreckage of near-by Valognes, the center of the troop staging area. Here and there Frenchmen were still digging in among the ruins, looking for some article of household furniture or clothing that they could use.

Activity was quiet in Valognes, a small town with one drinking spot that was always mobbed. The favorite American drink was calvados. Nobody liked it but everybody drank it because it was alcoholic. That's one thing about the Americans, they'll drink anything that contains alcohol. Well, the outfit spent a quiet time on the Normandy Peninsula. We did have a mission of protecting the West Coast of the peninsula from a possible landing by some krauts who were holding out on the Channel Islands but which had been by-passed.

But the big thing was Ninth Army D-Day on the Western Front. That's something that was a memorable event for the 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion. Immediately upon arriving at an assembly area in the middle of November 1944, one company was committed to action in the "Geilenkirchen, Germany" campaign. Then the battalion, that same day, made its march across the Dutch border and into an assembly area in the middle of a broad open field. It is a field that cannot be forgotten. It was muddy and the beets and cabbages were rotting. The battalion command post was a pillbox while two other companies dispersed in the immediate vicinity. The noise of artillery was incessant and now and then an incoming round of artillery would give us something to worry about.

My job was Liaison Officer and my first assignment was liaison with an infantry regiment where the assistant division commander of the 84th Infantry Division also had his CP (command post). And that same night, by telephone, I received the order to commit another company....It was rough from there on. The first two weeks of combat were the longest for me and although I have been overseas almost nine months the time has never dragged so long as those first two weeks did; I felt as though I'd been in combat two years. Luckily for me I was appointed unit historian for the battalion and I had a chance to take a much needed shower at Eigelshoven, Holland. I was pale, worn, haggard and dirty. The luxury of a hot shower at the coal mine was indescribable. But even back there a war was still going on because just 30 minutes after I left the shower it was bombed by Jerry planes with a direct hit on the laundry just opposite. The planes continued strafing attacks and inflicted many casualties.

As Liaison Officer I was always with the infantry regimental headquarters. All command posts were in cellars because it was too cold to be outside and too dangerous to be anywhere on ground level. You are always under artillery fire, of course, and you just sweat it out. Like everything else you get used to it although a normal human being hardly likes it. But a soldier has to get used to everything and accepts it as being all in the day's work.

Back at Geilenkirchen and vicinity the shelling was constant and unremitting. Like the Luftwaffe, it was said Germany was short of ammunition. But the boys up front didn't think so because the expenditure of ammunition was lavish and on a scale which was unequalled during any further operation beyond the Roer River or the Ardennes. That was not hard to understand — we were right in the heart of the Siegfried Line. And I might add at this point that never, in any day of favorable flying weather, did the Luftwaffe fail to appear, despite all the newspaper talk about "Where is the Luftwaffe"? And when they appeared, they strafed. There was no doubt about that either.

The Siegfried Line is something which is meaningless to the individual who has never seen any such thing. To my mind the greatest thing about it is not so much the pillboxes, which were of massive strength and well built, but the elaborate preparation of plans for a fortified area. In other words, their accuracy was uncanny. They knew the ground — every doggone foot of it. They could put a mortar or artillery shell anywhere they wanted and score a hit on the first round. Their trenches were deep and well prepared. There was no doubt about how well the defense of this area was planned. I would say that it showed the acme of careful and sound planning. The pillboxes were well camouflaged and reinforced with plenty of earth on their exterior. Every house had a good cellar and that's where we lived, like a bunch of rats. Real estate was awfully scarce out here too and there was always somebody trying to find a place for a CP or a billet. It was plenty rough — and dirty.

There's a little town called Apweiler near Geilenkirchen. It is a pock-marked town like all other towns in the fortified zone; filthy, muddy, shell-ravaged and stinking. The artillery fire was frequent, but one night it got so bad that I actually left the ground floor where I was sleeping and squeezed into an overcrowded cellar to spend a cold, uncomfortable night. Just the same I continued sleeping on the ground floor after that. One night I woke up and my driver told me that I said "Gee, they're sure shelling the hell out of this place" and dropped off to sleep again, unconcerned. Actually what had happened was plainly visible the next day. A tank destroyer which had stuck in the mud near Lindern managed to extricate itself under cover of darkness and the crew decided to put up for the night in Apweiler at 1:15A.M. The vehicle backed into a row of mines stacked up against a building and the resulting explosion tore the gun and turret loose with two bodies clinging to it, and landed in the wreckage of a building 200 yards away. The destroyer made a complete somersault and what was left of the scarred hull landed 25 yards away with the charred body of the driver burned beyond recognition. The other men were found in widely scattered places and rooftops several hundred yards away. It was the most horrible disaster I had ever seen. The explosion causing this disaster was so great that it also demolished an adjacent brick wall and the house next to it. It took the Graves Registration men to identify what was called the remains of human bodies.

Death, in the field of battle, is everywhere and you never know when it will strike or who it will strike. But among all of this the soldier must live, exist and fight. Many times you could hear the whistle of shells—those high velocity shells that travel so fast that they pass you before you hear them and crash and explode somewhere nearby. I always felt normal when they were shelling the town but on the other hand I always felt uneasy when they didn't. That sounds like bragging, but it's not. When they shell the town you know where the rounds are landing; when they don't shell the town you know damn well they will, but you never know when it's going to be or where those shells are going to land. That's what used to make me scared — the anxiety of waiting. Then there was the time — to mention just one more incident — when I was in a truck loaded with GIs coming back from a shower convoy in Holland. As the truck rounded a very famous corner in Geilenkirchen late one afternoon I heard the old familiar whistle of a Jerry shell passing over the truck. From past experience I said, "that was too damn close for comfort". It was. The MP on the corner hit the dirt and the men in back of the truck, with lumps in their throats, breathlessly watched the shell hit just ten feet from them and a puff of smoke sprang up and died away. It was a dud. If it had not been a dud all of us would have had purple hearts, some of us permanently. But it was a dud — thanks to the sabotage of German's slave labor who made many more duds like it.

There were many more incidents in Germany, but this is supposed to be a letter and not a book. Among them I can recall, to recite just another, the campaign of Lindern when I had the pleasure of being in an infantry regimental CP which was also the Division Advance CP. The jump-off was at 0630 hours and the Division Commander kept in close toutch with the situation at all times. Later an armored Division commander came in and then the Corps commander. And sure enough the Press came around too, in the person of Wes Gallagher covering Ninth Army for the Associated Press. They got Lindern that day but it was plenty hot. The infantry was cut off, isolated, and they wanted to have some TD support. Of course they said the road was clear, but the upshot was that one tank destroyer hauled a trailer of ammunition and medical supplies and the driver and officer that took it up got Silver Stars.

In the meantime, in addition to being Liaison Officer with the Infantry I had the job of battalion historian and that gave me something to do in addition to all the other things. Assuredly I kept busy all the time. Then suddenly, out of a clear sky we got orders to move. Something was in the wind but we didn't know what. The papers were cautious and we were completely surprised when we learned that we were heading for Belgium and the "Bulge".

En route to Belgium, and while on the outskirts of Liege I took advantage of our traffic halts to talk to some of the people. They were wailing and moaning about the fall of Malmedy. I didn't have the faintest idea where it was or anything else. Officially nobody knew the situation. It only happened in December, too, about a week before Christmas; but it seems so long ago, although the events of the Ardennes Offensive still lingers fresh in my memory. We wound down and around thru the country en route to Marche. It was foggy and cold. We heard that Germans had sent patrols into the town the night before and here we were all jammed up trying to get into town.

About that time the Krauts found out that we were in town and so they put a little artillery fire on us. It was late and I had just been undressing when we heard a loud explosion and the glass in the window crashed on to the floor. You don't mind sweating out a little shelling — that's normal. But When they get that close to you it's time to head for lower altitude. By the time I got to the cellar from the second floor of the house I couldn't get any further than the steps because a small space can only hold just so many people and I was a bit late. The artillery was still coming in and presently the battalion radio operator came in too. He was a good boy sticking to his post outside the building, but when a shell lands close to your vehicle and some of the shell fragments start slapping up against light armor it's time to take off and he did. Later, in the space of time of a half-hour, he went back to his vehicle and we all went about our business. Back up to the second floor, but I slept with my clothes on this time.

The next day there was a buzz of activity. Troops pulled out of town and the civilians began to evacuate in droves while those remaining were terrified. It also represented the first time I ever saw the American army on the defensive. Trees were prepared for demolition as road blocks; daisy chains (several mines on a board with a strand attached so that a man in a fox-hole can pull them in front of an approaching tank) were prepared at strategic points. And we took over the next house using the cellar only. I thought we were crazy for staying, but we held our ground though it was plenty rough.

Task forces were sent out in every direction to stem the tide. Many incidents later came to light and the heroism displayed by all troops in the campaign was such as to reflect none but the highest respect for the American soldier, the American civilian converted into a hard fighting man. I never thought we could do that well back in training days. The fact that this is a personal letter and not a book, prevent me from going into greater detail. But once again I shall try to relate some of the events.

For one thing I obliged the commanding general by staying up all night to maintain communication between one of the task forces and the division headquarters. The commanding general invited me to stay in the CP but I said that I couldn't because I was the radio operator as well as liaison officer, and had to stay on my radio outside. It was freezing cold and a hard night to keep awake in but nevertheless contact was maintained between the task force and division headquarters so that the progress of the force could be ascertained. I stayed up till about six that morning, and at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that I contributed to the campaign and assisted the TD commander in getting a Bronze Star which he so richly deserved.

The krauts thought they would have Marche by Christmas and in fact both sides admitted that it had fallen to the germans. But it was not so. Like Malmedy, the American troops held. The front line was a semi-circle around the town, actually. I can remember one time when radio communication with a company commander was out and I was sent out to make contact. I tried, but couldn't reach him, and here's why. The krauts held the high ground, a very definite ridge line covering the main road which was what all the fighting was for. In an open field huge spirals of smoke emanated from two burning TD's — a battle scene just like the movies. I went up a dirt trail and stopped my jeep right on the intersection of two dirt roads and got out. A doughboy frantically told me to get back down the hill because that spot was well observed by the krauts. I did. And no sooner did the vehicle disappear over the rise when a 75mm shell came whizzing right after me. Thanks to the doughboy I'm able to tell it. But if he hadn't been there I'd have learned the hard way, only it might have been too late by then — depending on the aim of the tank gunner who took a pot shot at me. Well the wind-up is that with all roads cut off and the Jerry tanks still holding up the advance of the doughboys I had not accomplished my mission. So I got back down the same trail I'd taken before— only there was no stopping this time. Managed to get some kind of radio communication and stuck it out relaying all kinds of orders in the midst of a hot fire-fight. After a time the action sort of died down, when lo and behold a reconnaissance unit broadcasts the position of an "enemy" tank just 100 yards from my position. It turned out to be an American light tank. But strangely enough it didn't take more than five minutes for a couple of rounds to hit in the open field right close by. I took off, my mission having been accomplished and that was all the excuse I wanted.

The situation changed from the defensive to the offensive during the next seven days. We succeeded in capturing that important ridge line and the threat to Marche was ended. The civilians knew it too, somehow, for they began to stream back, smiling and happy. Things seemed to be quiet for a day or so, too. At the invitation of a company commander I took a jaunt around to see some of the gun positions. The gun positions were the front lines. And here is where the peculiarity of warfare at this stage comes in. The front lines of the Americans and the Germans were the southernmost and northernmost cellars respectively and in between is no man's land. We toured the line from town to town, right on a ridge line all the time. It was bad enough to expose yourself that way, which is contrary to all the tactics ever taught, but to make matters worse we stopped dead to look at the buzz bomb flying just under a hundred feet in the air. One machine gun firing at us direct could mow us down like flies. But that's one of the things to which there is no answer. And this went on right down the line except that at the last town I visited, the gun s were idle and most of the crew and platoon leader fast asleep, dead tired from all night work and some hard fighting. It's a funny war in respects like that. But such a thing as just described would never happen anywhere on the Siegfried Line.

Some days later, operating in another sector near Laroche, I was making a call on my radio when a tank backed into some buried mines and the resulting explositon gave me a jolt just like someone cuffing you on the back of the head. The small arms began to pop like firecrackers.

But talking about the Ardennes also reminds me of the difficulties in driving under various conditions. For example, driving in a blinding snowstorm. In civilian life, in a snowstorm, you just drive along and keep the windshield wiper working and maybe brush off the snow a bit when it gets too heavy. But in the army you drive in an open vehicle with the top down, darkness, and country roads that wind along without rhyme or reason. The only way that I could tell the road was by heading the vehicle between patches of brush and in very many cases by getting out in front of the vehicle and trudging along while the driver follows. Besides, there are the deep ditches that are completely hidden, but which suddenly come to life when you fall in them. And last, and least but by no means least, the shoulders of the roads are mined and the engineers have not had the time to clear them. And if they did have the time they could not do a good job in snow as some people found out — the hard way. And the funny thing about mines, too, is that sometimes a few vehicles can run over a minefield without setting of a single mine, then one does. That's some more of the fate you hear about.

The Ardennes campaign successfully closed when we joined with Third Army (I was in First Army during the campaign) but the krauts made an orderly retreat after very severe losses. So we hung around Belgium awhile awaiting orders and not doing too much in general when we finally rejoined Ninth Army for the push across the Roer River.

The Roer was just a puny creek that was a bigger obstacle than the crossing of the Rhine. The Ardennes postponed it and then when the krauts saw they couldn't hold it they flooded the river by unleashing the dams. So we waited awhile till that time when the river receded to something like normal and jumped across — completely surprising the krauts. But they were awful lucky. They bombed and strafed the bridge sites and really gave us a little trouble but of course that was just a delaying action. When we crossed the Roer, it was a clean sweep. The krauts ran in terror, having no Siegfried line to fall back on! There were lots of prepared trenches but no pillboxes and not too many tanks. They had committed the bulk of their armor in the Bulge Battle and it left them nigh and dry. So we swept thru, and of course all bridges were blown.

But in the meantime the greatest of good fortunes occurred when I got transferred to 6th Tank Destroyer Group. I had been told about someone asking for me but it was too good to be true so I completely disregarded it and what a big surprise when it did come thru! But while with the group I turned out to rear area security soldiering back in Corps Headquarters. My job was Corps rear area security but that didn't amount to much. It was a funny feeling to be suddenly cooped up in an office and then sit back and watch somebody else fight the war while you sat back trying to put a bunch of lines on a map which would tell you where they were. So we reached the Rhine before I even got across the Roer.

Finally, too, I crossed the Rhine and then I began to get back to the swing of things when I got an assignment with an armored division to radio back reports of their progress. That was something I really enjoyed. It was by no means the soft life of a corps headquarters but it was something to keep you busy and you were up where the war was going on. That was some outfit. They lived out of a half-track all the time, ate their meals on the fly and rode all night where the occasion called for it. They started out one day and kept on going. I began to get worried as we kept on going and at 11 PM I finally had to order a refueling on the move. Ever try to fill a gas tank while you are still moving? We did, and spilled plenty all over the vehicle. The next thing I knew my driver, at midnight, slumped over the wheel and pulled back the brake. And we were right in the middle of a convoy too. He was out cold. The gas fumes were too much for him. I had two radio operators with me, one of whom never drove at all and the other never drove a half-track. But we dragged the driver out of the seat and put in one of the radio operators and tried to catch the convoy. This was a funny convoy, too. We were heading east and a bunch of krauts, at midnight were in the town. Calmly as you please we pass them and they pass us and nobody does a damn thing. If it was daylight there would have been a scuffle but this way there was just plain nothing. This is just another one of the silly, unexplainable things that happen in combat.

The division made a halt at the Weser River because all the bridges were out. A few days later we went on again and this time we didn't stop till we reached the Elbe. Again the division blew hell out of everything in its path and the infantry was way behind. This is one time I was many miles in front of the doughboys. We stopped one night, saw and heard a real orgy of explosions and flares and said, "there go all the bridges". But the general did a funny thing — at least it was funny to me — he selected a route and despite all the explosions he took a chance on some more bridges being intact and came out on top. To this day I can't understand it after all the explosions I had heard and all the flashes I had seen. That again is some more peculiarities of warfare.

The spearhead kept on going till it hit the Elbe and then there ensued a fight for the bridge which was intact at the time. But the krauts were getting smart for a change and after a severe battle they lost the town and blew the bridge from the east bank. This was at Tangermunde. However the march was not without incident. There were lots of planes roaming around and we had no air support. Despite it we shot down every plane that came near enough to do anything and we tallied up six of them that day. That's what you have to do during an air attack — shoot back regardless of your personal safety. That is warfare. But we shot them all down and that is all that mattered.

It was a good healtny life despite living out of a vehicle. Slept in a pup tent every night rather than crowd around in some house and despite the cold it worked out well. But at Tangermunde I thought I'd like to sleep in a house for a change. Sure—all you have to do is walk down a hundred yards and take a chance at being shot at. We took the town, yes, but there were some die-hards who fight wars their own way and censorship won't allow me to elaborate. But anyhow, we ran up against the Elbe with prepared defenses across the river and they let us have some artillery fire. I was greatly surprised that we didn't get a lot more but maybe that was because we had changed positions just before dark and they put their counterbattery fire in the wrong place.

We let loose a barrage on the town that night (no conflict with the above, just censorship fills the gap) and while I was able to sleep thru the artillery fire I just couldn't sleep thru the jabbering of those liberated Americans — about 500 of them. They were all excited and happy and kept on jabbering till far into the night and morning. Most of them had been captured in Africa. They told me how they had been forced to march from East Prussia to the Elbe but we got there and liberated them before the krauts could evacuate them to the other side of the river. As it was we missed 1200 others in Stendal next day because the Germans got them across the river in time. But if you think that was bad you ought to hear the stories of the British who had been prisoners for five years.

Very impressive to me was the sight of the Frenchmen with huge national flags which they promptly displayed upon our arrival. For them V-E Day was the day we passed and liberated them after many years of enslavement. The smiles on the faces of the displaced nationals were broad and real. They were happy to be free and soon the highways were clogged with the freed slave labor heading west.

We took Stendal without a struggle. But you can't trust these people and when I took a stroll thru the town on foot I kept my pistol loaded and cocked, sort of sticking my neck out and looking for trouble. I didn't get any, but I wasn't taking any chances. But another scene I can't forget was the taking of Arneburg on the Elbe. I got there while the die-hards were lined up against a wall and the town was still burning. A few tanks lay around, a bunch of GI's were loosely cluttered around the street intersection. A colonel was trying to console a young kid who had been driving the major when a sniper opened up and the major was hit fatally. The kid, shaking like a leaf, was whimpering, somehow under the impression that it was his fault that the major had met his death. Arneburg had surrendered too, but there were still die-hards. We loaded the PW's on to a truck and drove back to the field where the tank battalion headquarters was. A couple of shells came in, and as if the men had forgotten something, they all grabbed shovels and began to dig. . .

Well, this is where I quit. I started out to write a letter but wound up writing a short story. For some reason it conveys wrong impressions, even here. I was very fortunate to have come out alive but I didn't have it as rough as the men who are up on the front line all the time taking it on the chin constantly. I never ran away from anything but at the same time I never ran into anything that would give me excuse to wear any extra ribbons. I led a simple life and hope that it will continue to be simple by not going to the CBI. War is romantic to the folks back home but to the man who has to take it on the chin all the time it's better to be wounded and get out of it alive because you never know when your number is up. The soldier doesn't fight for glory or romance or anything of the kind. He fights because he knows he has to and constantly his feeling is that the quicker he finishes the war the quicker he gets home. No, war is not glorious to the man up front, it's JUST PLAIN HELL.

The folks at home celebrated V-E Day but the man who fought this war thought it was just as good an excuse as any to get drunk, and where possible he did. But it was no joyous feeling because back in his mind he knew that the war wasn't over . . . it was just two down and one more to go. . . .

DAVID SALTMAN
Captain, F.A.

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