

As I Remember It

Stories from WWII

Wardlaw M. "Stumpy" Watson I-346

Stories published in the Golden Acorn News

87th Division Association
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3474 N Dundee Court
Highland Greens Estates
Highland, MI 48031

June 1989

September 1989

December 1989

March 1990

June/September 1990

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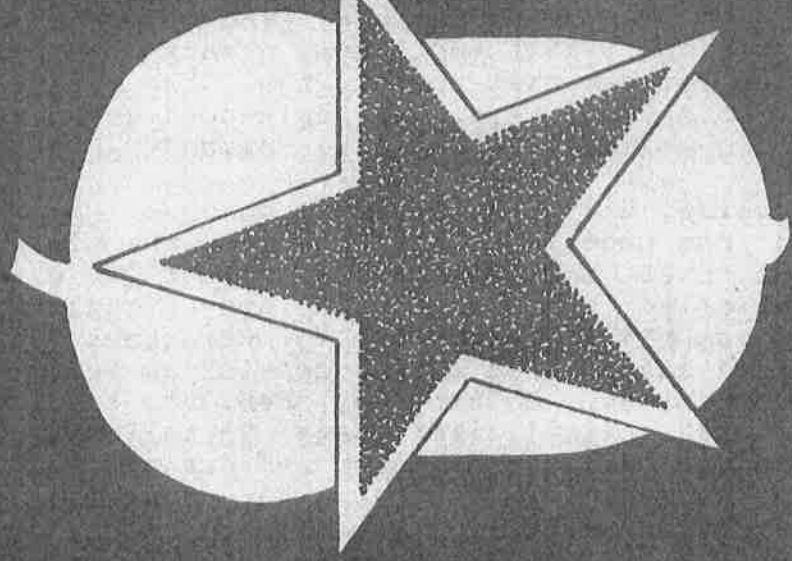
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Story P. 32
Stumpy Watson

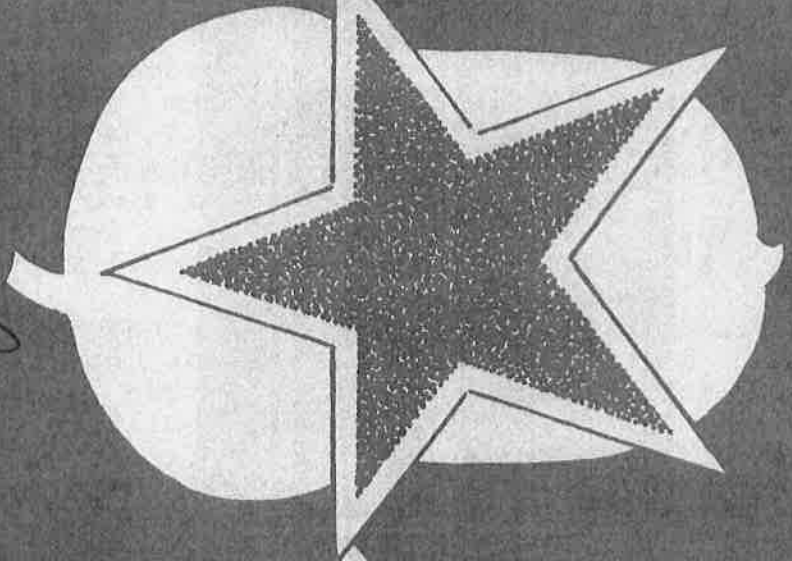
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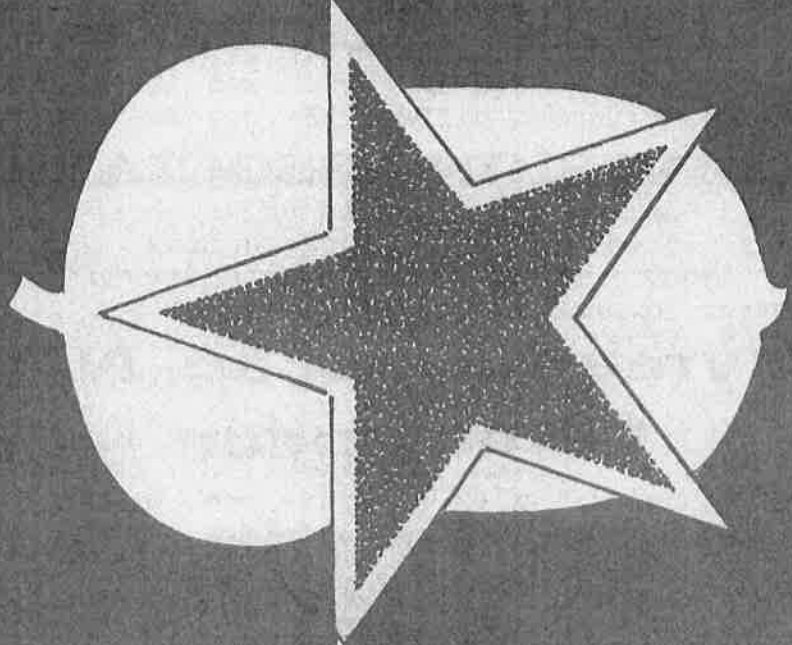
June 1989



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***** AS I REMEMBER IT *****

WARDLAW M. "STUMPY", WATSON I-346

Wardlaw Watson came to the 87th Division out of the Air Corps. He had left the infantry and gone into the Air Corps but his friend Johnny Wilder, had stayed in the infantry. Johnny Wilder was the son of the editor of the Lebanon Times in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. Johnny was killed at St. Lo in a bad bomb drop.

The morning that Watson received the telegram that Johnny was killed, he was taking a check ride and he gave his instructor a bad one. Watson bent up a B-25 just a little bit. It was a terrible ride. They told him that they did not need any pilots anymore. Out of one thousand of them, that were there, they washed out all but seven or eight of those men. They were three weeks from getting their wings and going on from pilot school to their assignments. Watson went back to see Major Hughes, who was the Commandant of Cadets and was from Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This was in July of 1944.

"Stumpy, what do you want to do? Do you want to be a waist gunner?" Watson said that he didn't want to do that. That he wanted to go back to the infantry, where he came from. Major Hughes said, "You can't do that." Watson looked at him and said, "Look on my record. I'm a lance corporal in the infantry right now. I'm not an air cadet, I'm an air student." He looked and said, "Damned if you're not. You can do anything you want to." Watson then said, "How about re-assigning me to Fox Company of the 8th Infantry Regiment, Fourth Division." Hughes said, "We can't do that. We'll just put you in general assignment." That's how Watson got into the 87th. He joined I-346 in August of 1944.



Watson has three Silver Stars. He had no idea that he had won three, but he has a piece of paper that says that he did. "Hell, I didn't know that I had the first one until I was in the hospital." The war was practically over and he's lying up in the hospital with most of his men with him and they're up on the second floor at Cerney, Belgium and this Captain Le Beau calls Watson in and says, "You have a Silver Star."

Watson says, "You're kidding." The captain started reading it to Watson and Watson asked him if this had happened at Tillet, Belgium and the Captain said, "Yeah." Watson replied, "I'm sorry, but that isn't me. You must have gotten me mixed up with Lt. Bob Watson of Company I." The captain looked at Watson and said, "Now just don't interrupt me." Watson laughed and said, "That's the damndest bunch of

lies I've ever heard, but that's alright, you go right ahead."

Later on, Watson had the opportunity to tell the captain what had actually happened there and he said, "I like your version a lot better than this one." But, Watson was at Tillet and he helped direct the end of it.

On February 26, 1945, Stumpy Watson had a seven man night patrol out behind the dragon's teeth to the left of the Ormont Road going up into The Bonn network of roads and he tripped a mine and blew three toes of his right foot. The doctors stuck the toes back on and after about eleven years, the feeling came back. His shoes are not exactly the same size but he has his toes.

When he was operated on, at the 109 Evacuation Hospital, he woke up in a room on the second floor and across from him was a major. The major had lost his entire tank battalion and was the only survivor. He was out of his head. He had been fighting up there where Watson was, just this side of Bastogne and Liege. Watson went back to sleep and when he woke up, the major was gone. He didn't think much of it until about two weeks later, when he found out that the major had taken a Brody right out the window and landed on his head down on that marble court-yard. In the meantime the medics would come into Watson's room and would give him a shot in the arm, of sodium pentathol. They would juice him up with the medication every day for three days until they found out that the one they were supposed to be giving the shots to was the major that took the dive out the window. The medics had not been told that Watson was in that room with the major. Now the medics were giving him this routine because they thought that they were helping the major and then when Captain Le Beau took a look at Watson's record, he thought, "This is that nut from the second floor." Watson tried to tell him that he has his decorations screwed up, "That it can't be mine, that it must be someone else's," he figures that Watson flipped out.

Lt. David McNutt once told Watson that he was responsible for getting him his commission. Watson stated that he had no idea how he had gotten it. He had always wanted to know what slip up had given him his bars. McNutt said, "Colonel Evans told me that at the first opportunity, where you showed leadership and the rest of that stuff, that I was to be damned sure that you got a direct commission, a field commission."

I-346 probably had more men commissioned in the field than any other unit. They had also gotten some excellent replacements. Watson remembered a sergeant that got off the truck at Tillet, just as the attack got underway, and that man had taught all infantry weapons for two years. His name was Delbert Lutterman and He knew every weapon. They didn't have another soldier in the battalion that knew all weapons. They also had another man who had been a captain. He was a pfc in the company. He had been unfortunate enough to hit an Air Corps Major who had been molesting his wife. He was given the opportunity to become a permanent pfc until the war was over, or go to Leavenworth. Company I was most fortunate to have him.

Watson believes that what he did in the Battle of the Bulge, he had been training for all his life.

He was born on a farm in Wilcox County in South Alabama, in what is called the Black Belt. His family had been living in the same house in Alabama since the family arrived there in 1780.

" We got run out of a place called Furman, South Carolina because we wouldn't fight for the Revolutionists. We had been run out of Scotland when we fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie. We were part of that Scot contingent that was told, 'Take your pigs and your women and children and leave here and don't come back. You can leave when you swear an oath that you will not lift a claymore against the English Kings again.' Well we took them seriously and left."

The Watsons settled in South Alabama and bought land from the Creek Nation and lived at peace with the Indians until the Creeks rose and killed a bunch of their people at places called Burnt Corn and Fort Mims. The Watsons served as scouts in Andrew Jackson's Army all through the Indian Wars. In 1834, when Jackson got to be president, he gave the Watson family, patent deed to that land which they had bought from the Creeks.

Watson says that his father raised him with a gun in his hand. The first baby picture taken of him, where he could stand, he's leaning on a Daisy B-B gun. The prone pictures that he has where he's wearing pants that you can slip on, "I've got a prone position B-B gun and Dad is teaching me to shoot.

When he got to be six years old, his father said, "Son, we're through shooting this kind of stuff." and he gave Stumpy a .22 caliber single shot rifle and one thousand rounds of .22 shorts. "I've been in business ever since."

When he got good enough to shoot the head off a dove or shoot a running rabbit and put meat on the table, his father took him to a Mr. T.K. Lee. Mr. T.K. "Tack-Hole" Lee was one of the five world champion marksmen and he lived in Birmingham. Mr. Lee taught him to snap shoot. Then Major May, who lived four doors up the street, and who had a pistol range in his basement, taught him hand guns. Major May was one of the champion pistol shots in the Southeast. He trained Watson on an old heavy barrel WWI artillery service revolver. Watson never learned to shoot any light hand guns. He started out with a forty five revolver in his hand and he ended World War Two wearing exactly the same weapon.

The edged weapons, he learned from two army sergeants; Sergeant Burden and Sergeant Otis L. Mc Daniels. He learned about edged weapons when he got to the Phillips High School. There he was introduced, at the door of the school, to the R.O.T.C. and also to Frank Wooford who was the Cadet Major of the Phillips High School R.O.T.C. Frank's father had been an officer in the Belgian Army in World War One.

Watson spent four years in the Phillips High School R.O.T.C. and thoroughly enjoyed it. They gave him a suit of clothes where the pants and jacket matched. It was the first suit he had ever had where pants and jacket matched. He wore those clothes five days a week or some times six or seven. Watson would volunteer for flag duty at Legion Field so that he could see the football games and any other place where he could wear that uniform.

Sergeant Burden and Sergeant Mc Daniels, told Watson that the High School had an excellent rifle range in the basement. "I know you do because I shoot on it." he replied. "Come down, we want you to try out for the team. We've been hearing about you. This is going to be regular Springfield frames, small-bore adapted." Watson said,

"That's fine. I've never fired bolt action like that before and I'd love to try it." They gave him five hundred rounds of ammo every afternoon to burn, when he got down to the range. Watson practiced and in the first year, the team came within a little bit of beating Clemson College. Stumpy Watson was low man on the 1941 team. The second year, that they fired for record, in the Randolph Hearst Trophy Matches, Fourth Corps Area, Clemson College just beat them by two points. Stumpy swears that they had forty-five caliber pencils on that range. That year, Watson was Team Captain and had also worked his way up to be Cadet Major of the Birmingham R.O.T.C.'s. The rifle team took second place in the 4th Corps Area small bore matches.

As Cadet Major, Watson could maneuver two thousand men without any trouble at all in close order drill. He could run a half-time program for high school or college football, out on that field, whether he had a mike or not. He had a good voice. In addition he had gotten a good foundation in map reading from Sergeant Burden. Sergeant Mc Daniels had shown him how to use edged weapons. Watson could throw a knife, he could throw an ax, and he could use a saber as well as anyone. He proved this by killing a German soldier with an ax in battle.

Both Sergeant Burden and Sergeant Mc Daniels were old time regular army and they were gray and grizzled. They should have been retired and they were close to it. They were first class training officers. Sergeant Burden was commissioned a captain in 1941. Mac was still training rifle teams in 1944 at Phillips High School.

About this time, Watson was headed for West Point. His father, through Harold Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, had gotten an appointment for him. He was to head off to Marion Military Institute in Marion, Alabama to brush up on his mathematics for six months and then, in the fall, he was to go into West Point. Watson just couldn't do it. He had had all the schooling that he could take. This action almost broke his parents' hearts. They were terribly disappointed. His father said, "Son, you're just going to be cannon fodder." Watson replied, "No Dad. I'm going to fly airplanes. Just watch."

Watson entered service at Fort Mc Pherson, Georgia on February 19, 1943, that's when he was called up. He then went down to the draft board and told them that he was ready to go. "You know, at that time, you couldn't volunteer because in late 1942, everybody was volunteering for the Navy or the Air Corps, anything but the Army. The Army couldn't get any recruits. By November 1942, everybody had to be drafted. So in the cold spring of 1943, Watson went in and ended up in Camp Wheeler, Georgia."

There were about twenty five thousand recruits there and they were the first bunch to take all those tests to evaluate them. Tests like math, writing and English, the whole nine yards, and then they gave them a mechanical, "Like having to rub your head and pat your stomach at the same time or place the square pegs in the round holes." They went through those tests and much to Watson's surprise three kids from Birmingham came out one, two, three. Watson was number three.

There were about 150 of them that got a score of over 130 and, if you got over 130 they weeded you out and they asked if you wanted to go to college or ASTP or be a doctor or an engineer." What would you like to do? You have an opportunity to pick your military career. What will it be?" This was in about their tenth week of basic training

and Watson had been carrying a light thirty on his back, on twenty five mile hikes and he had been watching those airplanes from Warner Robbins Air Field flying over all this time with four machine guns in the wings. Watson thought, "That's where the machine guns ought to be." So he said that he would go fly in the Air Corps. They said that it would be OK and that he should continue with his training and that they would process the papers.

In the next few days, Watson had qualified on the machine gun range, the mortar range and the rifle range. He was finishing up and was back instructing on the rifle range on M1's. These were the first M1's coming through. He doesn't know what happened but he was observing and calling the shots for a recruit and the rifleman was doing real well. Watson either crawled too far forward or the M1 blew. He doesn't know which. The next thing he knew he had a shell casing and a lot of sand in one eye and the eye was burned. The GI's around him grabbed him and hustled him into a jeep and in fifteen minutes he was in the hospital and there is a brand new doctor there. He didn't even have a uniform yet and he said, "Hey I just had a whole batch of this burn business studied in medical school. Bring him over here and let me try an oil immersion treatment on him." He put the eye under oil immersion treatment and put Watson in the hospital. Watson thought, "Well that ends the Air Corps. I won't fly anything with one eye."

Watson was kept at the hospital for about two weeks. At the end of two weeks, they took the bandages off and he could see just fine. The second and third layer of the eyeball had been burned off and it had just peeled and it came out allright. His father and mother thought, "Stumpy was going to be home again, out of the army."

He received his orders to report to Warner Robbins AFB. He tripped over there and walked into the Sergeant Major's office with a black patch over his eye. The Sergeant Major took one look at him and said. "Who the hell do you think you are, Wiley Post?" Stumpy replied, "Who do you think you are, Will Rogers?" The sergeant laughed and said. "Well that will cost you a couple of weeks of KP." And that's what he did. A couple of weeks of KP until the eye checked out.

Watson was put in Class 44G and sent down to Colonel Kimberly's Concentration Camp in Miami Beach at the Collins Hotel on Collins Avenue. This was the Spring of 1943 and, "It was beautiful down there."

Class 44G was backed up. What the cadets didn't know anything about, at that time, was that there were too many pilots. So from there they were sent to Penn State College for six months of training in navigation, physics and all the things that they were supposed to learn. They soloed in Piper Cubs at Bucky Walters Airfield just outside of Penn State. They were then sent to Nashville for classification. At Nashville, they were held way back and it was KP and guard duty, while the Second Army was on maneuvers up there in the Nashville area. It got worse and worse and Stumpy remembers that they had an old guy that was about thirty five years old named, "Pop" Wainwright. Pop was almost bald with a thin fringe of pink hair and he was an aviation student. He had paratrooper wings and it turned out that he had been an instructor at West Point. Pop decided that he wanted to be an aviation student. "You are not going to tell a Master Sergeant that he ain't gonna be an aviation student when he knows all the generals and colonels in the army." So he became an aviation student.

Wainwright said, "I'll show you how to get us out of here. Anything that you want in this barracks, take it with you." Stumpy was on KP and he took his stuff with him. When he got back that afternoon, the barracks had burned down. The next day they left on a train to Maxwell Field and started rolling up rat-lines as cadets.

Stumpy remembers that while he was at Maxwell Field, he was on the Tommy Gun range, when someone let a Thompson get away as a B-24 was flying over them at about fifty feet. The burst rose right into the outside port engine. The plane flipped right in front of them and killed nine people on board.

Watson reported to Fort Jackson after a twenty one day leave and met Sergeant Schlosser, First Sergeant of Company I. He assigned Watson to Sgt. Messier's weapons platoon.

Alexander "Rocky" Messier came out of New York. Watson says the he was the, "Damndest guy you ever saw. Hard as a pine knot." In Germany, Messier and Watson cut a deal between them. Watson would lead off the attack and once the attack was over with, Messier would cover with his machine guns and mortars and give the Company time to re-organize and get ready for the counter attack. Messier would hold them until Watson could get the ammunition re-distributed and get enough grenades up there to hold them because they usually used up a lot of their firepower when they were in the attack. The plan worked like a charm. Messier and Watson could work that thing off between them and once they got that working right, they didn't lose many men. Fire and maneuver was something that they knew real well. Messier knew how to lay down a field of fire. He had those guns laced down out there and had the mortars between them and German infantry just couldn't get through. And the German tanks didn't like it all that much either. Messier always had enough bazooka ammunition, and his men liked to shoot. They had a couple of light wounded back at the medical aid station. They would be alert for weapons and as soon as someone brought back a BAR they would grab it and haul it back to the company. One of their people, Tom Brown, the armorer artificer, would take those BAR's and clean and test them. This gave the company the change of weapons twice a day.

In the morning, just before first light, someone would go back to the company CP. Bill Riley, Donald Hansen, George Brittenham, Watson, anyone that they could send, and they'd check and make sure that BAR's had full magazines and plenty of extras. If they were going to use any marker, the tracer was in those magazines that they were going to use right then. Those BAR's were used in the attack. They also had a dozen or so M1's that were stripped out so that they could use AT grenades on them. They used those just like small mortar rounds and dropped them on top of houses. The Germans would think that they were under mortar fire. "If you had to get rid of a machine gun, you could shoot through the window with them and if you got lucky, you could chip the machine gunner or bust him open." At night, when they came out of the attack and were digging in, the kitchen would bring the chow up. As the men would go back to pick up their chow, they'd pick up a fresh weapon. All of their walking wounded and light wounded that had been back there with the kitchen all day long, were stripping magazines and cleaning weapons. All tracers were removed for the night fighting. All ammunition was ball ammunition. It was a good system and it was consistent. The men knew what they were going to get and they weren't afraid to fire their weapons

(continued Page 43)

Just before the division was to go overseas, Company I had to go on a weekend maneuver. Glen Doman was the Executive Officer of Company I. He had come out of the paratroopers. The mission on this little maneuver was that someone was going to have to be the enemy and infiltrate the camp of the opposition. Lt. David McNutt, volunteered Watson as one of the enemy. The other 'volunteers' were another Air Corps reject by the name of Waha and two other men, that Watson says McNutt didn't like. The 'enemy' and the other two men, drew iron rations and some of those bullets with the red wax in them and a pair of field glasses. "Pick out who you want to be the chief honcho and get out there and you try to sneak in here and disrupt the headquarters." (Company I, was going to be Battalion Headquarters.) The company was in a fairly open area not too far from a stream and there was a railroad track running beside it. Watson's group had a good compass and they could work in the dark. They also had a map and they wouldn't get lost out there with the stream, the railroad tracks and the map.

They got out into the hills a little bit and sat down to observe the camp. Watson put the glasses on them and watched how they were setting up the company and then he said, "Waha, I'll tell you how we're going to do this. We're going to do it just like we did when I was playing with my little brother, when we were kids. We used to attack the neighbors all the time. We're going to take off our steel helmets and we're going to keep the liners. Two of us are going in and two of us will stay out here. Waha, you and I are going to go in and as soon as it gets dark we're going to get somebody's GI cans and put our helmet liners in them and put on our fatigue caps and were going to go down that railroad track whistling but not making a lot of noise but not being too careful either. We'll walk right on down there where the road turns across the railroad tracks and goes into camp. We'll take these GI cans down there and put them down right close to the kitchen truck, stand around and smoke a cigarette."

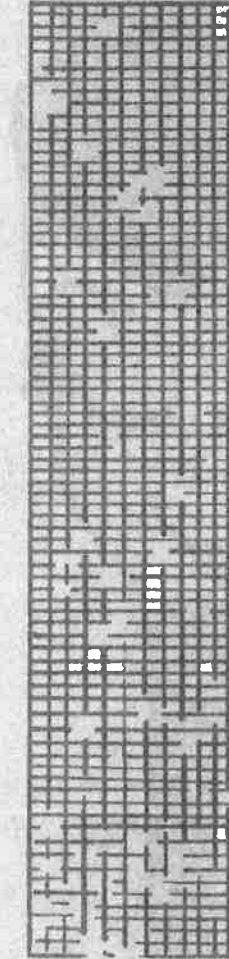
Waha looked at Watson and said, "You'll never get away with it."

After dark, around 11:30 at night, the two of them started for the camp, whistling. The guards yelled at them to shut up that everybody was asleep. They had already seen the officers lie down, but not inside their sleeping bags, because it was still pretty warm. They were lying with their feet towards the fire and the fire had burned down pretty good. Watson told Waha that he would take Swanson and that Waha would take Doman. "Now you lie down alongside Doman over there and I'll lie down alongside Swanson over here. I'm going to try to work Swanson's knife out of his boot and his forty-five from the holster. You try to get Doman's carbine." They had purposely left their weapons back with the other two. Watson snuggled up to John Swanson and worked the knife out of his boot and he had it in his right hand and he placed it alongside one of Swanson's kidneys. With his left hand he reached up and pinched Swanson's nose and clamped his hand down over his mouth. Watson whispered in his ear and said, "Captain, if you so much as wiggle an eyelash, I'm going to stick you real good." Swanson must have believed him or gone along with the act for he didn't move. Watson then said, "Now you're going to get up and you're going to kick Doman's foot and tell him, 'C'mon Doman, get up. We gotta go look at the sentries." By this time Waha had gotten Doman's carbine and his knife. Watson and Swanson stood up and Swanson kicked Doman's foot and told him to get up. Doman grumbled a little bit and then he realized that there was an automatic pointed at his belly-button and he didn't know if it was loaded or not and he didn't

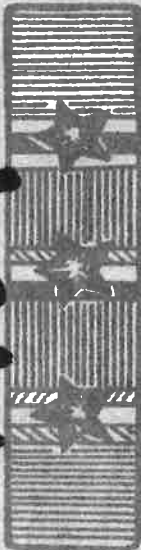
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Sept
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Story p. 21

Stumpy Watson

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CENTRAL EUROPE

**VETERANS OF
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3RD ARMY &
THE BATTLE
OF THE BULGE**

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WARDLAW M. "STUMPY", WATSON I-346
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..Continued from last issue..

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Watson kept them, until after lunch the next day, down in a dry stream bed.

Watson states that there was one good thing that he learned out of that mission. He claims that it was a great lesson. Watson was watching Swanson and Doman but he was concentrating mostly on Swanson. They were about seven or eight feet away from him and Watson hadn't taken their steel helmets away from them. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Doman reach up and stretch and then Doman grabbed his steel helmet and threw it at Watson. Watson caught it on the guard of his M1 and bounced it off and then brought the muzzle down where he could pop him good and just ruin that uniform. He was just waiting for Doman to do something so that he could give him some of that red wax. Doman just laughed and settled back and said, "You got to watch out for that." Watson never let a prisoner keep his steel helmet after that.

When the maneuver was over, Captain Swanson threw a beer bust for the entire company. Stumpy says that the captain paid for it himself.

Within weeks the division sailed to Europe on the Queen Elizabeth.

It was in the middle of November, 1944 that Watson got into a nothing of a boat, in England, and started across the English Channel to Le Havre. It was a cold, miserable rainy day. The troops climbed down the side of the ship on the netting and got into the little boats and pulled up to the dock. Carrying their gear, they climbed uphill through a still smoking Le Havre. Why places were still burning is something that Watson could not understand, even to this day.

The Company stayed overnight in some type of barracks, and then the next morning, they were transported to a place called, "The White Horse Assembly Area." The first night, at the assembly area, they were told not to bother digging in but to just roll up in their blankets and get some sleep because they would be moving out the next morning. Hot chow was brought up and they rolled into their blankets and tried to sleep. That night there was a hard frost and Watson woke up, sometime during that night, to relieve himself. When he looked around at the other GI's that were sleeping on the ground, he noticed that there were "Fairy Rings", about eight to ten feet across, all around the men. This was an area, on the ground, where there was no frost. It was a melt ring in almost perfect circles. There was frost every where else, even on the ponchos but inside those circles there was none. When Watson saw those rings he said to himself, "The old Gods are protecting us. We're going to be alright."

From the assembly area they went to Metz. At Metz they ran into the 26th Division. That's where the 87th got the name, "The Golden Nuts. Yellow and green. Too yellow to fight and too green to run." Watson said, "You have to understand that we were really in pretty bad shape and you had to admit that we were not the most perfect of ground troops when we got to Metz."

In Metz they got into a fire-fight and they had to leave their gear right on the ground. That's when Watson lost his duffle bags. He never saw them again until 1966 when a truck pulled up in front of his house, in Birmingham, and the driver asked for him. The driver gave Watson the duffle bags that were sent to him from France. The bags were plainly stencilled, "S. Sgt. William M. Watson 34705956. There was nothing missing out of them. Even the dirty laundry and a bottle of Calvados was inside.

From Metz they shipped out. Part of the outfit stayed at Metz and fought at Fort Jean D'Arc. The rest pushed on up north and into the Saar basin. It was their real first day of action and it was freezing and raining and a muddy mess. Company I de-trucked about a mile or so from where they were supposed to go into action. The men were all keyed up and scared and they didn't have any idea about what was supposed to happen. Watson was in the first squad of the 1st Platoon under Sgt. Hengesbach and Lt. David W. McNutt. They were going through some hedge-rows, heading up towards a railroad track.

They got up there, between the hedge-rows, and just as they were coming out, they could see ahead of them, into an open field with mud and some scrubby stubble, a bunch of GI's just lying around like someone had thrown out a bunch of rag dolls. The one nearest to Watson, up on the left, was sprawled out and he had on combat boots. Watson had never seen combat boots before. The 87th was still wearing leggings. Watson could see that he wasn't moving and that he must be a married man because he had a ring on his finger. He looked like he was asleep. All of a sudden, the whole world blew up. What had happened was, that they had walked between two hedge-rows and on the other side of one was a battery of 105's. They were firing in battery and it was the loudest noise that anyone have ever heard.

Company I lost their first man there. He was a young, aristocratic looking man. When those guns went off everyone hit the ground except that soldier. He jumped straight up in the air and when he hit the ground, he was dead. He died from fright. The medics could not get his heart started again.

From there, they moved on up and got into a railroad cut, climbed down into the cut and moved up on the other side. The brass wanted to take them into a baptism of fire under the best of conditions possible and what happened was that they were lined up just looking across a broad field, possibly three quarters to a mile across. There was nothing in that field to hide behind. There was a pill-box or some kind of cement structure over at the right and a copse of woods beside it. They knew that they were close to the Maginot Line and the Lt. McNutt told them that they should let the barrage get out about a hundred yards and that they would follow across that open field. That's what they did. It was a classic advance. The troops had on their heavy overcoats and they were carrying ammunition in their pockets, entrenching tools on their backs and those heavy overshoes on their feet. Those overshoes were gathering mud and they were getting bigger and bigger on Watson's size twelve feet and Watson was falling behind the rest of the troops. "In desperation, I just threw them away. That damned field was littered with overshoes."

As Watson was trying to catch up with the company, he saw Lt. McNutt coming back towards him and Watson thought that he was going to catch hell for not being able to keep up with the unit. Watson had a pack of cigarettes on him, even though he didn't smoke, and he took one out and lit it. It was then that Watson noticed that McNutt was holding a handkerchief to his neck. Mac had a nice neat round hole under his chin, going in one side and out the other and it wasn't bleeding very much. Watson looked past him and coming out of the doorway of the pill-box was a great big German in a gray uniform and it was about a hundred to a hundred and fifty yards. Watson knew that his rifle sights were set for battle distance. He dropped down on one knee and lined him up, with the cigarette in his mouth, took a deep breath, let half of it out and squeezed the trigger. The guy sailed over backwards and didn't move again. There was a machine gun firing from the left of the pill-box and as soon as that German hit the ground, the machine gun quit. McNutt looked at Watson and said, "Watson, don't you know better than to smoke while you're shooting? What were you shooting at, anyway." Stumpy looked at him and said, "That guy laying over there." "Did you get him?" "Sure, what did you expect?" (continued on Page 46)

They had gotten up a ridge line and into a fight on what they called "Skyline Drive" down there in the Saar basin. It was a narrow ridge line and they had to dig into rock. The German tanks had broken into their rear and were raising all kinds of hell and began to shoot them up. At the same time the company was having trouble with trench foot and upper respiratory diseases. The division was relieving good officers because they weren't keeping the men well and the men didn't have the good sense to stay well. They didn't take their shoes off and rub their feet like they were supposed to. Well they lost Lt. Murphy that way and he was a fine officer. They transferred him someplace else and sent a replacement. The unit no sooner got into that shooting contest, when Williams got out ahead of the company and a machine gun opened up on him and he was hit. Some GI's tried to get him out of there and the machine gun hit two more. Williams was lying out there screaming and finally two medics went out to get him at dusk and they were fired on by the Germans. The medics went out again at night and when they returned, they said that the Germans had booby-trapped him and that they were waiting for them out there. Williams yelled for another day out there, calling for help and no one could do anything for him and stay alive. At the end of that day, some German must have taken pity on Williams because he shot him, five or six times, and Williams stopped yelling.

The fight ground on for another day or so and then a little bastard tank platoon, four tanks, came up. They were little Shermans with their little gun and they came horseing around up there and everyone was afraid that they would draw artillery. Well they lined up on the ridge line four in a row and the self propelled guns on the opposite side fired four rounds and left four burning tanks on that ridge line. The tankers made little puffs of black smoke as they tried to get out of them.

After the tanks were destroyed the Germans withdrew and the company didn't try to pick up Williams' body. They were moving in a hurry and could not stop. He was left for Graves Registration.

At this point we will move ahead in time to October of 1951. Watson's in his automobile and he's coming down on Highway 78 from up north in Alabama. It's Friday late and it's raining and it's miserable and he pulls into this gas station at Rose Hill, which is east of Birmingham. It was a little cheap gas station with a little shack and two pumps out front. It's 29 cents a gallon gas and this man comes out in the rain in a black slicker. He tops the tank off for Watson and Watson rolls the window down and hands the attendant a twenty dollar bill. The attendant goes back to the shack to get the change and starts to count this change out holding the money in his right hand and counting it out with his left. When that last bill left his hand, that damned dragon's head was looking up at Stumpy and Watson said, "Thank you sergeant Williams." With that the guy reaches in and grabs him by the tie, turned his head around and cursed Watson up and down and backwards and forwards. Watson got out of the car and went into the shack with him. He asked him what had happened and they sat down and Williams told his story.

Williams was laying out there and when the final shots hit him, one entered his spine and paralyzed him. He couldn't move or talk and he lay out there for two more days until Graves Registration came by to pick him up. When they picked him up, The one that was holding his feet looked him in the eyes and Williams, who could only

move his eyes, began blinking like mad and when the guy saw him blink, he dropped him. They got him to the medics and it was two or three years before he was able to walk again. If Watson had not seen the dragon on his hand, he would have believed that Williams was dead.

From the Saar basin they went up to a village that was about fifteen hundred yards inside Germany. This was around December the 20th. At this time they had been detached from the 3rd Army and were part of the 7th Army to the south. They then got orders to pull out of the sector and move north and rejoined the 3rd Army. Now Captain Swanson gave orders for everybody to wash, shave and put on a tie and the 87th rejoined the 3rd Army.

It began to snow.

Watson had eaten some apples that he had not peeled and he got the honest to goodness GI's. Watson happened to keep count and it came to 134. He had started out at the head of the column and at number 134, he was so far behind the column that he could not see them. Well he had to pull off the trail into the woods, for number 135. He put his back to a tree when what should come walking by, but two Germans armed with burp guns. Watson was squatting there against the tree and the Germans were silhouetted against the snow and it scared the hell out of him. He did not know if they were alone or part of a group. He also didn't know whether he should shoot at them or what. Watson took off after them and he finally saw some figures up ahead. When he got to where he could make them out, he saw that they were the tail end of the column. Watson asked them if they had seen the Germans. They didn't believe him and thought that he was joking. Anyway, the Germans may have been afraid to tackle the company on their own.

The 346th got to Verdun on the 21st or 22nd of December and there was a hot turkey dinner waiting for them. Each platoon drew a five gallon jerry can of French wine. Sgt. Hengesbach and Watson tented together and they got their mail. In the mail Watson got a little wind up truck with a Krazy Kat in it. It was the kind that would run to the edge of the table and turn around. Hengesbach got a big pile of mail and then an NCO meeting was called. Watson put two heat tablets in his steel helmet and lit them and bedded them down in the straw in the bottom of the tent and they went to the meeting. A little while later there was a commotion and everyone went to see what it was. They discovered that the heat tablets had put the straw in the tent on fire and burned the tent down along with Hengesbach's mail. He could have killed Watson.

There was a man in the company named Loudermilk and he walked up with a great big shell, in his arms, from World War I. He had been sent to dig a latrine and found this thing in the trench that he was digging. Hengesbach looked at Watson and said, "He's your man. Why don't you tell him what to do with it." Watson said, "Loudermilk, Captain Swanson likes souvenirs like that. Why don't you take that on over to him."

On December 24, 1944 a roar filled the skies and the earth shook. The men got up and they could see that the skies had cleared. From horizon to horizon the the sky was covered with bombers. You could walk from wingtip to wingtip. The planes flew over all morning

(continued on Page 36)

and then in the evening they came back, low and slow and all shot up. The sight of those planes lifted spirits like nothing else.

On the way to Tillet, the men of Company I, had been attacking from the east coming down a ridge and they had walked six or eight miles to get there. They had walked down through a series of ridges and pine thickets and the first night after they got there, there was a big stone house with the windows blown out and there was an old sleigh out in the barn. Watson found a place where they baked bread in outdoor ovens and crawled in for the night. He hoped that no one would close the door on him. It was nice and warm in there. Someone on guard duty, that night, had gone to sleep in the house and had left his feet sticking out of a window. His feet froze up so bad that night, that they had to take them off. That was bad trench foot.

The next morning, the men got up and walked down a mile or two and came to a field with a whole bunch of low mounds in it. When Watson looked at them he thought, "That's the way Dad and I piled manure down home in Birmingham." He had never seen it in Europe that way. They were told to dig in and Watson started to dig in behind one of the mounds. The digging was easy. He thought, "Oh. Oh. I've found the honey pot." He dug himself a nice deep hole and a trench and bore holes north, south, east, and west and it was warm in there with all that manure decomposing. There were about five or six unfortunate people who were given blocks of nitro-starch and told to blow fox-holes in there. One of them was a big guy a short distance away from Watson who dug in good and deep and just as he had gotten in real good, a Panther tank popped up and came to a halt and just sat there. This man was still digging in and the top of the tank opened up and a German got up to see what was happening. The GI picked up his rifle and shot at the tank. The German in the tank dropped down inside and the tank lowered its gun and fired a round that fell about thirty feet short and blew snow and manure just everywhere. Along about this time all the infantrymen had opened up on the tank and it withdrew.

Erasmus Pistone went down to take a look at the man at whom the tank had fired. He had a big bruise on the collar bone. The shell that hit him had left a big welt there. That's where the shell stopped. It burned his skin but did not explode.

That afternoon they were supposed to hit Tillet and the men waited for the artillery barrage and stayed behind it. It looked like a real good deal. A little old village down there and there was a T-shape of houses and the short end of it faced the advance and the right side had a street going down it and had houses on both sides of it. Hell, it was down hill and should be easy. Normally, Company I would always have to attack up hill. Now the men had a chance to go down hill.

The men were given a hot lunch and hot coffee and warm bread and they were feeling good. Watson was short five men in his squad. A truck came up and two GI's jumped off the truck and they had rifles. Then they motioned for the men on the truck to get off. Watson had never seen men brought up to the line this way. These guys were unarmed and one, had to be released from chains. Watson asked them what they had done and the guard said that the one in chains was a bad one. That he had to watch out for him. Watson asked what he had done and they told him that he had a bad habit of hitting Majors.

Watson asked, "Air Corps Majors? You can't hold that against him." Watson laughed and said that he would take him. That man was Bill Riley. Sgt. William Riley. One soldier came up to Watson and said, "I'm not suppose to be here." It was getting close to jumping off time, 1415 hours, and this man handed Watson a piece of paper. Watson looked at him and told him that he wasn't supposed to be there either and what was his problem. He told Watson that he had a medical discharge. Watson looked at the piece of paper and sure enough, he had a medical discharge. This man had everything wrong with him. He was in terrible shape and you could tell it just by looking at him. He had no business being where he was. Watson told George Brittenham to get the men rifles, get them stripped off and get all that junk off them. Watson looked at this man and said, "Look buddy were going down that hill to that village down there. They have houses down there and we don't want to stay out in the snow so we are going to go down there and pick one out for us in just a few minutes. If you don't want to go down there, don't go. I understand your problem." Watson thought that the man would get in the way. "You just stay up here but if we have to do anything about moving wounded or helping with the kitchen or carrying ammunition, you do it and we'll see to it that you get sent back home where you belong."

About that time, the artillery started to come and Watson's squad was supposed to be the third squad going down that hill. They waited and the other soldiers went down the hill and then it was their turn and they started out with good dispersement but they looked like raisins in a pudding. Dark uniforms against a snow background. The Germans had artillery of their own and the men were getting rounds falling in on them. About half way down Watson came across Sgt. Bill Dailey and he had been killed by an artillery round. Dailey had a Thompson sub-machine gun with a Cuts compensator on it. Watson started to reach down to pick it up and thought the better of it and left it there. One GI came over to Watson and said, "I've got something in my back and I'm on fire. See if you can get it out. Watson turned him around and he had that great coat on and a webbed belt and sticking out of that webbed belt was a piece of shrapnel bigger than his hand. It was red hot and oozing out around it was a red goo. "I thought it had cut his spine in two. How is he standing up? On top of that, it smelled pretty good. Sweet, like Italian sauce." This soldier had armored himself around the middle with cans of meat balls and Italian sauce. All that he had was the imprint of the bottom of a can on his back.

The unit continued down the hill and though they had started out spread out real well, they began to bunch up as they got down to the bottom because the terrain was funneling them down into town. The shells were falling in around them and Pitt got hit by machine gun fire and he went down. Sid Ohman was down about eight feet in front of Watson and he either stepped on a mine or got a direct hit. The explosion knocked Watson over backwards and threw Ohman about ten feet in the air. When Watson sat up, he had bone fragments sticking in his face and he wiped them off. To his right was Lt. Dobie and he was hit too. Swanson had been shot through the legs and he was trying to comfort Dobie as he was dying. Watson screamed to the squad to spread out but not to lean against any banks because they might be mined. They spread out and all of a sudden he got a big whack on his right shoulder. Watson grabbed at his shoulder and sure enough someone had shot him but he saw no blood. The shoulder was just numb. Watson looked up and saw a German in the top

of the house, on the right hand side of the street, beyond the big wood pile. He was in the attic, of the house, and had moved the shingles aside on the roof with his rifle. Watson knew that was the German that shot him. Sure enough, he poked the rifle back out and Watson took very careful aim and cut down on him. Watson fired high. About that time, the German fired and Watson's rifle banged against him. Watson lined him up again, and squeezed the trigger and nothing happened. He pulled back on the bolt and chambered another round and waited and when he saw the rifle poke out again he fired. Both men shot at each other. This time Watson shot low and he saw that rifle pop up and slide back down and he knew that he had gotten him.

Watson had something happen to him, at this time, that had only happened to him three times in his life. He stepped out of himself and became an observer. "It was the damndest thing but I could look at everything that was going on from away from myself."

Watson looked over to the house where he shot the sniper and saw a pair of white legs running up a stair, past a window. He turned around with his M1 and figured that it was a thirty five or forty degree angle going up those steps past that window. The German should be five or six feet past that window. Watson squeezed off a shot and the German came rolling down the stairs, all in a pile. At this time, someone came down from the wood pile, and told Watson that Sgt. Hengesbach had been captured and that Watson's assistant squad leader, Sgt. Donald Hanson had been hit by the same sniper that had killed Lt. Dobie.

Watson didn't really know that he had been wounded. When he looked, he found that he had a red bruise on his shoulder. After he had shot the second sniper, he turned his rifle over and coming down from the upper hand guard down into the trigger assembly was a long splinter. Watson pulled the trigger assembly off and there was a round jammed in it. After he removed the round, the rifle worked perfectly. Watson and Loudermilk went off to the left, down to some houses going out into the field and here comes the GI that has the medical discharge, sliding on the snow. He called out, "Wait a minute sergeant, wait a minute. Before you go I wanted to thank you." Watson said to him, "What for?" He replied, "I've been shot through the legs twice and I wanted to thank you for taking me with you. I was going home, you know, and I would have been a damned draft dodger, almost, and now I'm going home a hero."

Watson received orders to find Hengesbach. Watson took, as volunteers, George Brittenham, George Elpert, Vinny Leadore and Loudermilk.

The small group crawled down towards the houses and slid down four or five more houses and damn, there were five Germans down there. Watson was crawling on his hands and knees and he looked over a wall and there they were. They were as much surprised as he was. The Germans jumped up and Bill Riley shot the one closest to him. The other four started to run and Riley began to pick them off from the rear. Watson remembers yelling, "Shoot, shoot, shoot." Nobody else was shooting and there is Watson with an M1 and he's not shooting either. They were all watching Riley shoot. Then they heard the 'ping' of Riley's M1 and he turns and says, "How do you load this thing?" They all looked at him in disbelief and Watson said, "Don't (continued on

Page 42)

you know how?" "No, I came from the Air Corps. All I ever fired was Thompsons." George Elpert said, "Four out of five ain't bad shooting." The fifth one got away when Riley's M1 went dry.

They crawled on a little bit further and there was a big shell hole over on Watson's right. Just as he pushed up there, right in front of him was a great big German facing the other way and his shoulders and helmet were sticking up out of the fox-hole. Watson could see his right hand on the burp gun with white rags wrapped around it. Watson froze. He slowly reached into his boot and slid out his trench knife. Watson drew back and as hard as he could, he stuck him right between the shoulder blades. The trench knife broke off at the hilt. The German was a solid block of ice. He must have been dead for days. This attracted the attention of a German machine gun down in the corner house and he opened up and hit the German corpse. When he did, Watson jumped into that shell hole and yelled up to the other guys to toss him a grenade. Watson no sooner said that when he realized he should have not done so because Loudermilk was up there. Watson heard the grenade go 'ping' and here comes the live grenade sliding across the snow. He frantically grabbed it and tossed it over the wall towards the house. The grenade went off and the machine gunner stopped shooting. "I guess that he was afraid that if he stayed in the window, he was going to get it." The men backed out of there as it was getting dark and returned to the little cut in the road where they had started from. Every one was gone. The shooting had quieted down and they couldn't see anybody. Just the bodies of the men who had been killed.

It began to snow again.

The group went back to the house where Watson had shot the two snipers and they thought they could get into that house for the night. It was possible that their men were already in there. About that time, a sniper up in the snow field on their right shot at them and this got everyone's teeth on edge. Watson and Brittenham went to get that sniper. They didn't realize that it was getting dark awful fast and after they went up about two or three hundred yards and couldn't find him, they returned to where they left the other men. They were gone. They didn't know if they were in the house or not but no one answered their calls.

Watson and Brittenham returned to the top of the hill, in the dark. When they got up there they went to the aid station. They tried to find out where the company was, but no one knew where they were. They tried to find out about Capt. Swanson, but they didn't know where he was. They tried to find the CP. No one knew where it was. Then Sgt. Register came by and asked them what they were doing up there. They asked the sergeant, "Who's in charge? Where is the rest of the company?" Sgt. Register then told them that the Colonel would want to talk to them. The two men walked down the ridge and came to a very large building that looked like a library. They went on into the command post and the colonel was talking on a field phone and when he was finished, they talked to the colonel. He asked about the status down in town and he was told about Swanson and that they could not raise any one in the village. The two men then asked the colonel what he wanted them to do. The colonel told them to rejoin the company. Watson and Brittenham got out of there and were met by Register who stopped them and asked where they were going. The men told him that they were going back into town. Register told them that

he was going with them. They were delighted for the extra gun.

No one had given a password for the night.

The group got down into town and came up to the wood pile at the first house on the right hand side of the street and they could hear Yankee type talking going on in there. They thought that they were Americans. They could hear the smashing of furniture in there to make kindling and Watson got in behind the house and Register and Brittenham stayed behind the wood pile and Watson shouted, "Hey in there. I'm looking for I company." It went quiet in the house in a hurry. They then used a particular set of nasty cuss words, in sequence, that they used to use if they did not know the pass word or had forgotten it. That drew no response. The group stood around for about ten minutes and then decided they would go back up the hill and go to the aid station.

When they got to the aid station, Register told them to stay there while he went off someplace and Brittenham and Watson went into the aid station. Doctor Dove was standing there, shaking the alcohol off his instruments and he asked Watson, "What's wrong with you?" Watson said, "Nothing." Brittenham looked at him and said, "What's wrong with your knee, Stumpy? You've got a hole in your pants and there is blood coming out." He looked down and sure enough there was a jagged cut across his pants. Watson dropped them and the Doctor put a bandage with some sulfa powder on it and then he said, "What's this in your thigh?" There was this neat little hole on his thigh midway between the hip and knee. He didn't even know how it happened. The Doctor reached in there with a skinny probe and found a bullet in the leg. He put some gauze between Watson's teeth, told him to look away and he pulled the bullet out. "You'll be OK in the morning"

The doctor had taken a small, skinny kind of tweezers and reached down inside that hole and pulled out a bullet. That bullet had gone in right against the bone and stopped. "I never felt it when it hit me and I never felt it when he took it out". The Doctor then asked Watson if he wanted something to keep him warm and Watson thought that he meant a cup of coffee and said, "Sure, can Brittenham have some too?" Doc Dove went over to a Jerry can and tilted it over and poured some of the contents into their canteen cups. Then he opened, what appeared to be a can of ketchup, measured about a spoonful into each of the canteen cups and stirred. Doc Dove then handed the canteens to Watson and Brittenham. When Watson took a drink, it was medical alcohol. What he had made was a Bloody Mary. The men took a good pull on that and sat down for a little bit and all the heat and all the excitement disappeared and they were tired and they didn't remember another thing until the next morning.

Register woke them, at first light, with the news that they were taking chow down into the village. The men asked him if he knew where the company was and he told them, "They're down there." They went down into Tillet with the chow. Pete Byas and Charles R. "Cash" Register had the chow tied down on sleds and they slid them down the hill to the village and delivered it to the first house on each side of the road. Brittenham and Watson stayed in one of the houses on the left side of the street, all that day, and then they decided that they had to clear the house next to them. (continued on Page 46)

Watson had been lined up with that German's belly-button. "My daddy always told me to never try to hit a man in the head. Shoot for the middle. If you hit him in the belly-button, he's not going to bother you. If it gets a little low, well he's got places down there that he doesn't want to get hit in. If you get a little high, well it's where you would like to hit him."

McNutt continued towards the railroad cut. Watson went on up towards the pill-box and as he got close to it, with two other GI's, he noticed that the rest of the unit was over towards the woods. Watson was working this sweep of mud and as he get up to where the pill-box was, four Germans got up from where the machine gun had fired and they were grinning and had their hands on their heads. Watson was looking for the machine gun and he could see that it had been dropped down in the hole. Well the four soldiers began to walk towards him and Watson could not fully see a couple of them because they were walking behind each other. He was highly nervous. Watson shouted to them to halt, in German and in English, and the Germans just kept on coming, so he lined up with the one nearest to him and shot him in the shoulder. That stopped them. Watson's BAR man, Martin Arling, was trotting up behind him and said to Watson, "Damn Stumpy, don't shoot any of these bastards out here in front of God and everybody. Every Kraut in the world is looking at you." They were on top of a hill and everybody could see them. Watson told Arling that he had to get them to stop and they wouldn't listen and Arling replied that he had them lined up with his BAR and that he would have shot the rest of them. The wounded German hadn't been badly hurt. The shot hadn't broken any bones and Watson felt like hell about shooting him so he went over to them and offered them all a cigarette.

A short while later, some GI's were taking wounded back to the aid station and they took the prisoners with them. Actually, the prisoners were kids. They weren't more than sixteen or seventeen years old and they were Polish conscripts who were happy that the war was over. The German that Watson shot was a German sergeant and guess what? He wasn't hit in the middle, he was hit right between the eyes, just below the rim of his helmet.

They were standing around there for a couple of minutes and the rest of the company was off in the woods and someone brought the news that Mulverhill, "The Mole", had tripped a mine and lost a leg. That was bad news because he was very popular and he was Max Blundell's best friend. The small group then went off to the left over towards a macadam road, and as they got up there they could see some German tanks coming out of the woods, down on the left, in the valley. Martin Arling and Watson were standing there in a ditch beside the road and there was a little rise over to their left about thirty five or forty yards away. They didn't hear it but all of a sudden a German tank came over the rise. It wasn't a very big tank and it didn't have a big gun on it but it sure looked big as it came into view. The tank wasn't paying any attention to them and Arling who was ten or twelve feet in front of Watson swung his BAR up and strafed the man standing in the turret of the tank. Well he dropped down and no one knew if Arling hit him or not. The tank swung it's gun around at them and Watson and Arling dropped down into the ditch.

Arling sprayed the tank again and the tank lowered the gun and fired it at them and it tore a trench in that macadam road between them. It threw rocks and dirt all over them. The machine

gunner started firing at them and Watson was hoping that he wasn't shooting at that canteen sticking up on his back, because the canteen was filled with gasoline. That must have been what he was doing because every time that Watson wiggled, the machine gun would fire. Well Watson wiggled his way down the ditch away from Arling because Watson thought that Arling was going to do something stupid sooner or later. As he crept away from Arling, Arling shouted at him, "Do you think that I should put some armor piercing ammo in?"

The word had been called in by somebody that there were tanks out there and the artillery opened up on that hill and they were a little short. Neither Arling or Watson were hit by any shell. The shells were digging in and blowing up. They saw some holes later and they couldn't have fallen more than ten or twelve feet away from them. Watson knew what those rounds did to him. They threw him up in the air. He'd go sailing up in the air and the tank would shoot at him. He felt like a clay pigeon in a shooting gallery. The tank was backing up a little bit and about ten or twenty shells landed up there and Watson developed his first and continuing case of artillery dysentery.

All of a sudden a bazooka round hit the tank and bounced up in the air and exploded. The tank fired a round down behind them and then another bazooka round hit the tank broadside and knocked off a track. Now they had a pill-box sitting there. It was getting dark and after a while Watson called out to Arling to see if he was OK and he responded that he was. Later on that night the Germans turned on a lamp and began to repair their tank out there in the open. They were banging on it with tools and talking and laughing. Watson had three hand grenades on him and he was afraid to throw one. He looked at Arling and Arling said, "Let's not stir them up."

Erasmus Pistone, their medic, came up and told them that the two of them were supposed to hold that left flank position until morning. Watson told him that they were going to leave with him and return to the company. Pistone brought them to the medical aid station and then the captain made a decision about putting them back up on the hill but not just the two of them alone.

Watson always regretted that he didn't take that tank and crew out that night, but that's the way it was. It was inexperience. The GI's that hit that tank were Alexander Messier and Pop Milligan. Pop Milligan had no business being out there with the troops. He was forty years old at the time but he became the tank destroyer of the company. He blew up more tanks than anybody else in the company. He would run up to a tank and pry the lid up with his bayonette and drop a hand grenade down in there. He was a gentle man but had the heart of a lion.

Company I went into a holding position, at a French ranch, at the beginning of December and got into a shooting contest somewhere just inside the German border. They had a sergeant in the company named Williams and he was old army. He was meaner than a snake and everybody was scared of him. Williams was tattooed all over. He had one tattoo with a dragon with its belly on the right arm muscle and its head in the palm of his right hand with his fingers out like flames coming out of its mouth. The tail of it kept on going up and wrapped around his neck. Williams had been in the army a long time and had earned his stripes and had held on to them. He knew his weapons and he knew his tactics and he was a good sergeant.

cont. on p. 32

The company received two new lieutenants, at that time, and the new one that they got was Bob Watson. The other one was Lt. Lamont. Lamont was a good lieutenant and he told them that they were going to have to take that whole row of houses and to get at it. Riley asked Watson if he wanted him to go take the next one and Watson told him that he would do it. Watson did send Riley after that Thompson that was on Bill Daily's body. Riley came back with the Thompson and the magazines. Riley now felt more at ease with a weapon that he knew how to load.

Watson told Pop Milligan that he would go out and take the house on the far end and they would then have one house between them. Pop told Watson that they would give him covering fire. Watson strapped his entrenching tool on his back and, as he started to go through the window on the house on the end of the row, the entrenching tool hung him up in that window. He was stuck in that window and he couldn't move. With that, the door opens and who should come walking in but Bill Riley. Riley took one look at Watson, busted out laughing and asked, "Can I help you, sergeant?" He pulled Watson through, "Much to my embarrassment and total relief." (to be continued in the December '89' issue of the Golden Acorn News)

* * * * *

SURPRISED TO READ ABOUT THE 87TH DIVISION IN LOCAL NEWSPAPER

"Thank you or whoever was responsible for putting the article about the 87th Division in our local newspaper, The Hastings Reminder. This is the first mention of the 87th Division I have seen in the 43 years since my husband, Benjamin C. Davis, member of the MP Platoon, came home after VE Day. He had Basic Training at Camp McCain, MS, and to England with the 87th. Went to England with the 87th and spent 6 months in Europe ending at Plauen, Germany; home Jan 1946 after 2yrs, 8 mo's in the Service.

We were married 6 mo's before he was inducted at Ft. Custer, MI. We had two children, and my husband died of a heart attack in 1962. We corresponded with Cleon Clary and family, one of his buddies, until Cleon died around 1960.

Our son died late May by suicide, age 44. My daughter and grandson will treasure the story as it appeared in The Reminder. I still have the map of Europe and the 87th's route as well as the phot of the MP's. Mrs. Benjamin Davis (Ruth), 233 E. Charles St., Hastings, MI 49058.

* * * * *

HE IS A BAND CONDUCTOR AND A 'LOOK ALIKE' OF JOHN PHILIP SOUSA

James G. Saied, (Hq-345), 5832 S. Florence Ave., Tulsa, OK 74105. Tel: (918) 742-2118, is married to Helen and they have a son, James Robert, and a daughter, Delia Ann. He is a Retired - former owner of music stores and has two hobbies, golf and his grandchildren.

"Since I am a Band Conductor and a "look-alike" of John Philip Sousa, I conduct Sousa-type concert with University, Community and Professional Bands around the country - complete with Sousa-style uniforms and music. Spearheaded the successful effort to designate "The Stars And Stripes Forever" March as the the National March of the U.S. Testified before a Congressional Committee which led to President Reagan signing in to law December 11, 1987.

* * * * *



87th DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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WARDLAW M. WATSON
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Story P. 22
Stumpy Watson

RAINELAND

CENTRAL EUROPE

ARDENNES

—R. TRICKS—



***** AS I REMEMBER IT *****

WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346

.....continued from the last issue.....

As our last chapter ended, Stumpy Watson was in the village of Tillet hung up in the window of a farm house by his entrenching tool.

After Stumpy Watson had been freed by Bill Riley from his predicament in the window, the group started to search out the houses on the far left of the village. Sgt. John C, "Pop" Milligan, an older GI about 38 years of age, took one house by himself. Pop tried to kick in the door and it would not cave in. He rammed it with the butt of his carbine and shattered the stock. Pop carried that carbine because of his age and because it was lighter than the M-1. Pop also carried a bazooka and a load of ammo from time to time.

Stumpy searched out the house where he had been hung-up in the window and found a woman and her children in the basement. The civilians were herded into a house on the street end of the string of houses and now the GI's controlled the upper end of the village.

Most of the houses were made of wood and the cellars were made of stone. Stumpy was down in the cellar and tried to poke the basement door open only to discover that the door did not swing out but swung in. He looked out and didn't see much but down to his right he could see what appeared to be five GI's headed for the lower end of the village. They looked like they were out for a stroll. Watson yelled to them and they glanced back but didn't stop or say anything. Watson then stepped out the door. Elpert, Riley Leodore and Brittenham were back in the basement and they came to the door to see what the yelling was all about. Watson continued walking to his right toward the group of men that he had seen. When he got to the end of the hip high wall back of his house, a machine gun fired from his rear and hit the ground in front of him. The fire was coming from a barn out in the middle of the field and when the gun opened up, Stumpy lost all interest in the group of men heading towards the village, jumped back over the wall and crawled towards the open door. Upon reaching the door, Stumpy rose into a crouched position and ran into the basement. The machine gun followed him and splattered the opening with its fire. Elpert yelled, "Close the damned door," as splinters flew everywhere but no one was hurt.

later that day, as it started to get darker, the men cautiously opened the door again and looked out at the barn and found that someone had placed a smoke round on it. Stumpy had entertained a foolish thought of going up the stairs in the house and starting a fire-fight from a window up there with the people in the barn. It was late in the afternoon and he thought that if he did do that, he would be ordered to go across that bare snow-field and engage the enemy. He figured he would wait for orders.

Lt. Bob Watson and Sgt. Register then gave orders for the men to keep the occupied house posted but Stumpy was to gather whatever

walked out of Tillet to get on the truck to take them to Pironpre, not far from Bastogne. The lightly wounded, company HQ, the kitchen staff had already loaded and left. Sgt. Al Messier and the weapons platoon were assigned the house diagonally across from the Catholic Church. Company I drew two truck loads of replacements but no new officers. Lt. Bob Watson was acting CO. The wind and snow was bitterly cold. Stumpy got his squad together. It was George Brittenham, Joe Stevens, and Bill Riley. Lt. Watson sent word that Stumpy Watson was acting platoon sergeant and to draw replacements and get organized. Delbert Lutterman was one of the replacements that had come in earlier. He told Stumpy that he remembered his speech to the new men. "You will obey orders instantly and without question. Cover your buddy's ass. Don't play hero. Share your ammo and grenades with your buddy. When you dig in, dig fast. Keep your head down during artillery bombardment. Don't play hero - just do your job and look out for one another."

The first platoon was assigned the upstairs of the house next to the weapons platoon. As they filed up the stairs with their weapons slung muzzle down, the man in front of Stumpy stumbled and shot himself through the top of his right foot. The man was one of the replacements, a clean six foot redhead from the state of Florida. He had forgotten to put his rifle on safety. A self inflicted foot wound was going to be hell to explain to Lt. Watson and General George Patton. The medics took "Big Red" away, the men were bedded down and sent to chow by squads.

At that point, with the men fed and bedded down in real beds, with hot water for sponge baths and shaves, Tillet hit Stumpy. He went looking for the priest that went with the Catholic Church. Latin turned out to be their common language. While the priest said a mass for the dead of Company I, Stumpy wept.

Sgt. Register found Stumpy in the church. Called outside, Register told him to set up a road block at the end of the village away from the church. Stumpy and Sgt. Messier each picked four men. Sgt. Elpert and Sgt. McIntosh each brought a machine gun and an assistant gunner. The defensive position selected was a large standing stone that had a small niche cut into its side. A shrine to Bernadette. The village street became a road and split around the stone, then closed again to a narrow road leading off into flat and frightening snow and darkness. The frozen fields lay flat and hard as iron on either side. Off in the black beyond sight could be heard the constant roar of truck engines and the clank and squealing squeak of tanks moving at high speed. Whose? Ours or theirs? Sgt. Elpert made a real bright suggestion. "Stumpy, go get some mines and enough rope for us to make daisy chains." Smart man! Stumpy left instantly to find Sgt. Enright and the supply room. What he found instead was Staff Sgt. Eugene Lavert Brown (later to become 2nd Lt. by grace of God and the good offices of Gen. Georgie Smith Patton). Stumpy and Brown had grown up playing football in "The Goat Pasture" and dating the same girls from Southside and going to fraternity dances at the Pickwick Club in Birmingham, Alabama. A deal was struck, Stumpy was to get two boxes of mines "and some rope-but not all of it," provided he returned any unused mines. Oaths were sworn, the mines and the rope went with Stumpy to the other end of the village. Sgt. Elpert made his "Daisy-Chain" and nothing happened all night. In the frozen dawn

Stumpy went looking for Sgt. Eugene Brown-H Company of the 347th. They had made an early departure. Company I of the 346th kept the mines for later use.

Skip to some time in 1984 or 1985. Fleeta and Stumpy had gone with friends to Long Dongs' Chinese Restaurant in Birmingham's Eastwood Mall. A voice from the seated crowd: "Stumpy Watson, Where are my goddam mines?" Sure enough, there sat former Sgt./Lt. Eugene Lavert Brown-with the memory of an elephant. Stumpy offered his right arm and a quart of blood. He had an empty land mine box in his work shop, but no mines.

Gene Brown is now vice-president of Thomas Foundry Co. and lives with his wife Evelyn Chapman at 4132 Glennbrook Drive Birmingham, Alabama 35213. Home phone, 205 870 1715 Business phone, 205 595 3900.

"Who was it said, 'Hell is paved with good intentions and roofed over with broken promises?' If you remember Brownie, call him or write him and let him know you care and love him"..Stumpy Watson.

Item Company of the 346th went down the hill to Tillet, Belgium on the afternoon of January 6, 1945 in their usual more or less disorganized fashion. They came away on January 10th with 43 effectives left. That included Sgt. Enright's supply room and the cooks and bakers . The men who trucked into Pironpre were madder than hell with everybody-not just the Krauts-Everybody. Company I had "gone Golden". Suddenly a bunch of boys had become serious fighting men. Their business as long as they could shoot was to get at the enemy and kill as many as they could. The company started taking care of their own. Sgt. Messier went back to Tillet to find the dead and bring them in to graves registration. Messier also testified for the Red Head from Florida who had accidentally shot his own foot. No court martial for that soldier-it was just a careless hunting accident-not intentional. The lazy, the timid, the slow to learn and the unlucky were gone. The company was lean and mean. T/5 Thomas V. Brown, armorer artificer for the company, put the not so severely wounded to work cleaning weapons. The rifles the replacements were bringing in were going single-shot after being in wet snow and mud for a few hours. Tom caught the problem. The operating rod of the M-1 had a slight curve to the right. Tom scraped away a 1/16" of wood where the rod rubbed the upper hand guard. The problem was fixed! He also sent a man to stay at the battalion aid station and collect weapons, especially BAR's and bring them back to be checked out. Anyone who wasn't busy doing anything else was stripping tracers out of the ammo belts and magazines that were issued for night use. Tom Brown made it possible for every man on the firing line to be delivered a cleaned and fully checked weapon when he crawled back to breakfast or with his hot chow at night. Sgt Peter M. Byass was delivering hot chow to the men in their fighting positions. Thank God for Tom Brown. Thank God for Pete Byass.

Around January 15th, Item Company of the 346th was holding a "quiet sector" of the Luxembourg front in rolling wooded hills overlooking the Sauer River. This was not too far from the juncture of the Sauer, Our and Moselle rivers at the town of Wasserbillig and Underbillig. There wasn't much fighting, but a lot of patrolling. The

division was stretched thin. So was I Company. The company had a new CO, Capt. David Kieffer had been 3rd Battalion Supply Officer. All of the men hoped he would "lead from the rear". It had been hard losing Capt. Swanson, wounded through the legs at Tillet. Lt. Bob Watson was now giving more attention to Sgt. Stumpy Watson's first platoon and Sgt. Tommy Miller's second platoon. Lt. Watson told Stumpy and Rock Messier to form a ten man squad from the first platoon and weapons platoon to cover a three quarter mile stretch of the bank of the Sauer River upstream from the company's present position. They were given T/S Stevens with radio, as communications link and forward observer. Rock Messier took Sgt. Richard P. "Moe" Gresch with helper on one machine gun and Sgt. Walter C. McIntosh, with helper on the second machine gun. He also took Sgt. Scrafino V. Leodore as a spare, "just in case." Stumpy Watson took Bill Riley, George Brittenham and Clarence L. Peasley, a new man with poor eyesight, a bad cold, but a great desire to become a fighting man. Since the sector was quiet and the patrol was to be housed in a chateau it looked like a good chance for a rest-away from the rest of the company. The squad left the company in the late afternoon and walked behind their guide for a couple of miles in knee high crusted snow. The guide left when they reached a path leading into a dark stand of fir. He said to walk down the path. It would lead into a clearing with "a big stone house in the center. The guide took off at a brisk trot back the way they had come. It was dark with blowing snow. Stumpy and Rock flipped for the honor of leading the group. Rock Messier lost and took the lead. Fifteen minutes later they broke out of the firs into the edge of what had been a formal garden, now a white wasteland of broken fountains and cracked statuary. There, in three acres of clearing was a multi story chateau. To the squad it looked like a castle, without moat. Messier set his guns to give covering fire while Stumpy and Brittenham went to the chateau to check it out. The upper two floors were clear and the rest of the men were waved in by pairs. Guards were set on the first floor at the front, facing the river off somewhere in the darkness and on the second floor covering the fir forest at the rear and on the sides. Nobody got much sleep till the grey of morning showed part of what they were expected to defend. From the marble terrace across the front the land dropped away to the river at a thirty degree slope. The slope was a terraced vineyard. The orderly rows of vines were pock marked with holes and close by the bodies of German and American soldiers. At first Messier said it was artillery but then he used his glasses and he and Bob Stevens said together, "Mines!" The patrol had walked into the middle of a heavily mined area in the dark. During the night the wind had blown their tracks away.

Stevens got on the radio and tried to contact I Company, then Cannon Company then just anybody. The set was working OK and had fresh batteries, but nobody was listening. Messier and McIntosh spent several hours working first to the left and then to the right setting trip flares in shallow gullies a short distance from the chateau. They got back in one piece without setting anything off. The rest of the men thought them incredibly foolish and shot in the ass with luck.

Riley and Gresch decided to explore the basement. Bill Riley bounced into the ballroom, his arms loaded with dark green bottles of new wine. Gresch was right behind carrying a 10-in-1. Bottles were uncorked, a small fire was built, bacon was fried, stale bread broken out-a feast prepared. Over the next several hours Sgt. Watson and Sgt.

Gresch got knee walking drunk. Bill Riley was to claim later that Stumpy was heard talking to Cannon Company and to Item Company, over his dog tags.

That night, the second in the chateau, Stumpy got a scare that has stayed with him for forty four years. It had started snowing again. The men had agreed that standing watch at night should be two up and three down. The cold and the strain of longer than two hours was too much. Stumpy was relieving Peasley at 1800 at the left rear of the chateau. Peasley wasn't at his post. Stumpy called Sgt. Gresch to help while a search could be made. The rest of the men and quickly manned all points of entry. Stumpy went out the left rear by the kitchen and found tracks leading out into the snow--none leading in--only one set. He followed the footprints to the edge of the fir forest and looked in--nothing! He called softly several times. Nothing! He got down on his hands and knees in the snow and tried looking under the low swept branches along the crest of the snow. Stumpy then saw movement right in front of him just at the edge of the woods. As he struggled to get to his feet he saw two legs encased in white; above that extended a pair of hands holding a rifle pointed at his rump. Above the rifle was a thing out of childhood nightmares--a gray face with large round glassy eyes, but the horror of horrors was the long gray snout hanging down to almost to the things waist. Stumpy just flopped down in the snow and screamed. The thing poked him and then mumbled, "Stumpy, are you O.K.?" Of course the thing was Peasley wearing his gas mask. Why? He had dropped or lost his GI issue glasses and put on his gas mask which was fitted with prescription lenses. Peasley had gone out to answer a call of nature and being a new man hadn't thought to wake one of the other men to cover for him. Imagine a guy carrying a gas mask instead of grenades in his gas mask sack. The rest of the night was spent awake by everyone. Something set off one of Messier's trip flares. The snow on Stumpy's pants melted and ran down on the floor. That caused comment and speculation. Stumpy claimed he wasn't that scared.

The next day was more bad weather. Nothing on the radio. Everyone explored the cellar and estimated the amount of wine. There was several thousand gallons, all in quart bottles lying on their sides, stack on stack with wooden slats between. The weather started to clear the third night and by morning radio contact had been made with the company. A lot of other people must have been monitoring the radio communications because they received a call from Regiment wanting to know how much wine was in the cellar. Stevens said, "About ten thousand gallons, all in quart bottles." The men did not have long to wait. In less than an hour a mine sweeping team had cleared the path, plus a road that the patrol hadn't even seen.

After the road was swept, a truck with a general's star arrived at the chateau and its crew began to load the wine on the truck. When the loading operation was over, the truck departed and the patrol returned to their unit by walking in the tracks that the vehicle had made. The patrol wished the relief squad happy drinking and told them about the trip flares.

Toward the end of January, 1945, Item Company 346th was in reserve when Lt. Bob Watson told Stumpy Watson to form a combat patrol for another three day mission. When stumpy called for "Volunteers"

everyone wanted to go. Rock Messier had already picked his men from the weapons platoon and Lt. Connolly and T/5 Stevens were going as forward observers. The men in the rifle companies were absolutely, positively sure that "Watson, Watson and Messier, Ltd." had found another stash of liquor and other goodies. Lt. Watson had called for forty men. Capt. David Kieffer objected strongly that Item Company was being stripped of most of his experienced men to perform a job for regiment that was a special job. Sgt. Robert G. Elpert was a little worried when the men from weapons platoon were told to turn in all their personal papers and identification including dog tags.

Just before dark, with snow swirling and sticking to their just issued "white suits" the patrol set out, led by two members of the Tiger Patrol closely followed by Sgts. Watson and Messier. Their objective, the town of Wasserbillig, sat at the juncture of the Sauer, Our and Moselle Rivers in the Duchy of Luxembourg. Lt. Watson had explained to Rock Messier and Stumpy that the German defenders were nothing but a "Light Battalion" of "sorry" German Volks Grenadiers who were being supplied by boat from German territory just across the river in the town of Underbillig. The Lieutenant never explained why these "sorry" troops had not been kicked back into Germany by the encircling Third Army. These thoughts were the background music in Stumpy's head as the men walked down the elevated railroad tracks toward the town.

On the patrol's right ran the silent river, on the left an open expanse of snow. The men felt very exposed despite the snow and the pitch dark. If caught in this exposed position, they were sitting ducks. As they came into sight of the first buildings in the town Stumpy could see an unmanned machine gun position in a shop or warehouse building to their left. The gun was positioned to cover a lacework of wire that ended at the first houses of the village on their right. At this point the Tiger Patrol had completed its mission. They had led the combat patrol to the gate of the objective so they left. Stumpy was suddenly all alone in the dark at the head of a restless, but silent line of men, all anxious to leave their exposed positions. Lt., Bob Watson stepped up with, "Let's go". In front of them was the lacework of wire, strung out two feet high in an elongated diamond pattern about six feet from point to point, sprinkled with grenades, flares, and other goodies too numerous to mention. Stumpy handed his rifle to Lt. Watson, straddled the wire at a connecting point. Lt. Watson handed both his and Stumpy's rifle back and crossed the wire and hurried forward to to the first house on the right. As each man took his turn at stepping across the wire, he would hand his weapon to Stumpy, cross then retrieve his weapon and hurry off into the darkness to form their fire teams. Stumpy remembered Sgt. Moe Gresch crossing with his machine gun near the head of the column. Pvt. Bob Loudermilk, the guy who dug up the WWI shell when the company was in Verdun on December 23rd was part of Gresch's gun crew. He was carrying two cans of machine gun ammo and had gotten to come on the patrol because of his load carrying ability despite a severe head cold. Trying to stifle a sneeze, Loudermilk dropped one can of ammo on the railroad track and grabbed his nose. Everyone froze, not knowing at what moment the Germans would appear to check up on all the noise. Nothing happened. The men quickly finished their transit of the wire.

After the last man had crossed, Stumpy became the last man in

the column, By prearrangement, to insure that the patrol was not being followed and then trapped by the Germans, Stumpy stayed behind in one of the houses near the wire and within sight of the still unmanned machine gun position. He was supposed to observe for ten minutes then catch up with the patrol by following their tracks in the snow. If the patrol heard him shoot, they would know they had walked into a trap and to take cover. If he heard them shoot, he was supposed to wait and give them covering fire as they came back out. Stumpy waited too long. The wind blew the tracks out. He searched for almost an hour without finding any sign of the patrol. He went back to first houses on the river embankment where they had entered the village. The German machine gun position was still unmanned. Stumpy opened the door to the second house in the row and crept inside. He started a small fire in a laundry heater stove and tried to stay warm and dry himself out. On the way in he had stopped the patrol on the railroad tracks, slid down the bank and tested the ice on a frozen lake running along the land side of the tracks. He had broken through the ice and made so much noise he was sure every German in Belgium and Luxembourg had sprung to their guns. He was wet from the knees down. Without the fire his feet could have frozen. He felt the fire was worth the chance. Suddenly he heard his name called, then again: "Stumpy, are you in there?"

"I'm in here-come on inside-quick," was the relieved reply. Stumpy has wished he could remember the name of that soldier who risked his life to go back and find him. The GI told Stumpy that the patrol had gone to ground in two houses near the river but planned to move into a church that Messier had discovered while on a reconnaissance. The snow had stopped and the sky was beginning to get light when gun fire erupted down river in the direction the patrol had gone. Answering fire flashed along the far bank and from a couple of boats in the river. Stumpy quickly finished lacing his size thirteen snowpacs, drank the last gulp of a melted D-bar and hurried after his guide and savior. They caught up with the patrol, now being led on a quick march to the Catholic Church by Lt. Watson and Lt. Connolly. As the patrol entered the church many of the men, like Messier and Riley genuflected and crossed themselves before taking defensive positions at the rear doors, the windows and the slitted windows on the steps leading up to the choir loft.

Stumpy and his guide just got into the church before the heavy double doors at the front were slammed shut and the bolt bars were thrust into place. The silence was broken by a few random shots from a hotel catty-corner from the left front of the church and from the left rear of the church and across the street. Soon all hell broke loose with a storm of rifle and burp-gun fire on the church. The men inside the church held their fire until the rush by two German assault teams of ten or twelve men each. George Brittenham and three other BAR men firing from the windows overlooking the street knocked the attackers reeling back around the corners of the hotel and the building behind the church. Bill Riley could be heard singing above the crash of gun fire, "I don't care if it rains or freezes, I am safe in the arms of Jesus. I am Jesus little man-Yes by Jesus Christ I am!" Soon men were singing or humming the tune from firing points and from the basement of the church where T/5 Erasmus Pistone and T/4 Henry P. Dart Jr., the company "brain surgeon" had set up shop. Pistone soon reappeared to inquire if his personal grease gun might be of help. The fire fight continued for a short time and then it died down as the day got

brighter. T/S Stevens, a forward observer, had his radio with him and it wasn't working too well. Stumpy went up into the steeple to see if he could pick off some of the Germans from that point.. He brought up a long barreled German rifle that he had found. Upon getting to the second level, he noticed the mechanism had bee bobby-trapped with artillery shells and anyone pulling on the bell cord would set off the explosives. The word went out in a hurry, "Don't pull the bell cord."

Stumpy looked out from the steeple and spotted a group of German soldiers in a knot about five hundred yards away. He adjusted the sights for what he thought was that distance and popped off a round. The Germans flew in every direction. Stumpy did not believe that he had hit anyone, just spooked them a it.

As the day progressed, the Germans kept attacking the church and were repelled every time. As soon as a German went down, the body was removed by his comrades. This continued for two days and two nights and on the third night, Stumpy was awakened by Bill Riley. "Stumpy, it's too damn quiet out there." Riley was concerned that the Germans were sneaking up to the church for another attack. "Wake every one up and make sure they don't make any noise," replied Stumpy. A quick inventory of ammunition was made and the men realized they were running low. They had hoped for phosphorous grenades, to light up the street, but there were none. Aside from small arms rounds they had a few fragmentation grenades. "Let's save those just in case we have to drop them from the windows on them." suggested Dutch Sherk.

Pop Milligan started shooting from the front of the church. Brittenham shouted out, "They're coming through the front door." Stumpy screamed, "Get to the sides. Get to the sides," as machine gun fire raked the center of the church. Brittenham then yelled that one of the BAR men and a couple of other GI's were hemmed up in the two story house behind the church. The Germans were trying to get into the church through the rear court yard. Sgt. Brittenham, Stumpy and a company runner by the name of La Blanc ran from the rear door of the church, nearest the street, toward the door of the two story building facing the rear of the church across fifty or sixty feet of court yard. The three had reached the steps leading to the door of "the school" when they heard firing inside the building, both the "BUMP! BUMP! BUMP!" of a BAR and the "BRRRRR! BRRRRR! BRRRRR!" of the German burp gun. In an instant all three had dodged to the right of the steps leading up and had started down a set of steps leading underneath those steps to a cul-de-sac basement room. Brittenham was in the lead. As he started down, heavy firing broke out in the street from both the front and the rear. Suddenly a white clad German soldier came into view in the middle of the street and angling toward the rear door of the church. Several things happened at once: Brittenham turned on the steps to face back toward the street; Stumpy also turned toward the street and the sound of heavy firing; La Blanc, the runner, who was attached by a slip noose of wire around his neck to a "grab hold" in Stumpy's left hand (to remind him not to run too soon) dove between Stumpy's legs, jerking Stumpy to his knees; La Blanc jumped up in Brittenham's face, knocking Britt's BAR into a wedge position over Britt's head and across the entrance to the steps leading underground; La Blanc ducked around or under Brittenham and slid to the bottom of the stairs. Brittenham jerked his BAR free and fired across and past Stumpy's head. (Stumpy was still on his knees in the snow trying to

bring his M-1 into firing position from where it had been dropped when La Blanc went under him). The German soldier had reached a position about forty feet from the back door of the church, with other men coming around the side of the "Boys School" into view, when the leader suddenly blew up just as Brittenham put the lead to him. The attackers were stunned; there was a pause; Brittenham and Stumpy fired at the leaderless mob and they turned and fled back around the corner of the "Boys School". In the quiet that followed came the distinct Pop! Pop! of Pop Milligan's carbine firing from the front corner of the church. The front door of the "Boys School" cracked open and a voice above Stumpy and Brittenham said, "It's clear. Come on. Let's get the hell out of here." Three men eased down the steps, then ran slipping and stumbling across the icy cobblestones of the back court yard and to the rear door of the church where they yelled, "For Chrissake let me in!" and were almost run over by Brittenham and Stumpy who were right behind them. It was later that someone thought of La Blanc. Was he still in the underground stairwell? Brittenham worried about him and asked what should be done. Stumpy suggested, not unkindly, that he should be shot on sight. Max Blundell and Vinny Leodore told Brittenham that his three round burst had hit the detonator of a Panzerfaust that the leader of the attack was carrying under his arm, ready to fire. The death of their leader had broken up the German attack.

Later that night Sgt. Elpert and Sgt. Leodore were told to go get the dead German's body. They dashed out and dragged back into the church the broken body of Capt. Hans Voegel, 1943 graduate of the Metz O.C.S. He also had, in addition to maps and orders, a picture of his wife and two children, and a fifty Reichsmark note that was signed by as many members of the patrol as there was room for names.

The enemy regrouped and worked their way into the houses and two story buildings facing the side and front of the church. A German machine gun firing through the front of the church, let up and Stumpy figured they were changing belts. Racing to the altar, Stumpy jumped up on it and having followed the path of the German tracers, began to fire back through the door in the same trajectory. When he got through firing back at where he thought the German machine gun was, Stumpy jumped off the altar and as he hit the floor, his haunches drove the knife in his boot into his heel. Bill Riley looked over at Stumpy and said, "See. It's bad luck to stand on altars."

The Germans regrouped again. Machine gun fire and burp gun fire raked the church. Mortar and artillery fire started to land in the village. Lt. John Connolly, who was the forward observer, went up in the steeple to direct his own artillery in support of the patrol. Because the walls of the church were too thick, their signal could not get out so they placed the radio by a window with the antenna sticking out. The concussion from an exploding shell dropped the antenna into the street. Sgt. Riley went into the street to retrieve it. Again the antenna was knocked into the street and again Bill Riley went after it. Finally with 105's laying in on them, they gave up attempting to reach headquarters and retreated into the basement of the church to wait out the barrage.

With the patrol now all in the church, the men felt somewhat secure until a 105 came bouncing through one of the small windows in

the small room on the street side at the front of the church. After sputtering around the floor it came to a dead halt at the feet of Erv Sherk. Bill Riley put on his gloves and very calmly rolled the shell on his arms and dumped it out of the church window. Stumpy didn't wait to see what might happen. He got out of the room along with everyone but Riley. Riley's field jacket and gloves were scorched from the heat of the shell.

Stumpy went up the stairs at the left front to where Pop Milligan was firing from a narrow slit window to tell him to conserve his ammunition. By this time, the patrol was running very low on ammo. Looking out the window Stumpy saw that there were six or seven Germans lying on the ground diagonally across the street from the church. Pop Milligan had stopped two machine gun crews with nothing but his carbine. He hadn't wasted much ammo—just Krauts. The shelling slowed a bit and Max Blundell was hit in the neck by shrapnel.

The next day was spent sniping back and forth. No one left the church.

On the fourth evening, a Tiger Patrol made its way to the church and advised Watson's patrol they were being relieved and to evacuate immediately. The relieving column was led by Glen Doman. The only casualties suffered by the patrol were Max Blundell who had been nicked in the neck by a piece of shrapnel and Moe Gresch who had a broken collar bone from falling masonry.

Of the men that were on that patrol, Stumpy remembers these names, Loudermilk, Bob Watson, Max Blundell, Leodore, Sherk, La Blanc, Gresch, Dart, Pitt, Peasley, Aller, Jenkins, Cockrill, Maguire, Barnes, Manikowski, Milligan, Connolly, Elpert, Conlin, Brittenham, Riley, Smialowicz, Stevens, Reetz, Messier, and Mann.

With a few days rest after Wasserbillig, the men of Item Company were motor marched by truck, Jeep and Weasel to St. Vith. It has been said of Achen that after the Allied bombing, "Every brick was broken twice." The 346th was relieving some more "airborne" troops while the Germans were still milling around in the area. On the way to St. Vith, Stumpy and Bill Riley and a BAR man other than Brittenham, found an unattended and lonesome looking Jeep. Since there was a standing order to retrieve all misplaced government equipment, the Jeep took up with the three and became their personal transport until it could be repainted by the used Jeep specialists of Item Company.

At a break for lunch in a small shot up Belgium cafe, Sgt. Riley almost ran over a German "Buck Rogers" burp gun lying in the snow as he parked the Jeep. Stumpy picked it up and knocked it against a tree, put it on fire and ripped off a string into the air. The burst attracted several GI's with pointy rifles—not to mention two curious MP types. Stumpy turned the weapon over to the MP's who told him not to do that again.

Stumpy and Riley went into the cafe, leaving their BAR companion and the Jeep at the side of the building where the numbers didn't show up too well. Sure enough, Riley found a bottle and some "real cheese" to go on their crackers. He broke down his Thompson and was cleaning it while Stumpy was looking at a broad bit, short handle

axe that resembled one he had used on the farm in Wilcox County, Alabama, to square and shape bridge timbers. There was a sudden burst of firing outside. A vehicle slammed into the side of the cafe. There was some more firing, American type, and the front door of the cafe burst open. Stumpy was reaching for his rifle, still holding the axe in his right hand. A German officer with silver lightning on his collar quickly raised his Luger and fired at Stumpy's head from about four or five feet, burning the skin along Stumpy's head and drawing blood from his left ear in the notch between his head and the ear. Stumpy stepped into the second shot that slapped the right side of his head and hit the Kraut with an overhand blow with the axe that split him from the bill of his cap, down his forehead, through his chin, and throat ending with the butt of the bit stopping in his breastbone. There was blood all over. Riley grabbed the pieces of his Thompson, and got in the Jeep. As soon as Stumpy could see to move, he followed him. Nobody stopped them. Riley looked at Stumpy and said, "SHIT!"

They drove on to St. Vith.

...To be continued in the next issue...



WASSERBILLIG

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VETERANS OF
GENERAL PATTON'S
3RD ARMY &
THE BATTLE
OF THE BULGE

Story P. 40

WARDLOW M. WATSON
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BIRMINGHAM, AL 35222

MARCH 1990

Stumpy

PETROCK

CENTRAL EUROPE

RHINELAND

ARDENNES

March

87TH INF DIV

1990

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The GOLDEN ACORN NEWS does not verify the historical accuracy of the stories published in this column. The words printed here are the recollections of the individual veteran who states his story, "AS HE REMEMBERS IT."

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* * * * * AS I REMEMBER IT * * * * *

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WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346

.....continued from the last issue.....

As our last chapter ended, Stumpy Watson had just defended himself against a German officer by hitting him in the head with an ax.

After Bill Riley and Stumpy Watson had left the cafe and were on their way to St. Vith, their BAR man and jeep driver told them what had happened outside just before the German officer burst through the door. The jeep driver said he saw another jeep pull up to the cafe and saw the driver, who was a German soldier, get shot by the MP's Stumpy had encountered earlier. The other German then fled into the cafe where he had his fatal meeting with Stumpy. Riley observed that it was fortunate the German fired at Stumpy's head. He noted that both shots had hit Stumpy in the head and bounced off.

A short time later, Stumpy stopped the jeep, got off the back, dropped in the snow and vomited. He tried to get the blood off his white camouflage suit with the snow but had little success.

About an hour later the remains of St. Vith began to appear. Mounds of broken brick; pits where houses had stood; blown out vehicles of every description all softened by the knee deep snow. They learned later that St. Vith was taken and lost three times by the Germans. The last time the airborne had come back was after a three hundred plane bombing raid by the 8th Air Corps. Sgt. Joe Barfield commenting on the lack of standing structures said, "There weren't no tits just pits!"

The jeep came to a stop near the weapons platoon and as the men prepared to turn the vehicle over to Sgt. Alexander Messier, the smell of coffee hit them. Riley parked the jeep near a brick wall that was still standing and they proceeded toward a group of men who were in the process of pumping up and lighting one of the small squad stoves. Suddenly the man holding the stove, Sgt. Walter Mc Intosh, burst into flames on his arms and all over the front of the woolen GI overcoat he was wearing. Everyone jumped back as Mc Intosh let a whoop and took off into the snow. Sgt. Messier who was Mc Intosh's best friend and squad leader took off after him and brought him down with a flying tackle. Messier rolled Mc Intosh over and over in the snow until the flames went out.

The bringing to Sgt. Messier another jeep for his now famous "Tank Killer Bazooka Teams" seemed anti-climatic but Messier was happy to have the extra jeep and set about to hook it up to a trailer he had found. It was immediately loaded with the new bazookas and fifteen

rounds of bazooka ammo the airborne had left behind. The new bazookas had magneto sparked ignition instead of the old type battery fired ones.

The men reported to Lt. Bob Watson who told them they would be getting some replacements and a new lieutenant some time that night, or the next day at the latest. Lt. Watson offered a comment on Stumpy's bloody appearance but Stumpy did not wish to volunteer the information about the jeep or the encounter in the cafe. Stumpy then went to check with his platoon and found them dug in at the base of a low jagged wall with fly canvas over straw and sleeping bags unrolled. Stumpy took off his shoe pacs, took off the blood spattered white camouflage suit, gave that away, climbed into a bag and went to sleep. Sometime during the early morning the ground began to shake as artillery shells began to drop in. Stumpy grabbed his tankers pants, shoe pacs and put them on and went to check with Sgt. Register.

Sgt. Register had sent part of the weapons platoon with machine guns - the kitchen fifties - and two bazooka teams to the west of St. Vith. The snow had started again. Just at dawn there was tank fire off to the west so Sgt. Register sent a runner off to find out what was going on and then got Sgt. Messier on the field phone. It appeared that the firing was from a company of tanks from a bastard tank battalion attached to the regiment and they had fired at several trucks that had tried approaching their position from the west. Conjecture was the trucks were probably the supply team bringing in the replacements they were promised.

Sgt. Vinny Leadore came plodding up to the tent leading what was probably the strangest thing anyone had ever seen in an active combat zone. A Baptist Chaplain had somehow gotten lost in the snow and wandered into I Company's position. The chaplain had with him his driver, jeep and jeep trailer equipped with a bellows organ and a whole pile of song sheets. All the men thought the hand of the Lord had set this man down in their midst to say services for the dead, who surrounded them on all sides and who came to light every time a snow bank was disturbed. Stumpy could never remember the chaplain's name but remembered he came from Anniston, Alabama. The thought crossed his mind that probably the Southside Baptist Church of Birmingham might have sent the good chaplain to collect the one dollar a month pledge Stumpy had failed to send since August of 1944. It seemed to Stumpy that, every time there was a mail call, the first piece of mail Stumpy would receive was a bill from the church for one dollar.

The chaplain finally got down to business and passed out song sheets while his assistant pumped up the organ. The men sang. The noise from the singing attracted more soldiers and a crowd soon formed. The chaplain started a standard issue service for the dead and by now the group had grown to thirty five or forty men. A crowd always seems to attract attention and this one was no different. The first round hit far to the east. The second one a bit closer. By now everyone had taken cover in or under something solid. Stumpy heard a jeep crank up and fade away into the falling snow. With the shelling stopped, the men began to crawl out from hiding and to check on casualties, if any. The groups' only loss was the chaplain and his assistant and the jeep and trailer that contained the new bazookas and spare ammo. In the confusion, they had left the jeep and organ behind. Who should come back into their area, about this time, but Sgt. Bill

Riley and his scouting patrol. Riley had a flair for the dramatic and on this occasion he did himself proud. Riley was riding bareback on a mule. Wound around his neck was a flowing white silk scarf and on his head perched a tall black silk opera hat. Like a magician pulling rabbits out of a hat, Riley slid down from his mount and with a sweep of his hat gave attention to two other mules that materialized out of the gathering storm on lead ropes and loaded with 10-in-1 rations slung on blankets across their backs. Behind the mules came a straggle of twenty to twenty five men, some armed, some not, following a fat figure with a wild bushy bronze beard. Riley introduced him as Chaplain Cuddy whom he found wandering in the snow with his following of stragglers who, like himself, he described as "Temporarily Detached". The chaplain wasn't all that fat. When he undraped the GI blanket from his head and shoulders and opened his field jacket he was revealed in all his glory as a walking liquor ration. The chaplain was armor plated about his middle with White Horse Scotch and cognac. Sgt. Register took charge of the men and assigned them to the short handed platoons and Tom Brown supplied them with weapons. Lt. Bob Watson led the chaplain to the command tent to see Captain Kieffer. Pete Byas took over the 10-in-1 rations and Riley went off with the mules to find some fodder for them. When he returned, Stumpy told him about the earlier church service and the sudden departure of the "Mobile Reserve", the jeep with the bazookas. Riley cocked an eye at Stumpy, opened his field jacket and produced a bottle of schnapps, threw his arm around Stumpy's shoulder and in his very best voice of piety observed, "God will provide." To which Stumpy echoed, "Aaahmen".

Sometime during that night the snow stopped. A supply truck driven by Dave Matson, I Company's regular driver from Service Company, came grinding in loaded with replacements, grenades, bazooka ammo and the new Platoon Leader, 1st Lt. Roy J.L. Charest. The Lieutenant had already been wounded in combat while in the Pacific. He had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 with an ammo detail and had been injured during the battle. His Commanding Officer recommended him for O.C.S. and he had received his training at Fort Benning and then been posted to a unit stationed near Spartanburg, South Carolina. This information was supplied to Stumpy by Sgt. Register along with the news that the platoon was being moved up to another village named Herresbach. Stumpy was then informed that they would go on the attack in the afternoon. The move took all day and by nightfall they were finally in the process of relieving the airborne troops that were holding the town and the forward slope of the hill going down to the stone bridge over the Our River and into the town of Andler.

First Platoon moved into a pretty good house and barn complete with an airborne staff sergeant named Jones who played the guitar and sang. The men got a mail call and Stumpy received some Christmas letters from home. Lt. Charest received a telegram which he handed to Stumpy. It was a short message stating he had a son. Stumpy noticed that it came from Spartanburg. The lieutenant and Sgt. Jones thought that called for a celebration so Stumpy volunteered to find the battalion supply depot and see if they could draw down a liquor ration. It was January 29 and with any luck the supplies might have caught up with the unit. Lt. Charest had a supply of Belgian and French invasion money which was handed to Stumpy and Lt. Bob Watson. The two went looking for Battalion Supply. When they returned after an extended delay, it was quite late and almost everyone had hit the sack. However, there were several of the men that helped the

lieutenant celebrate the news of his son. They then checked on the guards and turned in until 400 hours when they were to prepare for a first light attack on Andler. A few hours later, Stumpy was awakened by the sound of heavy firing from somewhere nearby. When he went out to check with the guards and sentries, he found Sgts. Riley, Brittenham and Lutterman already at the outposts trying to calm down the jittery sentries. No one knew the password but that didn't matter since the wounded GI's passing through their positions to Battalion Aid at the other end of town didn't know either. Periodically a flare would light up the sky in the northwest direction of Herresbach and then there would be a periodic growling roar of small arms fire with an occasional flat "blam" of a tank or anti tank gun. I Company did not get much sleep. At about 330 hours Lt. Bob Watson came up with the news that the airborne outfit they were to relieve at first light had been hit by a company or better of German parachute troops during the night. So much for that "old men and boys" crap that they were being handed by their intelligence people. The German bodies they had seen so far looked awfully big and healthy, even dead. Up to now they had not seen any prisoners from the fighting but the men knew that if you got hit in that cold and did not get immediate aid, you had a better than even chance of going into shock and freezing to death. These were thoughts that were racing through Stumpy's head as they formed up to try and relieve the airborne unit that had repulsed the night attack.

Guides appeared and led the men forward; up and then down a well beaten path through the snow field. They soon came to a large rock formation. Sheltered behind the rocks were a couple of Sherman tanks. Capt. David Kieffer, Lt. Charest, Lt. Bob Watson, Sgt. Register, a K Company officer and a couple of tankers were all squatting in the snow trying to see a map. Upon viewing this, Stumpy was reminded of something an old R.O.T.C. officer at Phillips High School had told him. "There was only one thing more dangerous than a second lieutenant with a map and that was a colonel explaining to a bunch of lieutenants where he wanted them to go from a map he was holding."

Stumpy noticed that one of the tank crews was under the command of a "sawed-off raggedy-assed" red headed lieutenant who was cussing a blue streak as he directed two men with a ramrod, punch a broken shell out of the breech of his tank gun. He also had his men checking every shell on the tank but especially every one in the ready racks inside the vehicle. They had evidently found some shells inside the tank that were either broken or bent because the gun loader popped his hatch open and threw some rounds out into the snow. The lieutenant talked to the sergeant in the second tank and the sergeant nodded, went to the second tank and said something to his crew. A short time later, six rounds of H.E. and A.P. were passed to the lieutenant's tank. The lieutenant kept four rounds and rejected two which were piled in the snow with the earlier rejects. Stumpy asked the sergeant, who had a southern drawl, if he was going into attack short of ammo, and would he try to use the ammo now piled in the snow. He replied, "Naw, if that red headed Tennessee bastard thinks it might break in the breech, it probably will. He's got more lives than a cat, but the reason we're still alive is he don't take nothin' but 'Hafter Chances'." The sergeant then explained to Stumpy that the ammo they now had was the discard from one of the 4th Armored units that had fought nearby a week or two before.

(CONT. ON PG. 50)

The red headed lieutenant then cranked up his tank and poked the snout of his gun around the rock. The sergeant scrambled into his tank and prepared to move. Several infantrymen from an outfit other than Stumpy's climbed on the deck of the lieutenants tank. The tank made a dash around the rock into the open and started down the icy slope. Several more infantrymen ran at a crouch behind the tank. The tank began to pull away from the racing infantry. It had traveled about 200 yards down the hill when there was a "flash and a crack". The snow in front of the tank turned black and a big puff of black smoke spilled out behind the racing tank. The tanker locked the treads and went skidding down the slope toward the bridge. The men riding the tank threw themselves into the icy snow to either side and stumbled back up the hill keeping well clear of the fresh tank tracks. Another "crack" and this time the explosion was at a spot where the tank would have been if it had continued its headlong plunge. The men behind the tank were now into the snow to either side. The second tank came around the rock and lined its gun down the hill and fired. The first tank had completed its slide and was now coming back up the hill even faster, it seemed, than it had gone down. Stumpy scrambled through the snow to get clear of where the returning tank would be at any second. There was a flash from a tower beyond the bridge in the town of Andler. The lieutenants tank slowed, there was a deafening explosion where Stumpy had been just moments before. Stumpy was dazed and down in the snow. The lieutenants tank fired and then came back quickly to where the smoke was still rising from the snow. Some one grabbed Stumpy by the collar and dragged him rapidly away from the action. His head was ringing and he once again experienced an out of body phenomenon and watched the action from away from his body as a spectator. He felt great and sensed a great deal of energy. Other men came charging around the corner of the rock pile and threw themselves flat into the snow well away from the two tanks. The lieutenants were now shouting and laughing at each other. They shut down their engines.

Stumpy then heard the officer with the maps say, "Tell that damned Harris to come over here," One of the men on the ground called over to the red headed lieutenant. The lieutenant climbed out of his tank, jumped to the ground and went over to where the officer with the maps was. "Did you get a fix on that gun?" asked the colonel. "It damn near dusted your ass off that time." The lieutenant laughed and spit a well chewed cigar butt into the snow and said, "Close don't count, colonel." Stumpy observed that moving fox holes seemed to attract a lot of attention.

It was now full light around 0845 hours. The men of Item Company pulled back up the trail a couple of hundred yards from the scene of action and were sent back in small groups to get some chow. At about 1000 hours word was passed around that they would try to sneak in a few troops at a time and relieve the airborne troops immediately to their front across the ridge. Stumpy believes that Sgt. Carl Carmack, third platoon, was the first across the ridge and into or behind a still burning house and separate barn or equipment shed off to its left front. Sgt. Tommy Millers second platoon was next with Stumpy's first platoon completing the change over in the rifle pits and dug in positions. Sgt. Messier's weapons platoon took over the machine guns and mortars of the relieved force in place. As they left, many of the airborne troops left their pistol grip, wire stock carbines behind along with all of their ammunition. They pulled out in a hurry. Now the men had a chance to get a good look at what all the

firing had been about the night before.

A German column either lost in the heavy snowfall or at least unaware of the airborne troops position, walked in a column of twos into the waiting machine guns and carbines of the American troops. The result was a slaughter in the snow. Flares lit the snow like daylight and the airborne from their protected positions shot anything that moved to their front and flanks. A few Germans fought through to the shed-like barn. Their bodies lay sprawled where they had fallen. Stretched across the whole front of the position for a hundred yards and down the bare slope of the hill to the front were German bodies in ones and twos and sometimes in clumps of a dozen or more. Remembering the wounded that had come back through Herresbach in the night, the fight had not been entirely one sided.

Nothing was now happening and the order to stand down was given. The men waited and finally Sgt. Miller and a couple of other men climbed out of their positions. Burleigh A. Smith, one of the best liked men in the company, walked over to where a small fire was burning. In a few minutes, as the tension eased and nothing happened, three or four more men joined Burleigh Smith at the fire, warming their hands and laughing. Suddenly Burleigh, who was facing down hill toward the Our River, pitched forward across the fire. A couple of the men pulled him out of the fire and dragged him behind the house. The rest of the men took cover. No one heard the shot that brought Burleigh down. In a few minutes word came from the medics; Burleigh Smith was dead. Shot between the eyes by a bullet that went in but never left his head. This place of death had now claimed a man from Item Company; one who had led a charmed life up until that moment.

Stumpy looked down that almost barren snow covered slope and thought how much it looked like a replay of the attack made on Tillet. Stumpy hoped this time they would not get any artillery preparation. This time they would put a scout out ahead of the company. Because their most experienced scout Red Harrison from Uriah, Alabama had been wounded earlier and because they wanted an experienced soldier as a scout, Sgts. Brittenham, Stevens and Riley picked Stumpy to be the point. While the platoon waited for the attack order, Lt. Charest showed Stumpy how to use a weapon he had not seen before. It was a fragmentation grenade launcher. The M-1 had the adapter just as you would for AT grenades and after a few tries, Stumpy could get an air burst at about 30 yards on the downhill slope. Stumpy played with his new toy for a few more minutes, hitched up his pants and took off. What he did not think about was the device rendered his M-1 into a single shot rather than a semiautomatic weapon. Stumpy took two bandoleers of ammunition, two fragmentation grenades and one white phosphorous and set off down the trail.

He hadn't gone more than two hundred yards when suddenly, a "body" about thirty yards in front of him flipped over in the snow, jerked a white cover off a light machine-gun and swung it in his direction. The German's movements were awkward and Stumpy jumped to his right and landed behind two dead Germans in a shallow ditch backed by a small bank with snow covered bushes. The machine-gun fired away in his direction and Stumpy flipped a grenade at the gunner but he had failed to pull the pin. The Germans began to yell as the grenade landed near them and the gun went silent. Then it began to bark again. This time Stumpy made sure the pin was removed and tossed another

grenade. The machine gun stopped firing. Stumpy took a quick look over the dead Germans and saw the gunner was lying still and the other was trying to crawl away. Stumpy shot him in the butt.

Shooting that German was almost his undoing. Stumpy discovered there were more Germans a bit more to the left and fifteen yards further down the road. He also discovered his rifle was now single-shot. The Germans began to fire in his direction. They did not know where he was. They were firing where they thought he might be. Stumpy peeked out from between the two dead Germans, that were his protection, and saw a rifle arc over a snow bank, lie there pointing in his direction and fire. Stumpy waited for the rifle to arc again. It did. Stumpy aimed a little below where he saw the rifle go down in the snow and squeezed off a round. The German did not fire but Stumpy saw the rifle slide back out of sight. Stumpy waited some more and pretty soon the rifle made the same arc and rested on the snow. This time he fired a little bit lower and the German never arced his rifle again. A bit later, Stumpy picked off another one the same way.

Working his way back up the ditch, Stumpy found a spot a little deeper and protected by three bodies of really big, frozen German soldiers. Just as he had settled into his little fort, a burst from a burp-gun tore the ground around him. The fire had come from the area behind him. Looking over he could see two Germans shooting through the hedge and raking all the places where he had been in that ditch. Taking the white phosphorous grenade, Stumpy heaved it as high as he could in their general direction. The grenade never went off. Then he heard the bark of a mortar. The round came crashing down somewhere behind him. Stumpy thought the Germans would walk the rounds in his general direction but nothing happened. He waited and waited and still nothing happened.

Then he noticed that the sky was beginning to get darker. It had been snowing off and on all morning and now it began to snow viciously. The left side of his face was half frozen from pressing it against the frozen bodies. He took off his helmet and peered over the frozen bodies down hill. He could just make out what appeared to be a little whirlwind or dust-devil and it was moving up the path in his direction. The decision was made and as the whirlwind came by his position, Stumpy jumped into the center of the swirling snow and took off up hill in the middle of it. He could not see anything but the path and a few feet in front of him. About thirty yards in front of Item Company's position, he stumbled across the body of Lt. Roy Charest.

Lt. Charest had tried to go to the aid of Stumpy when he was caught in the open by the machine gun. When the Germans swung the gun on the lieutenant, Stumpy was able to throw the grenade but, for the lieutenant, it was too late. The machine-gun burst killed him.

Stumpy Watson remembers that as he crossed into Item Company's position he was singing at the top of his panting lungs, "I don't care if it rains or freezes; I am safe in the arms of Jesus; I am Jesus little man; yes by Jesus Christ I am!" Bill Riley and George Elpert were there to greet him and they escorted him to the back of a house. There by the corner of the house was a knocked out tank with its gun pointing down into the snow. As the group passed around the side of the tank, they saw ahead in the snow what was left of two more

of their group. They had tripped a large box mine just minutes before. One had no face and arms the other had no legs. There wasn't much any of the medics could do but give them morphine. Stumpy wanted to put the two out of their misery with a shot to head apiece but Riley stopped him. Said Stumpy, "That's what I would want some one to do for me."

Once Riley and Elpert got Stumpy settled down behind a wall they told him what happened while he was down the slope. At this point someone handed him a cup of coffee laced with Calvados which Stumpy thought had kerosene. They didn't want to tell him about George Brittenham being wounded. Riley told Stumpy that the instant the firing started between Stumpy and the German machine-gun position, Lt. Charest jumped up and followed by Brittenham started down the hill in his direction. The German machine-gun swung away from Stumpy and opened up on Lt. Charest who was hit full in the chest and died instantly. The volley continued past the lieutenant and hit Brittenham in the legs and hips. Brittenham was quickly brought back and turned over to the medics. By that time Stumpy had finished off the machine gunner and earned the full attention of the other Germans in his vicinity. Riley told Stumpy that he looked terrible. His face was all screwed up and frozen in position with his left eye nearly closed from being pressed against the frozen German bodies.

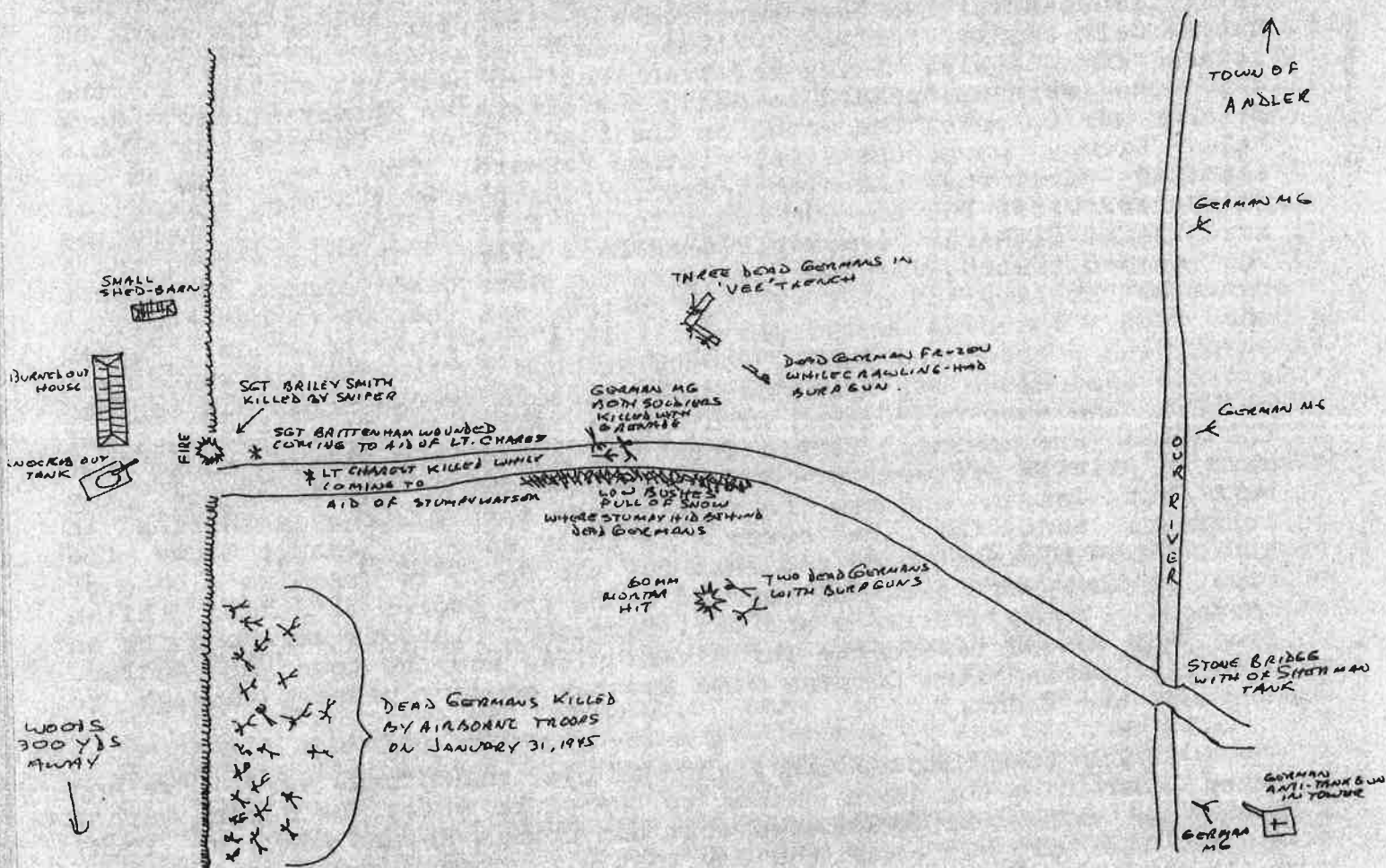
Riley now told Stumpy Captain Kieffer had been hit and evacuated and Major William R. Reilly and part of his Regimental Intelligence staff had been captured and disappeared into the woods on their left flank. Further, Stumpy was to organize the company and attack immediately. Using the plan that had been set earlier in the day, the word was passed to begin the attack on Stumpy's lead. Rock Messier was to cover the woods on the right flank. Getting out of his hole, Stumpy waved the first platoon forward. There was almost no shooting until they had almost overrun the place of Stumpy's earlier encounter. First the platoon swept to the left of the trench where the fire fight with the German riflemen took place. They were dead in a Vee shaped trench. Behind them were two more dead Germans he didn't remember killing and a little bit further was the one he had shot in the butt. The dead German was still in a crawling position, frozen stiff with a blood red face. Stumpy stopped to look at him and almost got his head blown off a second time. Bullets cracked past his ear and he hit the snow and looked to his right rear to see how the rest of the attack was moving. To his front was a low snow covered ridge that gave a little protection. Stumpy crawled out of the trail past the butt-shot German and saw the rest of the 1st platoon gathering in prisoners that they had overrun in their headlong charge down the hill. The platoon moved too fast for the enemy to organize a base of fire as they were crawling forward among the bodies of their fallen comrades. Tommy Miller's and Carl Carmack's platoons were pushing on down the slope toward the Our River bridge and the town of Andler. Directly behind Item Company came another company passing through to continue the fight.

For Item Company the fight was over and Stumpy said, "We had eaten down into the sugar barrel to the place where the sugar warn't sweet no more." He remembered what his cousin Roland Adams of York, Alabama had told him about the day that his company commander had been killed in a gas attack in the first World War. He was a sergeant and had rallied his company and met the German counter attack with a

bayonet charge. His timely action not only saved his company but was brought to the attention of General "Black Jack" Pershing who promoted him to second lieutenant on the spot. Later, in the same ceremony where the general awarded Sgt. Alvin York the Congressional Medal of Honor, Roland Adams was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. He told a wide eyed ten year old Stumpy Watson that he was glad that he did what he did but he was even gladder that he didn't have to do it again.

Around February 10, 1945 Lt. Bob Watson was the Commanding Officer of Item Company again and the 346th Regiment had a new commander, Col. Curtis D. Renfro. He replaced the very much admired Col. Donald C. Clayman who was wounded while breaking up an attack on his regimental headquarters by an infiltration team of German Panzer troops. Company I had been given a "quiet" sector of line looking down to a ford on a small stream that they were told was the Reuther River. They were being very careful to keep this section of the lines "quiet". The company took up their position in a wooded nose overlooking the river. Even as the company moved up and dug in, keeping well back inside the tree line, two German Panther tanks quietly crossed the ford and took up positions in a deep pocket of woods about 300 yards to the company's left front. Shortly a light company of German infantry followed them across the ford and into the woods.

.....to be continued.....



June and Sept. 1990

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VETERANS OF GENERAL PATTON'S 3RD ARMY & THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

87TH DIVASSOC

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***** AS I REMEMBER IT *****

WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346

.....continued from the last issue.....

As our last chapter ended, two German Panther tanks and a company of light infantry crossed the Reuther River and took up positions to Item Company's left front.

The silence in the thicket of young firs, where Company I was dug in, was so deep that men whispered to each other and were glad that the two feet of snow muffled their foot falls. Nobody - absolutely nobody wanted to do anything about the enemy to their left front. As First Sergeant Charles R. "Cash" Register observed, "No Kraut tanks go ahead of infantry unless it is to meet other Kraut tanks with more infantry. That draw to their left front looked less and less appealing.

In the late afternoon the new Regimental Commander, Col. Renfro paid I company an unexpected visit. He had on a shiny leather jacket, nipped in at the waist, with a wide fur collar and an Airborne patch on his left shoulder.

Stumpy Watson was about to leave the area to pick up their liquor ration. Lt. Bob Watson had checked on the available supply of flares for the pistol and found there was only a small amount. They were also short of white phosphorous grenades and Lt. Bob Watson opined that they might have to resort to the use of Molotov Cocktails and how was the supply of bottles? No bottles! With that Sgt. Riley mentioned that whiskey bottles of English or American manufacture seemed to smash on German Panzers better than French or Belgian wine bottles - and had a better throw weight too! That was the observation that brought forth the inspired suggestion that Stumpy go draw a liquor ration and in so doing, obtain the required containers for the Molotov Cocktails.

At this point I Company's visitor decided to view their final protection line from outside the tree line. Not the entire party followed him, just his aide who noted how much faster the men back in the trees seemed to dig when viewed from the front. Stumpy had already left for the Molotov Cocktail containers.

He returned about thirty minutes later, armor-plated around the waist and chest with White Horse Scotch (\$1.25 a quart), rye and gin, plus two Meusette bags filled with the same, (the men expected a large attack). Upon arriving, he was met by a horrified S/Sgt. Allen Heffner who said the visiting Airborne Commander had gone wherever Airborne Colonels go after inspiring the troops and left tracks all over the snow in front of their position. Allen stated he was leaving on an urgent mission and suggested Stumpy do the same if he valued his

hide. Much to Stumpy's sorrow he ignored the suggestion and leaving the jeep went dragging through the snow dodging small trees toward the command (squad) tent that was set back inside the stand of young fir about fifty yards. Just as he came abreast of the first guy rope, the barrage landed in the tree tops 25 to 30 feet overhead. There were not that many shells nor did the shelling last long, but it was right on target. As the first shells hit, Stumpy grabbed the tree to his left for support. A shell fragment promptly sheared it off right by his left knee, pulling him to the ground as it fell. Stumpy was entangled with the straps from the Meusette bags, the branches of the tree and the guy ropes of the tent. He was so badly entangled he just decided to lay still in the snow and wait on the Lord to stop the shelling.

The barrage stopped and all was quiet except for the ringing in Stumpy's ears. There were no cries for medics. All Stumpy heard was someone say, "If ever that goddam Colonel shows his butt in my company again I'll either keep him back with the kitchen or tie him up and let him enjoy the shelling with the rest of us." Someone else remarked that he would shoot the S.O.B. if they would let him keep the jacket. Heffner said, "Stumpy was headed for the Company C.P. when the fit hit the shan." Stumpy lay still and soon he heard the platoon aid man, Henry Dart say, "I think I see him over there under that tree. It looks like it fell on him." Dart ran over to where he lay and moved his legs a bit. "Are you hit?" Before Stumpy could answer Bill Riley said, "Oh my God! He dropped the Meusette bags! See if he broke any of the bottles." Stumpy said he always felt a deep affection for Riley for the concern he always showed, specially if he was carrying the liquor. Not a bottle was broken, not a man killed nor seriously wounded. Those results came from the urgency all the men showed in digging in and finding cover for their holes - or like some, getting as far out of the area when they saw the colonel give away their position by taking a stroll in the snow.

The company now waited in silence for the night attack that always seemed to follow an artillery preparation. After an hour of silence that seemed to last forever, four figures appeared out of the gloom and approached their positions. As the shapes came closer, the men could see they were civilians so they made no challenge, simply passing them through the lines in silence. Their dog growled but did not bark. Some forty yards behind them came another group - non civilian. The breathing stopped all through the woods. The party of five came almost to the edge of the woods, turned left and followed the colonel's tracks in the snow to where they turned into the woods. This party of Germans discussed the advisability of following the tracks on into the woods and then decided, since there had been no cries from the woods and the civilians they sent ahead had not been challenged, there was no reason to enter an area that must be mined or booby-trapped. They turned from the woods and walked down the hill in the direction of the ford on the Reuther River. Moe Gresch who spoke fair German and excellent Polish had overheard these conversations and reported them.

By the time Gresch had told his story, Lt. John Connolly and one of his men from the 336 Field Artillery Battalion were bringing wire and a wire laying party was being formed up by Alexander Messier. Two new radios were brought in, one to replace the one in the company C.P. that saved the life of the operator when it stopped the shrapnel from a tree burst. The other radio went down to an observation post on

the river ford along with a two man bazooka team. Everybody tried to stay in the same tracks as the German observation party. The wire team was short of wire and dawn was only hours away. Lt. John Connolly left to see about obtaining more wire. The radio was working but when the crew might need to adjust fire on the woods on the slope to their front and the ford, in case of reinforcements, wire was better. The men observed that strange things happen to radio waves in those deep hollows.

Dawn showed the men the damage from the shelling and the miracle that no one had been hurt. It appeared that the whole top of the fir woods had been blown away. Stumpy said a short prayer of thanks to God for shielding them with His hand.

The day crept on with a few men at a time slipping away to the rear to get hot chow. Everything was quiet.

Sgt. Carl Carmack's platoon had the left flank and was most likely to catch an attack through the woods. There was no activity on the part of the Germans. Sgt. Riley and Stumpy received permission from Lt. Bob Watson to go Kraut hunting. Stumpy got an 03 sniper's rifle and Riley got an extra compass plus two pair of field glasses and they then let Sgt. Carmack's men know they would be off on their left flank. If they heard Riley's Thompson firing his usual short bursts, watch out for them for they would be hustling back probably ahead of the Germans in a flank attack.

They circled up into the woods and then slowly worked their way from tree to tree down toward the ravine that had swallowed up the German infantry and armor the previous day. They were a bit disturbed they had made no contact with either L or K company on the left but Item Company had been stuck out on a nose before.

Stumpy was leaning against a fairly large fir with his M-1 grounded and trying to scratch high between his shoulder blades when he noticed the two trees just down the slope from them, start to move very slowly away from them down the hill. Actually they weren't trees, just very large bushes - big Christmas trees - and then they fell over in the snow. They could see German soldiers dragging them away with ropes. Riley and Stumpy circled to the left slowly and carefully and soon they found a small shelf with some rocks, with a small draw giving them a line of withdrawal in case they were spotted. They saw and heard three tanks or tank destroyers, plus thirty-eight men in addition to the tank crews.

Since it was almost noon and they had done what they had to do, they climbed out of their O.P. up the draw and to the top of the ridge. Within a couple of hundred feet from the top they came to the main trail leading from Company I's C.P. to the road leading to the battalion C.P. There they met Le Blanc who was waiting on the trail with a message that Sgt. Cash Register was looking for Stumpy Watson. They hurried to the company C.P. and told Lt. Connolly and Lt. Bob Watson what they had seen and Riley offered to lead one or more of Connolly's forward observers to the observation post they had just left.

Everyone Stumpy ran into told him, with a grin, that Cash Register was looking for him. Finally Register found him at Tommy

Miller's second platoon. The wire team was still short of communication wire and Stumpy was telling Miller about the Germans setting up camouflage for their three tanks so it looked like they intended to stay longer than just a few hours.

Everyone seemed worried about the tanks coming at them from the left front while the infantry worked up the draw just used by Stumpy and Riley. Messier looked at Stumpy and said, "Don't worry about it. Lt. Connolly and I will take care of it. See what Register wants."

Everyone seemed to know what Register wanted Stumpy for, except Stumpy. Finally Register caught up to Stumpy and told him that a jeep was waiting for him with a jeep driver by the name of Monohan. They were supposed to go straight to Regiment. Since Monohan was notorious for not being able to keep track of his tool roll, Stumpy asked just how they had screwed up and if the colonel had heard that Item Company had him on their list because of the shelling. All that Register would say was that Monohan was to go Stateside. He had won a competitive exam for enlisted men and was to go to West Point. Stumpy was positive that his father would not have done anything to re-activate his own appointment at this late date, but who knew what the U.S. Army might do next.

Stumpy pondered on other engaging possibilities. The post office box he had reported to in Atlanta to an individual named Al Kalish might want him to testify in a pending case. When he had rejoined the infantry he had stopped writing his weekly reports to the intelligence unit that Sgt. Alphonso Younce had recruited him into during that first week at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. What could they do to you for not sending in reports like you were supposed to? Would he have to testify against a lieutenant and his sergeant who were working a laundry scam at State College, Pennsylvania? Stumpy thought not. They had in all probability already been sent to Leavenworth or the charges had been dismissed. Besides, there were three other men in the Air Corps who could be called on to testify. Maybe the Air Corps had put him on a statement of charges for bending that damn plane.

That's when Register suggested, with a grin, the least likely of all possibilities. "Stumpy, I think they are going to give you a battlefield commission!" Stumpy felt since he had been doing what most 2nd lieutenants do in combat for the past sixty days, that didn't seem too strange. But why him instead of Al Messier or Cash Register or Carl Carmack or Max Blundell or Tommy Miller? The U.S. Army did strange things. If in their wisdom they had decided he was to be a Second Lieutenant, that was OK with him. Register relieved Stumpy of Capt. Dave Kiefer's six gun and his M-1 rifle, handed him one of those toy carbines and put him in the jeep with Monohan. Stumpy thought how proud his grandmother, Annie Elizabeth Lee Mason would be at the news of his promotion. She used to read him the stories of the great heroes of antiquity, of Horatio defending the bridge across the Tiber, of Roland defending the pass and of her own father, Jarred Jackson Lee carrying dispatches for Johnson's Army and being promoted to Captain in Lewis' Battalion of the 1st Alabama Regiment during the War Between the States; of how her sister's son, Roland Adams of York, Alabama had distinguished himself and been commissioned in the field during World War One. Finally Stumpy felt he was doing something that was bringing honor to her name. Since the family didn't have anything else, they

lived for honor. From time to time everything else was stripped away but the hard core of the family, from both sides, had always been their honor. He couldn't think of a nicer thing to happen to his family.

It was at Regimental Headquarters that Stumpy found out what was to be stripped away. First it was the white suit, then the tankers pants; then they tried to get the shoe pacs with the chain tread soles. Finally he told the sergeant, who was scraping away his most prized possessions layer by layer, to put them in a bag for him. Stumpy then went to the shower point and took the first all over bath since December. Then he took another one. Then he just stayed there as the units taking baths filed in and filed out. After a long time, he came out, sat down and rolled layers of skin off his feet. He got into his new issue of O.D., new web gear, and put on new size 12 combat boots with the strap sewn on the tops. He hardly even knew himself. Stumpy asked if he could shave but since he was late, due to his prolonged shower, the jeep was waiting to take him to St. Hubert for processing. Just before he left, the Sergeant Major asked if he had any final requests as a T/Sgt. Stumpy asked if he would see that four spools of communications wire went on the next jeep to Item Company along with some extra bazooka rounds. The bazooka was easy but regiment was also short of wire.

Wardlaw M. Watson passed into processing and his discharge as ASN 34705956 and into AUS 0-2006587. He couldn't believe how lucky he was to have his new serial number end in 87. He asked the sergeant if he needed a shave. The sergeant grinned and asked how old and Stumpy told him twenty last December 21, 1944. The grin got bigger and he wanted to know when was the last time he shaved and Stumpy replied it was down in the Saar Basin on December 20th when they were told they were being transferred back into George Patton's army. Captain John Swanson had told them to break the ice off a shell hole and scrape their faces whether they needed it or not. The sergeant told Stumpy he didn't have time as General Culin was coming out of his field headquarters trailer right then so Stumpy came to attention and General Frank Culin pinned the gold bar of a second lieutenant on him by order of General George Smith Patton, Commanding General of the U.S. 3rd Army of the United States. Stumpy was proud for his family to know he had so far conducted himself in such a manner as to win the approval of his superior officers but sad that his days of taking a free hunt with one or two of his platoon were over. It began to dawn on Stumpy that the U.S. Army had ruined a perfectly good sergeant and acquired a half trained 2nd. Lieutenant in his place. He wondered what his men would think when he didn't know all the answers. The lieutenant was expected to have all the answers on the tip of his tongue, including all the school solutions and Stumpy had not been to school.

The drive on February the 16th, back up to the company positions somewhere in the hills overlooking the Reuther River, was the usual cold and grey with the growl of artillery somewhere in the distance. When Stumpy climbed down from the vehicle, there stood Captain Swanson back from the hospital. The bullet had passed through his leg clean and now he was ready to test the knowledge of the lowest form of life on earth; "Watson, get in the jeep and drive me up that hill!" The snow covered hill was about a 35 degree incline, but looked a lot steeper; besides Stumpy had never driven a jeep before. He could

drive a truck; had driven an 18 wheeler from Birmingham to the navy base at Key West the summer he was 13. Not in the snow and not straight up. He couldn't even shift gears without stalling out. Having satisfied Captain Swanson he was ignorant enough to be a 2nd. Lieutenant, Joe Barfield, Captain Swanson's regular driver got his jeep back from a completely humbled Stumpy Watson.

The men of the first platoon of Company I were not all veterans but they were doing a lot of patrolling, taking prisoners and gathering themselves for the push through the Siegfried Line. When Stumpy asked about what had happened to the 3 Panther Tanks and the German troops on the Reuther River, Del Lutterman laughed and said that a concentration of H.E. was put on the woods early one morning and when the tanks and men went for the ford on the river, they got caught in the open by Lt. Connolly who got most of the infantry with proximity fuses and two of the tanks with high explosives. The last tank made it across the river and got shot in the tail by Pop Milligan and his bazooka team.

T/Sgt. Alexander Messier got called to Division Headquarters and came back a 2nd Lieutenant as did T/Sgt. Tommy Miller, of the 2nd Platoon and 1st Sgt. Charles R. Register. With all the sergeants in Company I being made lieutenants stumpy wondered who in hell was going to be left to run the army.

Stumpy was "loaned out" to the 8th Infantry of the 4th Division. They had heard AT grenades worked real well in village fighting and wanted to know how the team worked and how they could get close enough to use them without getting killed. Stumpy told them that over half the company had BAR's and the BAR's were used as suppressers until two or three men with AT grenades could get in position to all fire one after the other at the machine gun position or tank. They wanted to know where all the BAR's came from and Stumpy explained about Tom Brown, the armorer artificer and how they kept light wounded at the battalion aid station to pick up arms that he could repair. That is how they had a change of weapons twice a day along with hot chow. When he told them about the lightly wounded staying with the company to help Tom Brown in cleaning and repairing the weapons, he lost all credibility. Finally with tongue-in-cheek he broke down and told them about this incredibly lucky lieutenant by the name of Bob Watson, they had in Item Company. Before every major action, the entire company would all line up and each man got to rub the lieutenant's head for luck. They seemed to like that cockamamie story better than Tom Brown and his change of weapons twice a day.

While Stumpy was with them He witnessed one of the strangest but most moving sights of the entire war. Off to the flank of the 4th Division, there was a Canadian or English outfit that had antitank guns that looked like American 75's or 77's, but that looked to have about six inches more powder in the case. Stumpy had a chance to look at some of Panther and Tiger tanks they had shot and their shells didn't stop after cracking the first several layers of spaced armor. The next morning, Stumpy rolled out after first light to watch a combined attack by a battalion of the 8th Infantry and the British. Just as the fog began to lift across the valley from the ridge they occupied, eight or more German tanks approached out of the slowly rising mist, driving straight for their ridge line with their accompanying infantry riding on the decks. Suddenly, from the left

flank there arose such a wail as is usually heard at hog killing time. It was one or more bagpipes. Over the pipes went out the order; "FIIIIIX, BAYONNNNETTS-CRASH!!" Just one sound, like fix bayonets on the parade ground. The German tanks never paused, but as one, made a U-turn to the right and went back into the fog and disappeared as silently as they had come. After a few moments, Stumpy realized he was lying there in the snow and not breathing, with his mouth open. Later he met a British officer at a check point and remarked how impressed he was with the power of the pipes. The officer grinned and said, "Good show, you think? We were out of powder, you know!" Once more, Stumpy was left with his mouth hanging open and wondering if his leg was being pulled.

When Stumpy returned to Item Company, he heard from Le Blanc that Bill Riley had been at it again. Captain Swanson wouldn't put up with Riley's monkeyshines the way Bob Watson would. Swanson might volunteer them as a fire brigade in hell, but he would want it by the book, with all the loose ends tied up.

What Riley had been doing was stealing tanks. The whole thing had started out innocently enough. Riley and one or two others from the first platoon didn't have enough to do. Either Riley or his counterpart, S/Sgt. Eugene J. Maguire spotted a Negro tank outfit and visited them one night, returning with several cases of 10 in 1 rations. Company I, had in the process of combat acquired several temporarily attached individuals with varying skills. Some either were or aspired to be tankers. When asked about the rations, Riley stated the tankers had so much food they were getting fat and as a matter of fact, Stumpy could go see for himself. Riley had a patrol planned to come back through the tankers area. Riley observed that the Negro tankers were so fat they could not get into their tanks. They would jam in the hatch like a fat black Santa Claus in a small chimney. Stumpy went on the patrol that evening and that is how he met Douglas, his washer woman, Missouri's son, all dressed up like a tanker.

The patrol came back through the lines having seen nothing and heard less until challenged on the perimeter of the tank park. The sergeant in charge brought them into a squad tent for some hot coffee and to ask about some missing 10 in 1 rations from the ration tent the night before. Stumpy didn't recognize Douglas but when he took his steel helmet off to scratch his head Douglas recognized him. "Mr Wardlaw! What yo doin heah? Does yo Momma know yo is this fah from home? Where is ole Sis Bill?" (Stumpy's little brother). Stumpy wanted to know about Missouri and Lucy his sister who cooked for them and his Aunt Emma who cooked for them until Stumpy's father caught her putting snuff in the collard greens. Riley pulled Stumpy aside and told him if he wanted to visit with kinfolk all night he would take the patrol back in and let them get some sleep.

That is how Douglas and his lieutenant came to give I Company the tanks. The tankers didn't think too much about fighting a white man's war especially when they believed they were being shot at by both sides. Stumpy told them the Air Corps did that to everybody but the tankers stated they thought it was deliberate. Who was Stumpy to argue. He wasn't the one being shot at. Stumpy suggested they give up their tanks to I Company. The tankers stated it would look bad. Stumpy suggested they steal one or two. The tankers said it would look even worse, they might be charged for dereliction of duty or of selling the

vehicles to the French - which had not crossed Stumpy's mind until that moment. Stumpy wondered how much he could get for a fully equipped tank battalion. Finally someone suggested hijacking the tanks as soon as transportation could be arranged back to Le Havre for the tankers. The hijacking took place two days later and Lieutenant Harris, one of the displaced tankers operating with I Company got the tanks. Stumpy did not see Douglas again until 1953 when, knee walking drunk, he fell on Stumpy's neck on Bromberg's Corner at rush hour in the middle of downtown Birmingham. Stumpy felt it was good to have friends.

The constant patrolling was driving the troops crazy. They had moved up into German bunkers along the Siegfried Line on either side of the road leading to Ormont. They were told if they could break straight down the Ormont Road, it would put them on to the Bonn network of roads and from there the breakout would carry them across the Rhine to Berlin and then home.

Stumpy looked down that road to Ormont and as far as he could see, a mile or more, there was a scene of utter carnage. Dead soldiers, some with red stars on their caps, dead horses, overturned guns; death and destruction everywhere, half buried in the snow. It was a typical column caught by American "Jabos" or "automatic artillery," the 155 Long Toms.

The company was busy digging up the communication wire which connected all the pill boxes in this belt of armor in the Siegfried Line when Stumpy decided to ask Captain Swanson if it would be OK with him if Stumpy would take Bill Riley, a soldier from Birmingham, Joe Ingram and their knife and wire man, Joseph J. "Joe" Allen to investigate the pill boxes to their left front and they would be back in about an hour.

The group went slow and careful, looking for mines and trip wires, finding none. They checked out two big 24 man boxes the Air Corps had hit right in the entrance with either 250 or 500lb bombs. All the Germans inside were like sacks of corn - no bones left unbroken - heads like rotten musk melons. They were about to turn around and go back but Stumpy wanted to check one more box back to their right and nearer the Ormont Road. He sent Ingram and Allen back to tell Captain Swanson what they had found up to that point and Stumpy and Riley went to look at the last pill box.

Their next move, upon arriving at the pill, box was a dumb one. They both went inside at the same time. This pill box was intact and showed signs of recent use. Riley's torch picked up an American squad stove, so while Stumpy held the torch Riley lit the stove and they prepared to heat a can of processed cheese with bacon. As Stumpy fished in his pocket for his P38 can opener, Riley bent over to check the stove. Two armed Germans appeared in the door.

.....to be continued.....

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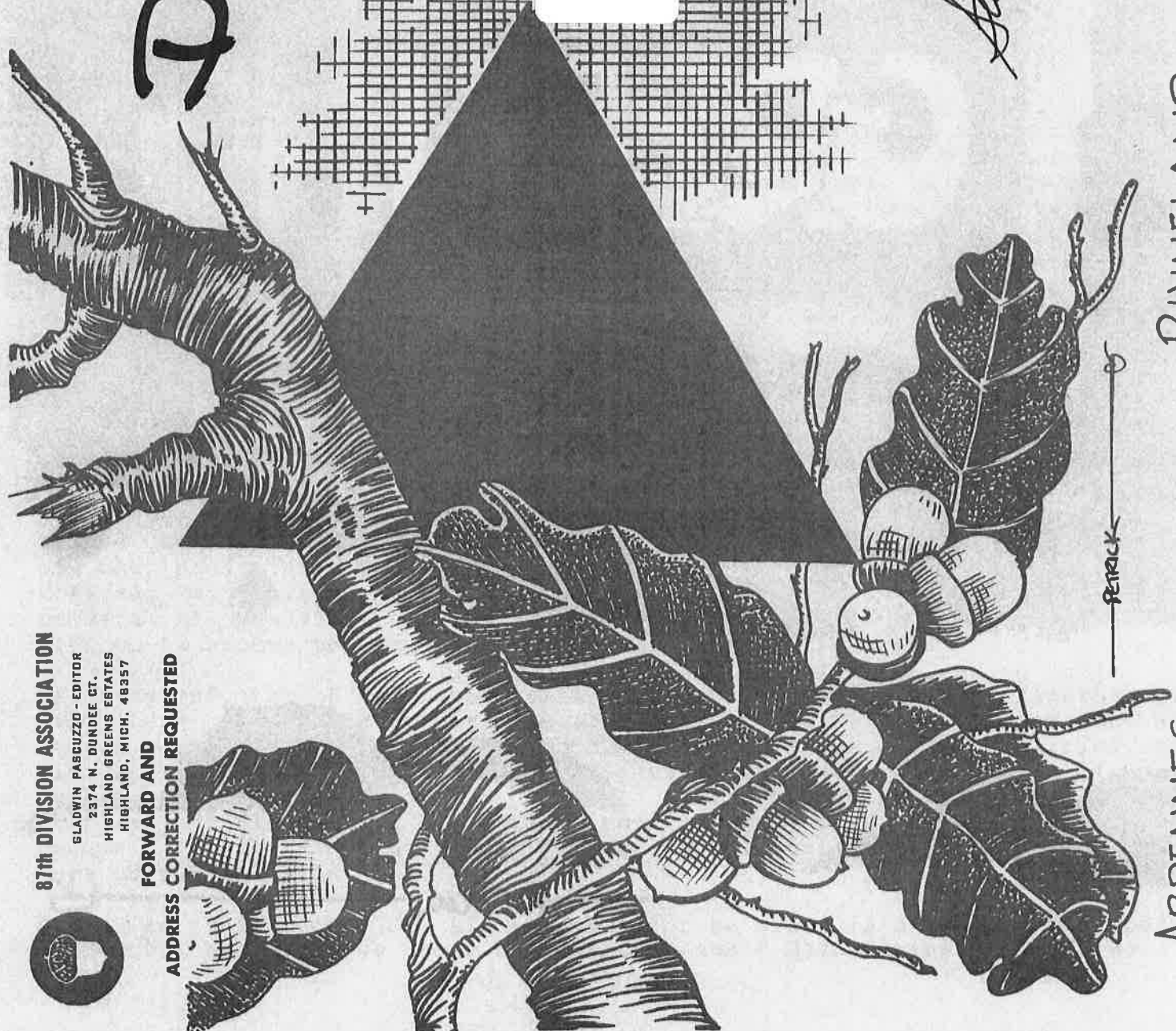
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Story P. 33

Sumpsy Abbotson



—PENACK—

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WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346
...continued from last issue....

As our last chapter ended, Stumpy and Bill Riley turned from a cooking fire they had started in a German pillbox to see two armed German soldiers in the doorway.

Upon seeing the armed Germans in the doorway, Bill Riley dropped the can of rations on the stove and slowly straightened up. Stumpy slowly removed his hand from his pocket and both men in unison but not very loudly said, "Kameraad." The Germans didn't say anything, they just motioned with their rifles for the GI's to back up away from the stove. Both men moved very slowly and when the Germans had just gotten between the GI's and the stove, the unpunctured can of cheese with bacon blew apart and turned the stove over. Stumpy and Riley dove for the exit in the resulting darkness tangling arms and legs as they raced through the opening. Riley, who was now crawling through the opening in front of Stumpy turned and pushing Stumpy down, fired a burst from his Thompson into the bunker. As soon as Riley turned and continued his departure, Stumpy pulled the pin on a grenade and rolled it into the pillbox. The two men scrambled into the fire chamber and the grenade went off as soon as they reached it. Stumpy was now holding the six-gun that had belonged to Capt. Kieffer in his hand and he looked out one of the firing slits to see two German soldiers running for the tree line in the fir woods. Stumpy decided to leave his M-1 rifle in the bunker and not go looking for it.

Cautiously the two GI's poked their heads out the door of the bunker and noticing that there was no further enemy activity around Stumpy raced for the firebreak. Once across, he motioned for Riley to follow and the two men returned to Item Company.

They decided to not say anything about what had happened at the pillbox. They both felt extremely foolish for having pulled such a bone-headed stunt. Reflecting on it later Stumpy said, "Thank God for the luck of the Irish."

About two days later, Stumpy and Riley were once again poking around up towards a line of pillboxes and road block in the dragon's teeth on the Ormont Road. There had been talk of a night attack and Stumpy wanted to reconnoiter as much of the territory as possible. Stumpy felt that a night attack across unfamiliar terrain was extremely dangerous.

They worked their way forward as far as they could without drawing any fire from the German machine gun emplacement in the

dragon's teeth. Finding a well concealed position, from which they could observe, the two men rested and watched for any enemy activity. After a while, Riley allowed as how he hated night attacks; the troops were always getting lost and confused and tended to shoot at each other. Stumpy said something about the tendency of the men to drift right or left off their line of advance, usually away from any fire-fight that would start up in the dark. Riley pulled a P-38 from his jacket pocket and as casual as asking for a cigarette he asked Stumpy if he would shoot him somewhere where it wouldn't hurt too much. Just as casually Stumpy asked Riley if he would do the same for him. They carried on a lengthy discussion on the various places they could be shot and then decided they all would hurt too much. Besides it still would be better to take their chances against the Germans than an American firing squad.

Returning to their lines, Stumpy drew up a map showing the fire lanes running off at angles from the main clearing and stated it would be too easy to get lost in the dark. Just after dark, Lt. Bob Watson sent Stumpy a message stating Stumpy would take a patrol down to the left of the Ormont Road and to bring back a prisoner or two. The area of the proposed patrol would be in the same general area where Riley and he had patrolled that afternoon. Stumpy now had the opportunity to see if a night attack would have a chance in that area.

A nine man patrol was formed up and no maps were furnished but he was advised that if he got all the way through the woods he would see a big brick house with a brick barn out back. He was to set them both on fire and kill anything that ran out; except to please capture two German officers. "Why not Hitler?"

The patrol wasn't bad but it got off to a screwed up start. The men assembled in the dark with a maximum of confusion. Their instructions were to keep to the left of the Ormont Road, look for and map any mine fields, go as deep as they could past the dragon's teeth and take a couple of prisoners. Another patrol, of equal strength was going on the right of the Ormont Road with the same mission.

Each man was checking out the equipment of the man to his rear with Lt. "Cash" Register dithering up and down and in and out among the men when suddenly .45 caliber slugs ripped into one of the bandoleers Stumpy was carrying. Register was carrying one of those "Inventions of the Devil" a .45 caliber grease gun. The lid had popped up on it and who knows what got caught in the trigger mechanism and fired the rounds. Sometimes those weapons didn't need any excuse to fire or not fire. The slugs missed everyone and no one was hurt but Stumpy's teeth were on edge and he told Register to get lost before he shot himself in the foot. The firing probably had awakened every German soldier for 5 miles. Finally, after getting a replacement for one of the soldiers who had suddenly developed a bad case of stomach cramps plus severe diarrhea, the patrol started off in the general direction of the dragon's teeth and mine fields that Stumpy and Riley had checked out earlier that afternoon. The patrol discipline was excellent and the men were properly spaced apart with Riley and Les Pilcher bringing up the rear.

The firs in that section were about thirty feet tall and the ground they were covering was fairly open. The patrol paused to examine a network of log enclosed fox holes, many with smaller logs

lashed across the top. There were longer log fortifications with lanes of fire cleared from one to the other and all of them under the covering fire of a couple of empty pillboxes.

Stumpy led the patrol off to the left, away from the Ormont Road, down a fire lane to the edge of a long open field that looked to be about 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile long when they were caught by a flare. In the dark, with some snow reflection, the field had not looked so big. When the flare popped they all froze. All of the men in the patrol had been looking down and all saw the same thing at the same time. The field was studded with mines, all plainly visible and looking like coconut cakes, checkerboarded down the field as far as they could see. Then came the thundering noise of a twin boomed P38 at treetop plus 25. They could see it following a line of flares off across their line of march.

Stumpy and Riley decided the P38 was photo reconnaissance plane with a higher ship dropping flares.

The mines sitting up in the snow worried the men and then the answer came to them: three days of warmer weather and very little new snow had caused the snow surrounding the colder area of the steel mines to shrink several inches. Riley found the areas and made a note on a small strip of map they were working from. There wasn't any further activity so the patrol started out with Stumpy leading and the following members walking in his footsteps one at a time. Since this area was too far away from the area assigned to the patrol, Stumpy passed the men through two feet of snow at a steep angle back to the right toward the dragon's teeth and behind several unoccupied pillboxes. The men had not seen nor heard a soul with the exception of the aircraft since they started out. Stumpy was moving over to his right in the direction of a trail he wished to take when he fell heavily with a great snapping of dead branches into a brush pile of fir tops. The patrol froze in place and went slowly to ground. Stumpy had not heard so much noise on a patrol since that time he fell through the ice on the way into Wasserbillig. Slowly and deliberately Stumpy got to his feet and walked carefully to the trail he had seen and glanced back to see if his men were following. When Stumpy looked forward and down again he was looking at fresh tracks in the snow leading him down the trail. That was when the mine went off.

Stumpy fell back away from the explosion since he was moving in that direction when he saw the fresh tracks. He lay very still and wondered if he had a right leg. He then heard someone groan and it wasn't him. "Who's hurt?" Blackie, a Negro soldier on the patrol with Stumpy, replied he had two slugs through his thigh. Blackie had 4 AT grenades hanging from his belt and the slugs from the mine had cut him inches below the charge in the heads of the grenades. He said he thought he could walk. One other man was hit but stated he was OK.

Stumpy pushed himself down the trail away from the explosion and asked Lester Pilcher to see if he had a foot. Stumpy was numb from his right knee down. Les took a look and told him there didn't seem to be much damage except part of the sole of Stumpy's snow pac had been blown off. He tried standing and couldn't keep his balance. He still didn't feel anything. It was time to leave that place. Joe Ingram said he would help Stumpy and Blackie and the other wounded man get back to their lines. Stumpy told Riley to take charge, stay off the paths and

work across to the road block on the dragon's teeth. With all the noise, flares, explosions etc. every enemy soldier for miles around was bound to be awake and trigger happy. He also told Riley not to get anybody else hurt as there wasn't much chance of getting a prisoner or killing off the machine gun on the road block. Riley agreed, took the map and led the remainder of the patrol off cross country. The last thing Riley told Stumpy was, "Stay off the damn path."

Joe Ingram led the wounded across country, but away from the Ormont Road. They soon came to the mine field that had been mapped earlier that day. By this time some feeling was returning to Stumpy's foot and he could feel the bones grinding against each other when he moved. Ingram had stopped the patrol on the edge of the woods to check if any Germans had moved back in while the patrol was gone.

Stumpy leaned against a tree and asked Joe to wind his scarf tightly around his foot. Joe did and the foot felt better immediately. Stumpy then told Joe that since he had already stepped on a mine once that night it was unlikely he would step on another. The odds were astronomical against it. He would go across the mine field first. Joe did not like the idea but there was no time to argue, not with two other wounded to get across.

Stumpy had gone half way across the mine field when he heard the Blam! Blam! Blam! of Riley's Thompson. It was answered by the cyclic rate of a German light machine gun. Then two grenade explosions close together, then M-1 fire, two and two, then some more machine gun fire in a short roar of sound. By then Stumpy had reached the other side of the mine field but no one had followed. Stumpy waved to Joe and they came across. Joe got back in the lead and asked if Stumpy wanted him to carry him. Stumpy said he could walk and was happy to be able to return with them and not be left behind. Stumpy placed his hand on Joe's shoulder to ease the pain in his foot and immediately felt ashamed. The other two wounded had never uttered one sound of discomfort during the entire return trip and he removed his hand.

The men traveled as fast as they could, stopping about every ten minutes to listen for sounds of activity in the woods or especially tracking them. They had heard the clink of equipment the last time they stopped and since Stumpy was slowing the rest down, he dropped to the rear. His ears were still ringing but his hearing had become painfully acute in the last hour and a half since they separated from the rest of the patrol. Stumpy's wish was that it would be Riley following them. There had been a very, very long silence since the shooting stopped.

The men had drifted far to the right on their return and although they passed several pillboxes, none showed tracks of any kind around them. Another fifteen minutes and they reached another clearing. Stumpy pushed his way to the lead and started across. There were no mines showing on the surface of the snow and he was halfway across when the sound of a machine gun being cocked was immediately followed by a challenge. They asked for the password and Stumpy couldn't remember it. After a pause Stumpy told them they were supposed to give him the first part to get him started. "Chicken" rang out. "Shit" replied Stumpy. By then he must have been gathering an audience for a voice of authority told him to try again. By then he remembered "Hawk". There was a long pause and Stumpy became violently

obscene and abusive and told them he had three more men in the edge of the woods, two of them wounded and they were coming in, ready or not! Stumpy walked in quickly followed by the others with Joe Ingram last, having covered the rear in case they were being followed by an enemy patrol.

The two wounded each received an ampule of morphine to help kill the pain, Stumpy began to unwind the scarf from his foot when the C Company Commander, a 1st Lt. brought a map and grease pencils, along with some hot coffee, up to Stumpy and asked him to place the information on where they had been and where the mine fields were on the map. Stumpy tried but couldn't concentrate on anything and finally asked Joe Ingram to assist the 1st Lieutenant. Stumpy got his shot of morphine and the medic finished unwinding the scarf. A horrified look came over the medic as he unwound the last bit. He looked up at Stumpy and said, "It looks like the whole bottom of your foot is blown off." Stumpy almost upchucked and quietly asked the medic if he would just pour some wound powder and wind the scarf back on the foot. The medic did just that and started to give Stumpy an IV of blood. Stumpy, remembering what had happened to S/Sgt. Fredrick J. Moehl, during their first attack in the Saar when he had mistakenly received a double dose of blood, asked the medic to wait. Stumpy had carried a piece of 1/2 inch rope around with him to be used in tying up prisoners and had made tourniquets for all three wounded. The medic loosened and removed the rope from Stumpy's leg and placed a strap there. The strap felt much more comfortable and due to the effects of the morphine, the warm room they were in and the warm coffee, Stumpy passed out.

Sgt. Riley was shaking his shoulder and after waking Stumpy up, he got him to a jeep, wrapped him in two blankets and drove off into the night. Before Stumpy passed out again, Riley told him what had happened after Stumpy left. Riley had gotten in pretty close to the machine gun position in the road block on the Ormont Road but could not get close enough to the enemy to much effective. The Germans were on the alert and spotted the patrol coming at them. Riley had sent a couple of grenades toward the machine gun position but they were too far for them to reach. They withdrew the patrol under covering fire.

After a short time Riley drove up to a field hospital and Riley took Capt. Kiefer's pistol and stuck it in his belt while a couple of aid men were getting Stumpy on a stretcher. Inside the big tent, there was not much happening. Blackie and the other wounded went to a different part of the tent and Stumpy never saw them again. The doctor that attended Stumpy unwound the scarf, looked at the bottom of his boot and said, "We will have to cut this off." Bill Riley suddenly produced the six gun from under his field jacket and said, "Put him back in the jeep!" The doctor replied, "I just want to cut the boot off so I can look at the foot." Riley wasn't having any part of it and waving the revolver, got Stumpy back in the jeep and all wrapped up. The shot of morphine was wearing off and a little while later the jeep arrived at what Riley described as "a real hospital" not one of those "cut and trim places."

The reason for Riley saying "it was a real hospital" was because the building had a generator and electric lights instead of gas mantle lanterns and it was a brick building. This time the boot

got cut off along with three pair of socks. The doctor had Stumpy propped up so he could see the front half of the sole of the boot blown off. Once again luck had smiled on him for the three pair of socks had absorbed much of the blast. A single slug had chipped through his little toe and the two next to it but they were intact and not turned to mush. Riley asked if the toes had to come off and the doctor looked offended. "I am a plastic surgeon." he announced in a southern drawl and the toes would be wired and put back on. "Besides," he said, "why take them off? If it doesn't work they will turn black and fall off."

The doctor gave Stumpy a local, did his job, sent Riley back to Company I and Stumpy to the hospital at Ceney, Belgium. Riley promised to take care of Capt. Kiefer's six gun and to see Stumpy soon. Neither man had any idea when that would be.

The hospital at Ceney, Belgium, the 130th General was housed in what looked to be a large red brick school with little castles set around in a large park with fish ponds. As the ambulance pulled up to the hospital, a low flying airplane with no propellers came and went directly over the hospital. The medic riding in back with the wounded said, "Buzz Bomb." After a minute or so there was a distant explosion. He added that the things came over four or five times a day or night. It was a pilotless bomb propelled by a jet engine directed at Liege or the Jay Hawk Rest Center at Viviers, Belgium. It was about March 1, 1945 and Stumpy wondered where Item Company was that day. "Not watching Buzz Bombs, I bet."

The 130th General Hospital was really great. It was either on or very near the former summer palace grounds of the Belgian Royal family. It was a stone and marble structure three stories high enclosing a central courtyard. The ground floor had the operating rooms and the enlisted men's wards; the second floor the treatment rooms for "battle rattle" and the officers wards (which Stumpy thought significant) and the third floor was the nurses quarters. In view of the frequency of the Buzz Bombs going over it appeared that the least expendable personnel were in the most dangerous position. When Stumpy asked about this, he was advised that if one Buzz Bomb ever hit the building it would not make any difference what floor one was on. During the second week of Stumpy's stay at the hospital, the large chimneys were lowered to just a few feet over the roof tops, "just in case."

The floors of the hospital were marble and the officers accommodations, on the second floor, had two cots (really hospital beds with real mattresses) to a room. Since Stumpy was a walking or limping wounded he got to his own room under his own steam, stripped off his uniform and gave it to an orderly in exchange for some floppy cotton hospital pajamas and he was told to use the bed pan or a "duck" if he needed a bathroom, but under no circumstances should he leave the room for any reason. The other person in the room was a major, if the insignia on his cap was right. He was lying in the other bed fully clothed, with his back to Stumpy. Stumpy got into his bed between those clean white sheets and that was the last he remembered until he was roughly awakened by two big orderlies who gave him a couple of shots and it was back to never-never land for him.

Stumpy awakened feeling as weak as a kitten, wringing wet and

(WATSON--CON'T. FROM Pg. 46)

wrapped like an Egyptian mummy from the neck to the ankles in a bed sheet. As soon as he woke up the orderly sitting at the foot of his bed left and came back with his partner and they unwound him, gave him a large bowl of cream of wheat swimming with honey and butter. Stumpy wolfed it down and asked for more and got it but fell asleep again in the middle of eating.

When he awoke the next time, a doctor was shaking him and asking how "Major Whats-his-name" felt and before Stumpy could reply a pretty nurse popped a thermometer in his mouth and the doctor said something about his being scheduled for another session in about an hour so they had better give him his shots - which they did and once again Stumpy was back in never never land.

When Stumpy awoke the next time one of the big orderlies asked him how he had hurt his foot. Stumpy told him what had happened and the orderly looked confused. "How would a tanker wind up wandering around in the Siegfried line on foot." Stumpy told him he wasn't a tanker but Infantry and he was doing what any Sgt/Lt. of the Infantry would be doing. The orderly called Stumpy, "Major Whats-his name." Stumpy replied he was not a major but Lt. Wardlaw M. Watson O-2006587. The orderly looked stunned and asked where the major was. Stumpy replied he had no idea where the major was. The only time he had seen the man was when he arrived in the room and that all Stumpy had done was sleep and eat. He had no idea where the major was.

All hell broke loose. Stumpy's dog-tags were examined at close range by a group of people including a doctor and two MP's. The MP's asked Stumpy what he had done with the major and why was he impersonating him. Stumpy was no help for he had no idea where the major had gone. At about 1000 hours they found the major. He was flattened out in the snow under the window to their room. He had been there for a couple of days. The MP's immediately wanted to charge Stumpy with throwing the major out the window - he had not left a note but the doctors found an orderly who remembered coming into the room to close the windows on the night that Stumpy had arrived. The orderly thought nothing of it at the time. The orderlies that came for the major thought Stumpy was the major because there was a physical resemblance. They had treated Stumpy as if he was the major and had dosed him with sodium pentothal and carried him off to "the confessional". That is when Stumpy found out the major had his company wiped out to the last man. He was the sole survivor. Apparently the guilt overtook him and he killed himself.

The doctors and nurses were extremely nice to Stumpy after the mix up and a super good looking red headed dietitian from Hillman Hospital in Birmingham, Alabama came by to see Stumpy and take his lunch and dinner order. Stumpy said he never got the things he ordered but it was nice to have someone ask what you would like instead of "SPLAT!" A little attention from a good looking girl can really lift your spirits.

About March 4th or 5th Stumpy began to feel better able to get around and he made his way down the stairs. He had already tried to venture up the stairs but an MP corporal stopped him.

The lower floor was just one large dormitory room. Not two men to a room like on the second floor. Aside for that difference,

everything else was the same; the food, the nurses, the doctors and the treatment. Stumpy was told there had been a rush of 87th Division men that had gone through the wards a day or two after he had arrived. Someone said Sgt. Bill Riley had come through with about a dozen other men from Company I-346, mostly shrapnel wounds. Riley was missing a leg. Someone also said Riley had "escaped" from the hospital and went into Ceney or Viviers, got drunk on the local apple jack, cold cocked an English major with his crutch, was rushed back to the hospital about dead from loss of blood and had to have the stump of his leg operated on again. He had torn out the stitches in the donnybrook before the MP's arrived. The MP at the door to the ward was looking at Stumpy like he was personally responsible for "Squirrel Tooth" Riley's behavior.

Stumpy ran into a high school buddy in that ward. A friend by the name of Hugh Martin. The band he was playing with got caught in the fighting. Hugh had written a song called, "The Trolley Song." He asked Stumpy if he would go in with him for a couple of quarts of Calvados. Stumpy sprung for 1,500 francs worth and got a bottle. It tasted like kerosene and had the kick of a mule. Stumpy left the bottle with the men in the ward and went back upstairs.

For the next several days, Stumpy had lunch and supper downstairs with the enlisted men coming out of the fighting. The last group had arrived from around Boppard. He was told there was no Company I-346 left - it had been all used up except for Sgt. Delbert Lutterman who was rapidly becoming a legend in patrol activity. It was said he would be put in for a DSC and 2nd Lieutenants bars as soon as the orders could be cut. There was no word of Sgt. Carl Carmack, "Cash" Register, Al Messier, Tommy Miller or Lt. Bob Watson. Then the men from the 87th stopped coming. The word was that the 87th had taken Koblenz. Stumpy didn't go downstairs much after the third week in March.

The sun was now shining more and more - there was less snow. Each time the bandage on his foot was changed there was less blood. A young girl from a nearby village came to practice her English on Stumpy and to get him to help her with her English and American poetry pronunciation. She was a sweet natured child of about 15. They walked about the grounds of the hospital and she told Stumpy that the Benedictines had had the hospital until the place had been overrun by the Germans early in the war. She said the German soldiers shot all the young clergymen and she pointed out 20 or 30 graves in the cemetery, all with the same date, as the final resting place of the unfortunate young men. She told Stumpy the German Army had installed the superb equipment in the operating rooms and the German soldiers who shot the priests had been sent to the Russian front. This was a pleasant time for Stumpy and he quit worrying that there was no feeling on the right side of his right foot.

In the weeks that Stumpy had been at the 130th General Hospital, he came to know a little about some of the men who were on his floor. There was a Lt. Harris, five Silver Stars, from Tennessee. He was about 5'4", skinny as a rail, red headed, smoking cigars that smelled like they had been dunked in urine, was totally profane and was seldom sober. There was another red head with bright blue eyes on the floor, an English bomber pilot who rode his disabled ship down to avoid hitting any of the numerous villages in the vicinity. He did hit

a low stone wall that sheared away the under carriage of both plane and pilot. He was a 25 year old, totally cheerful, with both legs off at the hips. He claimed he had been teaching Lt. Harris how to cheat at poker. Lt. Hanson of New Hampshire or Vermont, had been in the 130th since the middle of December. His tank outfit had been overrun and destroyed during the first weeks of fighting. In less than an hour of fighting, Lt. Harris had seen his platoon completely wiped out. He was a barrel chested, bald headed bull of a man with piercing blue eyes, blond walrus mustache and had not uttered one word since coming to the hospital. No one could get through to him. The medics had been trying sodium pentothal on him for a couple of weeks with no results.

The little Belgian girl was now practicing her English - Elizabeth Barret Browning's "Sonnets From The Portuguese" and "The White Cliffs of Dover" - on the British bomber pilot. Lt. Harris had found out Stumpy had drawn a pay day, \$160.00, and wanted to teach him how to play poker, and Lt. Hanson received a package from home.

Lt. Harris exhibited more interest in the contents of Lt. Hanson's package than he did over Stumpy's pay day. Both men hung around to see if Hanson would open the package in public, which he finally did. Out came a chocolate cake in a square tin with 26 little candles and a birthday card with a letter enclosed. Hanson read the card and the letter, carefully re-folded them and placed them back in the envelope. Next he arranged the candles on the cake to form a "2" and a "6". The cake was chocolate with coconut icing. He set it aside and started to unwrap a round object that was wrapped in straw. As the straw pulled away a one quart gray stone jug, stoppered with a cork and sealed with wax came into view.

Both Hanson and Harris were by now in a state of fevered anticipation. Hanson spoke his first words, "Maple syrup." Harris said, "Thank God for maple syrup." Hanson smiled and offered the jug to Harris and said, "Lieutenant would you like to have a taste?" Lt. Harris took the stone jug with some reverence, wiped the mouth with his sleeve, threw his head back with the jug to his lips and opened his gullet - glug, glug, glug, glug and then down came his head and the jug. Harris' eyes stood out on stems as he took the jug from his lips, stared with disbelief at Lt. Hanson and whispered in a strangled voice, "By God!! That's real maple syrup!!!" Stumpy had felt privileged to have witnessed the regaining of his voice by Lt. Hanson and the losing of his by Lt. Harris.

Around the first of April, Stumpy had been invited to witness a combat simulation procedure to be held on an infantry sergeant who had experienced a severe trauma, "battle rattle". The sergeant was about twenty years old and had been with the 4th Infantry. He had fought in the Hurtgen Forest in early December and had been wounded twice by tree bursts. He had been wounded again in January while pinned down by a German machine gun in a mine field and finally was blown out of a raft while crossing the Moselle with two other GI's. After assisting the two GI's to the safety of the opposite bank he saw them both killed within minutes by a sniper. The sergeant had nearly died himself from exposure, frozen feet and fingers. He was a basket case.

The sergeant was deep under the influence of sodium pentothal He was perfectly relaxed. The two doctors started talking

him through the river crossing. One of them stirred water in a bucket with a wooden stick while the other talked softly. The sergeant began to twitch and struggle and to talk back. The man stirring the water quit and picked up a bed pillow and began hitting the walls. "Ka-boom! Ka-boom!" sounded the pillow flat against the wall. The sergeant began to talk louder, he shouted directions, he gave orders, he struggled against the restraining sheet; the doctor talked back and picked up a steel pot and dribbled it against the marble floor - Brrrrpt! Brrrrpt! Brrrrpt! Stumpy almost jumped out of his skin. It sounded exactly like a German burp gun. Ka-boom! Ka-boom! Brrrrpt! Brrrrpt! Stumpy couldn't take it any longer and left the room in a sweat. He now knew what the major who jumped to his death must have gone through.

The bleeding had just about stopped in Stumpy's foot around that first week in April. He still had no feeling in his foot but he was using the cane less and less and his strength was returning fast. He knew it was time to return to his company. The new combat boots would take a lot of miles to break in so he walked every day in the fields around the hospital. When the boots got good and wet he would walk them dry to set them to his feet.

Easter was coming and Stumpy got invited to go to the Easter Parade dance by Capt. La Beau's girlfriend, the X-ray nurse. She made an Easter bonnet out of an X-ray film and won first prize for the most original hat. The prize was a case of gin which she immediately shared with the other nurses and their dates. After Stumpy had had a couple of gin martinis, he felt so good he insisted in getting into the dance competition. Once again his date, with his help, won a case of liquor only this time it was a case of cognac. Since she had already set up everybody at the party with the gin, Stumpy suggested they send the case of cognac over to the troops on the first floor of the hospital. The t/sgt in charge of the bar saw to the delivery personally. Sometime after midnight the revelers made their way back to the hospital to find a giant party in progress. There was apparently a lot more liquor loose on all floors than the case sent over. The partying on all floors became thoroughly mixed and it appeared that some of those uninhibited nurses took advantage of a number of the young, innocent, uninitiated and thoroughly intoxicated patients on the first and second floors - and visa versa.

Stumpy received an early call from the colonel in charge of the hospital and after putting himself in a presentable fashion, was escorted to his office and left wondering why he had been summoned. A short while later a door was opened and a sergeant ushered Stumpy into the colonel's presence.

The colonel fidgeted a little while Stumpy stood at attention until he finally decided that if he did not have Stumpy sit down he was going to fall down. It was obvious that Stumpy's condition called for coffee and the colonel was kind enough to order a whole pot. While they waited for the coffee to arrive the colonel told Stumpy that if he felt as if he wanted to stand at attention at any time he was free to do so. The colonel wanted to read a citation for the Silver Star and present it to him but he had never done so before and he wanted to do it just right. The sergeant returned with the pot of coffee and the colonel read the citation while Stumpy stood at attention. Then the colonel pinned the medal on Stumpy's chest.

After the brief ceremony Stumpy told the colonel he thought a mistake had been made and in all probability the true recipient of that medal should be Lt. Bob Watson. He further added he had not done any of the things described in the citation.

The colonel became irate and wanted to know what Stumpy had done at Tillet. Stumpy told him all about Tillet and also of the actions of the other men during that battle. The colonel listened to the entire story without interrupting, drew a deep breath and said, "My God! Every man there should have received the Silver Star!" Stumpy replied, "You are absolutely correct Sir!"

After leaving the colonel's office, Stumpy ran into Capt. La Beau who was waiting for him in the hall. The Captain was in a furious rage. He had been away from the hospital the previous evening, which explained Stumpy being invited to the dance by the captain's beautiful girlfriend. The captain was convinced that Stumpy was the chief instigator of the debauchery of the previous evening. At first Stumpy thought the captain was kidding but cold reality set in and Stumpy thought he was in deep trouble. He could just see himself being shot full of juice and put into the boom-boom room for a couple of weeks. Instead of the imagined punishment, Stumpy was ordered to get his kit together and to report to the back gate for transportation. When Stumpy got to the gate, with an MP escort, a six by six was waiting with about twenty badly hung over and sheepish looking souls squished down under the canvass. The MP's boosted Stumpy into a chorus of "Ah! Here comes our fearless leader! We hope the doc didn't give him a pro too!" Stumpy tried not to look at anybody for fear of bursting out laughing and having everybody hauled off to the stockade instead.

The truck took the soldiers to Liege where they were put aboard a train with real passenger cars. There was a stern faced captain from the Indian Head 2nd Division who was on his way back up to his outfit. He took charge of Stumpy's group and said he would wake everybody up if anything exciting were to happen. There was a kitchen car on the train and when Stumpy's car was called for chow only two other men besides the captain and Stumpy felt well enough to want anything to eat. The four of them enjoyed some of the best chow they had ever had from an Army kitchen. Stumpy does not recall what he ate except he returned for seconds three times. When he had finished eating, he returned to his car and told his men what they were missing and most of the men went to have dinner and returned feeling much better. With a full stomach and a clear conscience, Stumpy went to sleep and woke up in Le Havre.

The captain was furious upon learning where they had gotten to. He demanded to know if Stumpy had gotten the train crew drunk, as they were obviously drunk. Stumpy asked the captain just where he was going to get the liquor or the money to buy it. Stumpy opined the French crew had probably decided to visit their families and that is how they got to Le Havre. They were in Le Havre for two days and since a rough element was reported to have taken over the town, Stumpy and the captain went to a supply depot and drew side arms as well as a combat supply of ammo. The MP's in the town also tried to recruit the soldiers to control the looting and black market operations rampant in Le Havre at the time. Two men who really did not wish to return to the line companies volunteered to join the MP's and the captain helped them get their orders changed. The next morning the train pulled out

for Frankfurt.

The ride was long and the men slept a lot. The closer the train got to the fighting, the more the men started thinking of being wounded again. The weather was cold and drizzly but the inside of the train was warm and the food was good. The captain was a good poker player but they would not play each other for money. Mostly because Stumpy didn't want to.

Finally the train reached Frankfurt and the men reported into the replacement depot. The captain found that a group of officers and men from his outfit were waiting for him and they asked Stumpy to join them for the evening. The captain played poker for money with this group and pretty soon the captain and five or six officers were playing for some serious money. Around midnight, the captain woke up Stumpy and told him he was cleaned out. Stumpy had two or three thousand Belgian and a fistful of French francs and he cleaned out his Musette bag of any other money and gave it all to the captain. Then Stumpy went back to sleep.

Around 1030 hours the next morning the captain woke Stumpy up and they started off to the officers mess for breakfast. After they had eaten, Stumpy asked the captain, who had won all the money. The captain grinned and said, "We did." Stumpy looked blank and the captain said, "Look in your Musette bag." It was stuffed with every kind of paper money you could find in Europe at that time. The two men went back to officers quarters where Stumpy shook out the Musette bag on a cot and the captain split the winnings fifty-fifty. Stumpy rolled up all the money, except for a couple of thousand francs, into a German gas mask canister, taped it shut, took it to the post office and sent it off to his sweetheart, Fleta Caroline Montgomery.

Stumpy did not see that canister again until 1951 when Fleta and he were trying to scrape up enough money to buy a house in Birmingham, Alabama. The canister had been in storage, never opened, at her grandmother's house. Both of them had forgotten about it until one day Fleta asked Stumpy about the canister. Stumpy then remembered the money stored inside it and it helped buy their home in Montgomery.

After shipping the canister off to Fleta, Stumpy went to see the captain off, who was to rejoin his division, and the captain offered to have Stumpy's orders changed and find a slot for in his company in the 2nd Division. Stumpy appreciated the offer but said he looked forward to rejoining his old outfit. As the trucks pulled out an MP told Stumpy that FDR had died at Warm Springs, Georgia. Stumpy felt no sorrow at his passing. Stumpy's father, a Republican drowning in a sea of Yellow Dog Democrats in Birmingham, Alabama, had lived his life in the belief that "If rabbits could vote, there wouldn't be any foxes." Stumpy wondered how his father would like the new guy, Harry Truman.

Stumpy went back to BOQ to see if any transport had showed up to take him back to the 87th Division, somewhere deep in Germany.

to be continued...



87th DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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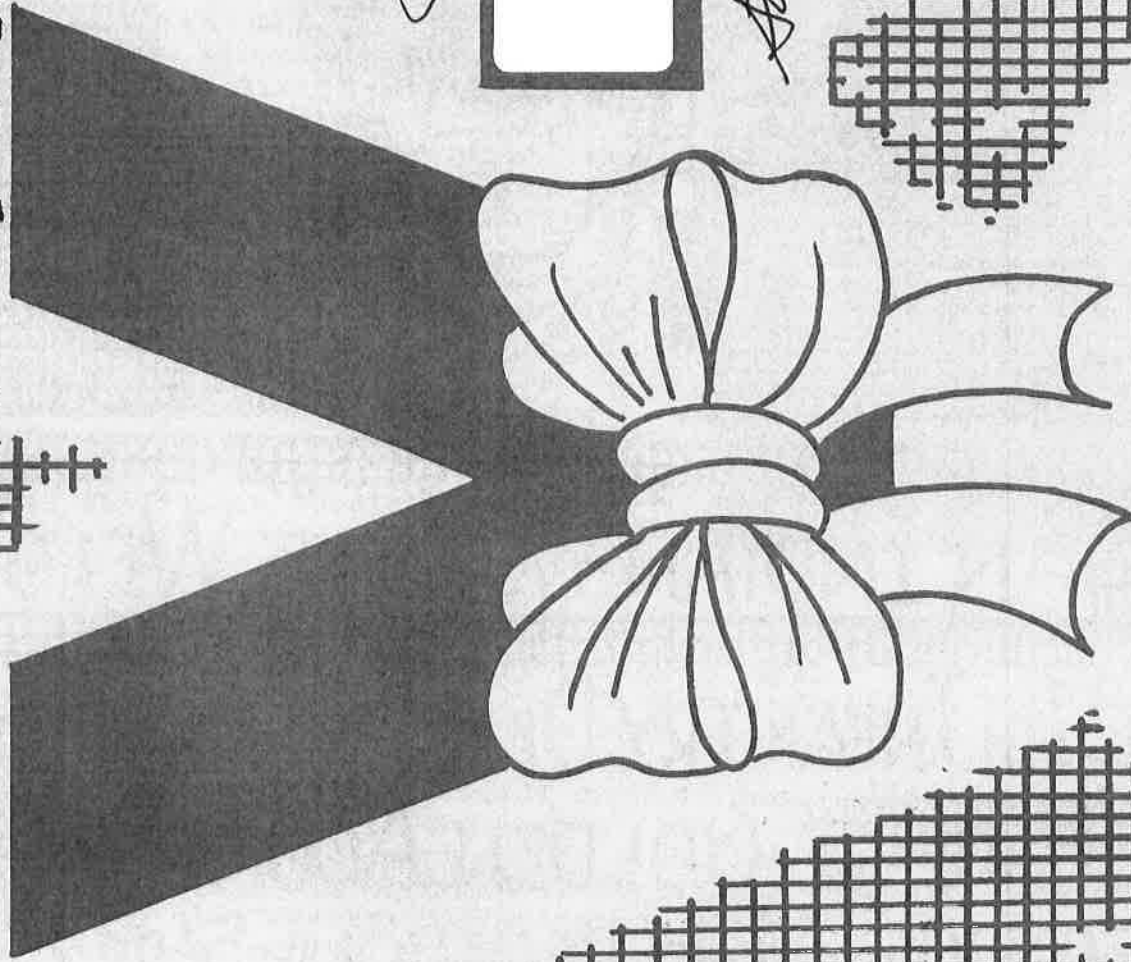
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March 1991

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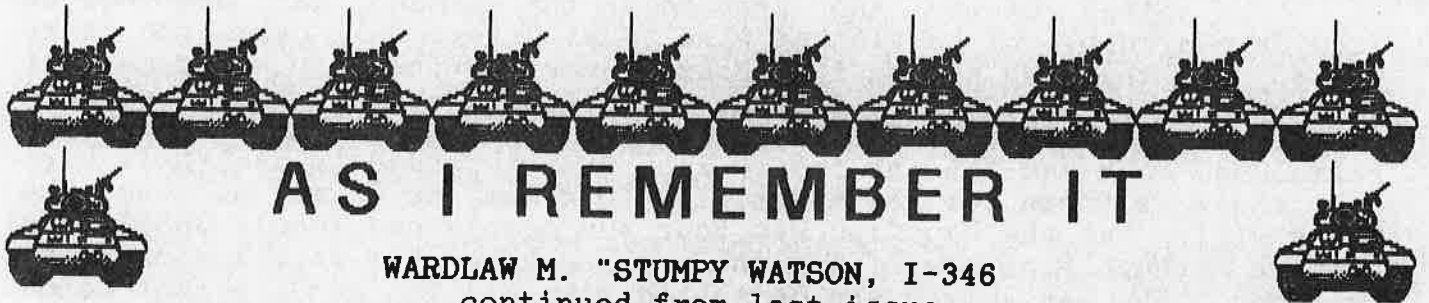
Story P. 43

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Stumpy Cotton

— PATRICK —

The GOLDEN ACORN NEWS does not verify the historical accuracy of the stories published in this column. The words printed here are the recollection of the individual veteran who states his story, "AS HE REMEMBERS IT."



AS I REMEMBER IT

WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346

....continued from last issue....

When we left Stumpy, in our last chapter, he was looking for transportation to return him to the 87th from the field hospital.

A day or two after Roosevelt's death, while still trying to get transport back up to the line, Stumpy drew a Musette bag full of 45 caliber and a Model 1911 automatic and headed for the firing range. He was absolutely determined to learn to fire the weapon with some degree of accuracy. He spent the better part of three full days trying to get the feel of the pistol. All he could say was he felt lucky he had not shot himself in the foot. Stumpy shot up everything else. He never got a shot into the black. He never even hit the paper!

While trying to master the pistol, Stumpy met a young buck sergeant by the name of Leonard. Leonard had acquired a German command car and was making his way back from the hospital to the 22nd Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division. Leonard also was an expert with the 45 and offered to coach Stumpy if he wished. Stumpy declined and exchanged his 45 and all the ammo with Leonard for a more familiar M1 and a boot knife.

The sergeant and Stumpy hit it off real well over a bottle of cognac and Leonard offered Stumpy a ride in the direction of the fighting. It developed that Leonard had been in the Air Corps on a P47 line crew until the Battle of the Bulge in December. He and several other men from his squadron had been left behind when his group had pulled back from their forward field near Liege, Belgium. Before they could leave the area, they were scooped up, given instructions in the care and feeding of the M1 and sent to the 4th Infantry Division as replacements. He fought with his line company until he was wounded in February of 1945. After a stay in a field hospital of a week or two, he got as far as Frankfort, found the German command car abandoned in a garage and then ran into Stumpy on the practice range.

Both men were feeling guilty about not being back with their outfits, so they decide to gas up the command car, paint some numbers of an Engineer unit on it and head for Plauen. They both figured their records would eventually catch up with them when they rejoined their units. They strapped on a full load of fuel, 'borrowed' a couple of cases of Ten in One from a supply dump, traded a loose jeep they found unattended for a case of wine and a "kitchen" 50 caliber machine gun and a load of ammo, and took off for the front line.

About dark on the first night, they remembered they had forgotten to procure sleeping bags but they lucked out when they came up on a column of Sherman tanks moving forward as replacements. One of



the armored divisions that had been stopped for rest and replenishment, was up the road somewhere.

The captain of the tank platoon was glad to have the two men join his column. In fact, he got out of his tank and joined Stumpy and Leonard in the command car and helped liquidate a couple of bottles of wine. Just before full dark, the tanks pulled off the road near a farm house. Most of the snow was gone but the cold was still intense. The men gathered around the barn and farmhouse, quiet and a little tense until the captain knocked on the farmhouse door and let the family know they intended to use their barn and their kitchen for the night. The old man was OK and so was the young girl, but the hausfrau was sour and complained loudly until the captain opened a couple of Ten in Ones and asked her to fix dinner for everyone. She was amazed and delighted with all the goodies that came out of the box and soon she was so busy cooking and ordering her little granddaughter and husband to fetch and carry that she even joked a little with one of the tankers who spoke a little German.

While supper was being prepared Stumpy and Leonard went to the command car and they then decided to stay with the tankers until they found the 4th and 87th. At the same time it dawned on the two men that they were probably being carried as A.W.O.L. and neither of them had any travel orders. The tankers never asked any questions and by staying with their column they would have good cover. The tankers came up with a couple of sleeping bags and both men were given guard duty times. They then ate supper, took the rotor out of the command car, drank some of the farmers schnapps and climbed into the hay in the barn loft. They were not wakened for guard duty but they were awakened when the tankers found out the rotor was missing from the command car.

Crawling down from the hay loft the two men found the farm kitchen warm and friendly in contrast to the cold and wet outside. The sour-faced hausfrau of the night before was much changed. All the American Ten in One goodies made her heart sing and wreathed her round fat face in smiles. She cooked eggs, fried bacon, fried bread and boiled coffee, all the while puffing happily on a Chelsie cigarette. Stumpy spread marmalade on the hot black buttered bread and drank a second cup of coffee. The coffee was good. It had real cream from the farmers cows and tasted like real coffee, not what Stumpy termed, "battery acid".

The tank platoon commander dropped off an extra case of Ten in One with their hosts for the night and with a flourish kissed the housfrau's hand, thanked her husband for their hospitality and suggested to all the GIs to get their butts in the saddle.

Stepping outside to sleet and freezing rain with slush underfoot, it dawned on Stumpy that the command car had come to them without any cover from the elements. Inserting the rotor in its proper place, the engine came to life. The captain took the right seat up front and Stumpy was relegated to the rear behind the driver, Leonard. Finding a blanket, he wrapped it around his raincoat and up over his nose and the group continued on its way with Stumpy bouncing around and being kicked from side to side by the bumpy ride in the freezing rain.

About first light, they caught up with another tank column moving up and the captain knew the people. He discovered he was expected to deliver his tanks to an outfit being refitted just beyond Plauen. They hooked on the tail of that column and pushed on through



Plauen.

They found a lot of confusion and buildings were still smoldering in parts of the city but nobody was shooting and most of the people they passed were trying to keep their boots clean. Stumpy gazed in amazement when he spotted a sergeant wearing a tie. The unit must have been close to somebody's Corps Headquarters because most of the people they saw were either wearing pistols or carrying carbines. Plauen had been blown to hell and the place was crawling with M.P.s!

The group stopped for chow and a load of fuel at an ammo and gas dump the other side of Plauen. It was about 1030 hours when they got ready to mount up again and the captain and the tank commander of the other tank outfit had been on the radio and found the place about fifteen miles up the road where they were supposed to catch up with the people they were looking for. Sergeant Leonard and Stumpy decided that they had better do a disappearing act if they wanted to hang on to the command car. The tanker captain had noted its many fine attributes. Both he and the other tank commander had looked Stumpy and Leonard over carefully and appeared to be discussing them while they had stopped for lunch. The arrival of another tank platoon created enough confusion for Stumpy and Leonard to gas up the car and take off for their units. Their theory was, 'if there are tanks, there has to be infantry nearby'.

The men were stopped several times by M.P.s and asking for and receiving directions to the 87th, got lost. Leonard, after hearing Stumpy's praise of the men in I-346, asked if he could join the unit. Stumpy allowed as it was just as easy to get shot in the 87th as in the 4th and, in addition, had a great promotion policy - last man alive got to be company commander. Buoyed by a recently discovered bottle of cognac, the two men went looking for the sounds of war.

The sounds of war was not what they heard. What they heard was the sound of an airplane. It was a P47 'Jabo' and it was trailing smoke. It came directly over them losing altitude fast. Leonard and Stumpy sped up hoping to help the pilot if he was lucky to get the bird down in one piece. Then they heard firing. They had just topped a rise and had slowed so that they wouldn't run up on the airplane unexpectedly, when the sounds of war were dead ahead.

The pilot had made a wheels up landing in a slush covered field alongside the left of the road. He had gotten clear of the plane, which was still smoking heavily but not burning, and was dragging himself up the ditch beside the road in Stumpy's direction. Down the road about a half mile was a dirt strip with an operations shack, wind sock and several dirt revetments containing aircraft of German manufacture. At the far end of the runway were two twenty millimeter flack wagons fully operational. They were shooting at some people hunched down in two of the revetments.

The people in the revetments were GIs because Stumpy could hear the steady thump, thump, thump of BARs answering the fire of the flack wagons.

Sergeant Leonard yelled at the pilot to stay put and keep his head down and that they would come for him. The pilot was not moving so the two men backed up the road behind the rise and climbed down, but not before they made sure the 50 caliber was armed and ready to fire.



Leonard got down in the ditch and crawled down to the pilot. He yelled up to Stumpy that the pilot was hit in the legs and would need the medical kit out of the P47 and that he was going for it and to cover him. Stumpy yelled back that there was a first aid kit in the car but Leonard was already out of the ditch and running for the plane. Since the plane was belly down, all that Leonard had to do was run up to the wing, climb into the cockpit, get the kit and jump back out. As he ran for the bank, above the road, the flack wagon on the right side of the runway cut loose and started walking 20mm fire up to the top of the bank toward Leonard. He slid into the ditch and out of sight just as the explosion reached his just vacated position.

Stumpy felt he wasn't helping any so he ran back to the command car and drove it forward until the 50 caliber machine gun just cleared the top of the rise, but he kept it as far to the right and clear of Leonard and the pilot as possible. Then, standing up, he swung the gun in the direction of the flack wagon only to notice that both flack wagons had cranked up and were making their way towards him, firing as they came. The first burst from the 50 went wild and Stumpy feared he may have shot his companions but he cranked the muzzle up a few notches and let go a full burst at the wagons. The wagons began to retreat and Stumpy got into the driver's seat and backed the command car out of sight.

By this time, Leonard had dragged the pilot up to the ditch and over the crest of the hill to a defilade position and was seeing to his wounds. The major had caught flack fragments in both legs and backside and had bled quite a bit. When he came to he was more concerned in finding out the state of the family jewels than anything else. He was assured that everything was intact and where it should be.

They had just assured the pilot they would get him to the aid station right away when a B.A.R. and a Thompson, attached to two of the dirtiest and meanest looking gravel crunchers in the ETO snuck up on them from the rear. They had seen the plane come down and heard the firing and came down to investigate - they brought friends. It turned out that the two that got to Stumpy and his two companions first, were the clean cut, dressed in their Sunday best, first scout and platoon messenger of the evil smelling bunch of shifty-eyed brigands who drifted in their direction, well dispersed and with their weapons always covering the three. In a few minutes a cigar with a Brooklyn accent trotted up to them, looked them over and wanted to know, "Watcha doin' wit' the Kraut car?". Stumpy explained they were a couple of innocent young boys out for an afternoon drive when they were mistaken for targets in the shooting gallery. Brooklyn looked at Stumpy and announced to all and sundry, "You're lost Lootenant!" Which was, of course, totally acceptable.

Stumpy asked Brooklyn if he had anything of large caliber that would shoot as far as the flack wagons and got a negative. The company mortars were fresh out of 60mm ammo. The best weapon available was Stumpy's 50 caliber. They had another 50 mounted on a jeep and Brooklyn had already sent a runner for it. Stumpy suggested that when the jeep got there they could have the 50 caliber and Stumpy would take the command car and get the major to an aid station and get help. Brooklyn wasn't buying the idea. While they were discussing the problem, the major cut in and told everyone that he expected transport to the aid station right away. At this time an officer came strolling down the road who turned out to be Brooklyn's commanding officer, a captain



wearing an Indian Head insignia on his jacket. He walked to the top of the rise and put his field glasses on the flack wagons, stood there a minute, then turned and walked back to the group. Twenty millimeter rounds tore the top of the rise and splattered everybody with dirt and shrapnel. The captain stuck his fingers in his mouth and gave a piercing whistle then yelled, "Taxi!" Immediately a jeep came growling up the road. Its 50 caliber and all the ammo was transferred to the command car, the pilot was loaded in the jeep and sent off to the battalion aid station.

Immediately a war council was formed and over a bottle of cognac, a plan that seemed perfectly sound, under the conditions and influence of the cognac, was formulated. Sergeant Leonard stated that in a conversation with the just departed major, the major was following an ME-109 back to the strip and had come in to finish it off as it landed and to shoot up the rest of the field and ran smack into the two flack wagons at the end of the runway before he ever saw them. He had told Leonard that he knew he was hurt and his ship in trouble but he decided to stay low and circle back to get the flack wagons and then land. His engine froze up before he could get back.

While Leonard was telling the story of the major being shot down, he got a dreamy look on his face and after a few minutes he said, "Do you suppose there might be a 109 down there that will fly and that might be armed? I can fly a P47 and I have taxied captured ME-109s."

The plan was for Brooklyn and Sergeant Leonard to work their way down to the planes in the revetments at the base of the small hill that they were on. A shallow ditch would take them most of the way down. The interest of the flack wagons would be drawn by Stumpy and those remaining in the rear. Once the two men had reached the aircraft and checked out everything about the plane, including its ammo load, they would start the engine. As soon as those in the rear saw the prop turning they would open up on the flack wagons with the 50 calibers in short bursts, moving from place to place. Sergeant Leonard was to warm up his engine, roll down his flaps, set his pitch for take off and as soon as he had enough manifold pressure, he was to come screaming out of that revetment with his guns armed and taxi straight into his take off roll. As soon as he got his tail up he was to take off holding his plane on the ground as long as possible and fly straight into the flack wagon on the left side with his throttle and his guns wide open.

While this was going on, Stumpy and the rest of the crew, with both 50 calibers firing, would attack the flack wagon on the right side.

It was sure fire! It couldn't miss! And it worked, with a slight variation. Leonard got into his take off roll and very quickly got flying speed. He raised his tail and cut off the runway toward the flack wagon on the left. That wagon had swung toward Stumpy and his crew as they charged forward over the hill. The wagon never had a chance to depress its guns as the converging cone of fire from the ME-109 blew it to pieces. Stumpy looked for the wagon on the right and it disappeared in a blinding explosion as they tore past with pieces of the guns and its crew raining down on them. The wagon had not fired a shot in their direction and they had escaped without a scratch. Down in the field a half mile away was the smoking wreckage of the ME-109.

As they bumped off the road and drove madly toward the plane, a sleet and mud covered figure rose from the stubble and staggered in



their direction. As they skidded to a stop beside him, he said, "I cut the switch before she hit the ground but we better back off. She might blow up yet." They drove around the still smoking wreckage at a respectful distance and noticed the tail had been torn off. The gun on the right had ignored Stumpy and his crew and turned to fire on the plane hitting it in the tail.

Leonard said that just about as he lifted over the wagon, which he had shot up, he felt his wheels come up. Had they stayed down he was sure they would have hit the wagon and dumped him into the ground. Instead he cleared the small trees and power lines at the end of the runway, chopped the throttle, cut the switches, pulled up on the nose, dragging his tail which immediately broke off. He slid to a stop in the slushy mud, jumped out of the cockpit and ran as far and as fast away from the plane until he tripped and fell down. Not even a torn hangnail.

What blew up the flack wagon on the right was a light Sherman tank which had taken advantage of the distraction, caused by the ME-109 and Stumpy's charge, to place a 75mm round where it did the most good.

The tank commander offered Stumpy a ride, which he needed, since Sergeant Leonard decided he was going to wait for a pickup from his old P47 squadron, and since the captain from the 2nd Division had already deposited Stumpy's Musette bag on the ground and his rear end in the command car.

Stumpy had never ridden with tankers before and was looking forward to the experience. He had ridden in front and behind tanks but never up on top. The captain, whose guest he had become was a West Point graduate but not inclined to rigid discipline. He pointed out that Stumpy was a damn fool for traveling without orders but he would radio ahead and notify the 87th Division Headquarters where he was and that he was on his way and not to worry, the captain would be personally responsible for Stumpy.

The column of tanks squealed and clanked into a pretty well spaced iron snake. Stumpy was clinging to the gun mount for the first ten or fifteen minutes and almost froze. His hands and feet were numb and his eyes, ears and nose ached. His eyes and nose ran and every breath was becoming more painful. Just about the time when he felt he could no longer stay on the tank, it came to a halt. Stumpy loosened his grip on the gun mount and slid off the tank. He hit the slush in the road and his legs buckled. They didn't seem to work.

A jeep came up the column from the rear and the driver stopped and helped Stumpy to his feet. When he noticed the condition Stumpy was in he helped him into the back seat of the jeep and continued on up to the head of the column until he reached another jeep that was halted at a crossroad. The West Point captain was getting directions from an MP and consulting a Michelin road map. After deciding on what he was going to do, the captain noticed Stumpy's condition and invited him to ride inside the tank where it might be warmer. Stumpy knew it wasn't any warmer inside, just noisier. The captain then said something to the jeep driver and the driver called to Stumpy to ride with him. Once seated in the Jeep, the driver told Stumpy to help himself the some clothing in the back seat. Stumpy found a set of tankers pants and jacket and put them on. He also found a pair of gloves that were rather thick and looked like mittens but had a trigger finger. He put those on



too. Before long he had warmed up but now he was swallowing exhaust fumes from the tanks as the jeep took up its normal position at the tail end of the column.

The column stopped a couple of times before noon and Stumpy would ask where they were headed. The jeep driver would look at the lieutenant in the front seat and the lieutenant would pause and say, "North or Northwest." Stumpy decided they didn't know where they were going either.

Alongside the road and off in the fields, on either side, were burned out and abandoned trucks, tanks, prime movers, guns, cannon and, from time to time in small clumps, dead horses. Almost all of the equipment appeared to be German. There were no bodies and not all the houses were shot up or burned down. Every so often older people could be seen tending farm animals.

At noon, the column made a halt and pulled off on either side of the road. Stumpy's jeep went up to the head of the column and found the captain parked by a field kitchen. Over coffee and fresh baked bread with butter, the captain said he had received orders to 'disrupt the German economy' any way they could. Stumpy looked around and thought they had already carried out that order. What else could they do to the economy?

They suddenly became aware that a quiet had settled over the kitchen area. The hissing of the gas burners was quite loud but in the distance they could hear the growl of big guns. Stumpy could feel the knot tighten in the pit of his stomach as memories of the first day under an artillery barrage in the Saar basin came flooding back. He hoped the sudden fit of anxiety would not be noticed on his face. The tank commander broke the silence by giving his tank commanders orders about what they were to do when they got to the crossroads up ahead and where and when to meet later on plus what the call signs would be for the rest of the day. His last words were, "Go forth and disrupt the economy!"

Since the weather had warmed somewhat, Stumpy asked if he could ride one of the tanks again. He had been told the infantry divisions had been split into task forces after crossing the Rhine and that the infantry was now riding on task force tanks until they would get into a fire-fight. Stumpy felt that before he rejoined I-346 he must learn how to get on and off a tank properly. He didn't want to fall off.

Stumpy was assigned to a tank commanded by a sergeant from Texas. He was stocky and full of bounce and it was evident that his men liked and respected him. The sergeant grinned at Stumpy and said, "Suh, since we know you are praying that we will get you home to your folks all of a piece, I suggest you ride on the Priest." This sounded funny to Stumpy until the sergeant waved his hand in the direction of a strange looking tank with a really big gun mounted on it. Because of the size of the gun, the tank superstructure and turret had been modified so that when you looked at it, and if you had a good imagination, it looked like an altar or pulpit. Stumpy discovered the big gun was a 105mm cannon.

The 'Priest' had more grab holds than the Shermans and since it was 4th in line in the sergeants command, Stumpy felt pretty good that if he fell off he would not be run over.



The units split at the crossroads with Stumpy's platoon moving right oblique while the others went right and left. The road they were on was a good secondary road and nobody was jumping up shooting at them. Three or four miles down the road, they came upon a jeep and driver. The driver told them that beyond a strand of fir trees, his company was spread out trying to work its way into a fairly good sized town. The Texan looked at the jeep drivers map, pulled a Michelein from his jacket and consulted that. He checked his watch, went back and talked to each tank commander then told the jeep driver to lead the platoon to his company commander.

The jeep driver refuse to take the tank platoon up the road. He stated his captain had told him to stay put. The Texan said, "Damn if I'm a gonna walk up there." The jeep driver mentioned that maybe his captain thought the road was mined. With this the jeep drivers radio squawks and the driver tells his CO about the situation at the cross roads. The captain talks to the Texan and a half hour later the captain shows up at the cross roads: The captain ASKS for the tankers help. He tells the Texan he is not sure the road is not mined but if he were to drive his jeep down the road would he send one tank after it. With this the captain jumps in his jeep and drives down the road. Texas, not to be outdone, cranks up his tank and follows in the jeep's tracks. Stumpy jumped on the road and followed a tank track at a trot. At a bend in the road both the jeep and the tank came to a halt into a stand of fir. The infantry captain, Texas and Stumpy looked down at a town through the captain's field glasses. It was larger than a village and was situated in a valley surrounded by fir covered hills. The town looked pretty and quiet. It hadn't been bombed or shot up yet. As they watched, one of the infantry platoons off to the right, drew fire from a stone barn and farm house about a half mile to their right front.

The captain pulled his jeep back up the road to the edge of some trees and then the Texan's tank came crashing through the trees to take up a firing position. This was followed by the crashing roar of the tank's gun. Neither Stumpy nor the captain had expected Texas to move into firing position fire his gun and retreat from the firing position before the dust had settled on where his round had hit the barn. Immediately, three shots came out of dug in antitank guns at the corner of the farm house and at the side of the barn. The shells tore through the woods right where Texas had fired his round. The tank moved again to the same spot and fired two quick rounds at the antitank gun inside the barn. Unexpectedly, a Panther tank backed out of the barn swinging its gun in their direction as it moved. Texas did not fire. He backed out of there quick.

The Panther took two quick rounds from the other two Sherman tanks who had worked their way into position while the initial action was in progress. neither round seemed to have any effect for the Panther disappeared into the town leaving the tankers to deal with the two antitank guns as best they could. Several shots were exchanged when suddenly a very loud roar filled the air as the top of the barn burst into flames. A second roar and a chunk of the farm house was blown away. The infantry, to the right, got to its feet and made a dash for the burning buildings. The antitank crews abandoned everything and raced for cover in the town. Texas pulled his tank forward to cover the road into town and took a hit from the Panther on the barrel of his tank. He backed up fast. The Panther took two more quick hits from the other two Shermans without any effect. The thing just squatted there in the road leading into town traversing its gun back and forth.



Stumpy then heard the squeak of tank treads behind him and looking back he saw the 'Priest' approaching. The 'Priest' pushed its way into the woods. The Panther squatted in the road at the edge of the town, full of menace. The cannon blast lifted Stumpy off the ground and slammed him down again. He had forgotten how loud a 105 could be. The round from the Priest hit the Panther at the base of the turret, where it joins the hull. There was a tremendous explosion which blew the tracks off their sockets. The front end seemed to crack open and fire shot out of a dozen different places. The turret and its gun were blown straight up in the air about fifteen feet where it hung suspended for a moment and then came crashing down on the raging inferno that had been the Panther. The infantry captain in an awed voice exclaimed, "Jesus K. Priest!"

Texas climbed on his tank with the blown away gun and clanked down the road with Texas manning the 50 caliber in the turret. Halfway down that road, the left track of his tank ran over a mine and blew him right off into a ditch. The crew was shaken up but not otherwise hurt. The tank was smoking and out of action. With the ever present danger of mines in the road, the other two Shermans and the 'Priest' crossed into town through the fields receiving only sporadic fire. By the time Stumpy entered town it had been secured by the infantry.

...the final chapter will appear in the next issue....

Prayer for Old People

Lord, Thou knowest I am growing older.

Keep me from becoming talkative and possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject.

Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs.

Keep me from the recital of endless detail. Give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips when I am inclined to tell of my aches and pains. They are increasing with the years and my love to speak of them grows sweeter as time goes by.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong.

Make me thoughtful but not noseey; helpful but not bossy.

With my vast store of wisdom and experience it does seem a pity not to use it all.

But thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

From Ann Landers Column.

87th INFANTRY DIVISION ASSOCIATION

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HILTON INN
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Story P. 26
Stumpy Watson

42ND
REGIMENT
GOLDEN
ACORN
SEPT. 25th
29, 1991

*ARDENNES

*RHINELAND

*CENTRAL EUROPE

— PETRICK —

The GOLDEN ACORN NEWS does not verify the historical accuracy of the stories published in this column. The recollections printed here are in the words of the individual veteran who states his story, "AS HE REMEMBERS IT."



AS I REMEMBER IT

WARDLAW M. "STUMPY" WATSON, I-346
continued from last issue...

When we left Stumpy, he was still trying to find his way back to I-346.

Stumpy felt the fear of returning to his company and finding more of his men had been killed or wounded. He loved the excitement of the attack, for to him, and to many others, there was no bigger game in hunting to compare with stalking an armed animal that was in turn stalking you. There was no gamble to compare with that of going into a house knowing that there were people inside that house waiting to kill you and you were gambling the whole ball game on how quick you moved, how fast you shot, and how lucky you got. But at the end, "Oh my God how I hated to face the butchers bill and hear that screaming pain in my heart. Why him and not me? Why is it I always walk away with the scratches and Bill Riley loses a leg? Why should I step on a trip mine and walk away but a man right in front of me steps on a mine and is literally blown all to pieces?" When he got back to the 3rd Battalion of the 346th he planned to ask whomsoever was in charge to let him form a snipers squad or platoon. Or if not that, maybe they could use him in the Tiger Patrols. Maybe he would feel different leading a group of all volunteers. Stumpy didn't want to have to say, "Follow me," and have his friends cut to pieces following him into some Godforsaken hell-hole. In addition, he knew he was no longer bullet proof, and how good was he going to be in a tight turn if the toes on his right foot didn't respond with their old reliability.

This was something new to Stumpy. His body had always responded 100 percent in the past, when called upon. That is until he tripped that mine. Until then he had never even broken a bone. Stumpy was also a teetotaler. Until he had landed in France, he had never had more than two drinks of hard liquor nor smoked as much as a carton of cigarettes. Now he was smoking a pack of cigarettes a day and drinking anything that smelled like alcohol, and enjoying it!

Stumpy had a friend hauling supplies on the "Eight Ball Express" under the command of Schuyler Baker's big brother, Col. Bradley Baker, from Huntsville, Alabama. He dumped Stumpy off at a supply depot about May 1st and Stumpy hitched a ride up to 87th Division Headquarters. Stumpy reported to the personnel officer who was surprised to see him. Once again, Stumpy had lucked out and beaten his records to Division by a couple of hours.

To Stumpy's chagrin, the very first thing that happened to him was having his number two general, (the one with the Adolph Hitler mustache) tell him to get rid of his tanker outfit and to get into a proper uniform, (with a proper field scarf). A TIE NO LESS! "The war



must be almost over" he thought. The chicken-shit had already started to pile up. Stumpy wondered if it had filtered down to company level. Oh yes, he got into proper uniform immediately and was taken in tow by an L Company lieutenant on the way back up to the 346th.

They drew a bottle down about them and Stumpy tried to catch up on what was happening on the line. The further the bottle slid down over them the less they cared about what was happening anywhere. They were finally billeted in a German schutzenhouse and during the night, Stumpy's records arrived.

The next morning, after breakfast, Stumpy reported to personnel and was told to draw an officers bedroll from supply plus the carbine and web gear and, in addition, was issued a pair of field glasses and a watch! "By God, how uptown can you get? The next thing you know, they would probably want some poor SOB to clean his weapon for him!"

Back row -- left to right

Studdarth, Peter M. Buyas, 1st/Sgt. Ralph R. Erbe, T/5 Thomas V. Brown, S/Sgt. Max Blundell, S/Sgt. Donal K. Hansen, Joe Barfield, S/Sgt. Andrew E. Perhac, Cpl. Charles W. (Bill) Pattit, Jesse F. Lawrence, Martin H. Arling, William C. Wittowsky.



Front row -- left to right

Allen C. Heffner, Walter C. McIntosh, Ernest Franzenburg, Leonidas N. Lintgeris, William D. Egan, Lt. Robert J. Watson, Albert A. Robinson, John W. Stocks, Charles W. Harrison, James E. Pratt, Elkin H. Rosenfeld

Mercifully for Stumpy, a jeep was going from Division to the 346th at noon and Stumpy was handed his 201 and sent packing. They drove in the Spring sunshine through one 'bedsheet village' after another. They were pretty little towns and hardly shot up at all. The ride was almost festive and thank God, Stumpy had already been reamed out about his uniform so he arrived at the 346th, freshly shaved, sober and in the proper attire. He turned in his 201 file and was told to report to the 3rd Battalion, and wonder of wonders, Col. William B. Travis. Col. Travis had recovered from his wounds and was back in the saddle.



While Stumpy was stooing around at battalion, he ran into Lt. William D. Mac Nutt, his former platoon leader, who had been shot through the throat during their first attack down in the Saar basin. They drank a few beers during lunch and Stumpy was pleased to see that Mac's neck didn't leak. Mac modestly admitted after much questioning, that he and Lt. Glenn Doman, plus some assistance from the rest of K Company and Division artillery, had just about run the German army out of Germany and into Czechoslovakia. Stumpy told him he was glad they had received such good training in command and tactics from Capt. John Swanson while they were in Company I at Fort Jackson. That was when Stumpy found out that 'Big John' had once again gotten shot up while leading Item Battalion in the attack. Mac said that Lt. Robert J. Watson had been the Company Commander of I company during all the fighting since Koblenz but that he was now on leave in Paris and Capt. Dick Lewis had the company at that moment. Mac also filled Stumpy in on the task force, tank-infantry teams and hoped that Stumpy wouldn't go stumbling around in any more mine fields.

Mac and Stumpy had another beer and then Stumpy met Lt. James G. Cougill, the S-2 in charge of information (according to Stumpy) for the 3rd battalion. Cougill's assessment was that the war was in its final stages and that all the troops had to do was keep their patrols out so as not to be surprised. The area Item Company was in was supposed to be the German national redoubt, and it was anyone's guess what unpleasant surprise might lurk in the quiet villages and mountain forests of that beautiful border country. Lt. Cougill stated that they were, more or less, in a holding position waiting for a link-up with the Russians.

Stumpy had not thought much about the Russians in the previous three years. He had originally developed an intense dislike for them ever since they invaded Finland. Stumpy had a great respect for the Finns. They were the only nation that had repaid their war debt to the U.S. from the first World War. Stumpy's philosophy was that the U.S. should finish the Germans off and then attack the Japanese through the 'back door'. It would only be incidental that the U.S. would happen to kick the hell out of the Commies as they went across Russia to get to the Japs back door. This is what Stumpy told the Watson and Montgomery clans when they gathered for his wedding to Fleeta, on July 26, 1945. Stumpy's in-laws quoted his statement many times during the cold war years. 'After all, our armies and weapons were already in place; why leave a bully loose on the block when you know you are going to have to do something sooner or later.'

On the same afternoon of that same day, one of the Company I jeep drivers, Edward J. Boch and Sergeant Raymond Broisman, came down from Melau to pick up Stumpy. They loaded the officers bed roll on the jeep, picked up a half dozen spools of communication wire and headed for I-346. Stumpy noticed there were two things new on the jeep besides himself; a standing iron bar, with a notch at the top, welded to the front bumper to cut any 'heads off' wire that might be stretched across a road and a mount for a light machine gun welded to the pistol side, up front. Stumpy did not remember Boch but he did remember Sgt. Broisman as one of the replacements they received after Tillet. When he got off the truck, at Tillet, he was half dead and had a high fever and on top of that, Stumpy remembered that Broisman wasn't much bigger than a two for a nickel bar of soap. Stumpy remembered asking Dave Watson, the driver assigned to Company I, if he had left the rest of the guy



back at the depot. Dave opined as that if Broisman lived to get well he would probably last forever since he sure as hell would be hard to hit. Now here he was healthy as a hog and twice as ugly.

Company I was billeted in a shooting house just outside of Netchcau and when he arrived, Stumpy reported to Lt. Charles R. (Cash) Register, the former first sergeant and now the temporary Company Exec. Cash Register took Stumpy in to meet Capt. Dick A. Lewis, the new Commander of Item Battalion. Stumpy found Capt. Lewis to be an easy going mid-westerner who told him to put his duffel in the corner and to go out and re-establish old contacts with the company.

Stumpy dumped his gear, picked up the six-gun that Capt. Kiefer had left behind when he was hit at Andler and that Stumpy had left with Bill Riley when Stumpy tripped that mine. Riley, in turn had left the six-gun with Pete Buyas after he had lost his leg at Gold Brick Hill. Stumpy belted the old WWI six shooter, tied it down, put a dozen half moons of .45 ammo in his jacket pocket, picked up an M1 from T/5 Thomas V. Brown's well stocked arms supply and took himself down the hill to see what was left of Item Company 346.

It was around 1400 hours and the sun was out brightly as Stumpy made his way down to a group of men standing and talking off to the left of the road on a grassy slope. Suddenly, one of the men detached himself from the group and came charging up in Stumpy's direction. He grabbed Stumpy in a bear hug all the time yelling, "Stumpy! Stumpy! Stumpy!" It was S/Sgt. Donald Hansen, Stumpy's assistant squad leader and best friend who Stumpy had thought was killed in action on January 6th at Tillet. As they rolled down the slope they were both laughing and crying. Stumpy was home at last.

There had been some changes in the company assignments. T/Sgt. Geodo (Joe) Perrota (who Stumpy felt should have been decorated for his defense of the schoolhouse in Wasserbillig) had the first platoon with S/Sgt. George Brooks and Sgt. Ray Broisman in the first squad; S/Sgt. Calvin Plitt and Sgt. John S. Rogerson in the 2nd; and S/Sgt. Joseph Stevens had the 3rd with John C. Burdette as his assistant. Stumpy was afraid to ask how many second lieutenants had been shot out from under the first platoon.

Stumpy was not so sure Lt. Cash Register was all that happy to see him. Register now had the 3rd platoon and he had the steady and forever lucky T/Sgt. Carl Carmack as his platoon sergeant. Carl had been the platoon sergeant of 3rd platoon back at Fort Jackson and may have been lucky enough to have never been hit. Stumpy also noted that Register had the most experienced men in his platoon and most of them came from Stumpy's first platoon. He noted S/Sgt. Max Blundell in the first squad with Les Pilcher and Cliff Pullen and S/Sgt. Groshong; 2nd squad had S/Sgt. Donald J. Hansen as squad leader and Sgt. Henry J. Woytowicz as assistant - that squad also contained Burgess, Bishop, Carman, Cohen, Imbody, Pleger and Nigro from the first platoon; S/Sgt. John Ignatz had the 3rd squad with, according to Stumpy, the best BAR man in the 3rd Army, Martin "Skin Head" Arling and the quickest man in the attack, Charlie Coffman, and another Watson backed by Sgt. Ogburn as assistant squad leader. Stumpy didn't know whether to feel good or bad as it seemed that Cash Register was such a natural leader that Stumpy's first platoon men just naturally gravitated to him. Or, according to Stumpy, he was so 29 sorry that he needed a lot of really



good men to keep from screwing up. Stumpy was told that at one time, Register even had T/Sgt. Delbert Lutterman as platoon guide prior to Col. Clayman appointing Del to Regimental Color Sergeant as the most decorated NCO in the 346th Regiment (at that time).

Lt. Tommy Miller whose battlefield promotion was preceded by several weeks of OCS at Fontainebleau Boys School back at Paris had his 2nd platoon just as he had been T/Sgt. of the 2nd platoon at Fort Jackson and through combat in the Saar and during the Battle of the Bulge. Stumpy asked him what he learned at the Boys School that he didn't already know. Miller though a minute, brightened up and grinned, "Don't urinate on the potted palms in the hotel lobby when you are on leave." Stumpy was amazed at the good stuff he had picked up while at OCS. Miller then told Stumpy that T/Sgt. Carl Carmack had turned down a battlefield commission; said he had observed that 2nd lieutenants didn't seem to last too long in Company I and he didn't want to stretch his luck. Stumpy observed that from his own experience, he could certainly see that point of view. Stumpy had never been hurt real good until George Smith Patton approved General Frank L. Culin Jr.'s request and made him a second lieutenant.

Lt. Alexander "Rock" Messier had his 2nd platoon almost intact except for Allen C. Heffner who had turned down a commission and had become First Sergeant of Company I instead. Heffner had almost enough points to get out as an enlisted man, but as an officer, he would have been headed for the invasion of the Japanese home island with the rest of them. Stumpy observed that Heffner was smarter than most of them. He knew the score.

Some of the men Stumpy most admired were still around; Joe C. Ingram who had walked and carried him and led the other wounded through the woods and mine fields back to their own lines in the Siegfried Line on February 26 when the night patrol was interrupted by Stumpy setting off a mine; S/Sgt. Walter C. McIntosh who had tried so hard back at Fort Jackson, without success, to teach Stumpy how to set up a defensive position with mortars and machine guns; Sgt. John C. "Pop" Milligan, Company I's expert tank killer and one of the bravest men Stumpy had ever known as well as being a gentleman of true humility and modesty; T/5 Tom Brown, the company armorer artificer, without whose expertise and tireless work in salvaging and returning clean and functional weapons on a daily and sometimes hourly basis they would not have been able to operate as Item Battalion. Stumpy recalled they had over sixty BARs; Sgt. Peter M. Buyas, Jesse T. Lawrence, Andrew E. Perhac and Ernest (Ernie) Franzenburg were still turning the inedible into the indigestible in the kitchen and may be the only cooks in the 346th Regiment to bring hot chow through machine gun and sniper fire on bob sleds to the troopers of a line company while they were fighting house to house in villages.

Joe Barfield and Edward J. Bach were driving the jeeps while Bill Pettit delivered the mail. Although T/5 Erasmus J. Pistone and Henry P. Dart were not in evidence, Stumpy was assured that if he needed an APC (all purpose capsule) all he had to do was go on sick call and they would be there.

Lt. John E. Connolly and his village crunching forward observers from C Company of the 336 FA Battalion were still in business and his boss, Col. Tague finally allowed him to receive a Silver Star



after a sniper dusted his tail feathers near Plauen. It was rumored that unless one got hit while doing something "above and beyond the call of duty" and doing it exceptionally well, Col. Tague seldom allowed decorations in his command.

Lt. John Connolly and his forward observers, like Tom Brown who kept their weapons working; Al Messier and McIntosh and Bob Elpert who kept the Krauts off their backs with mortars and machine guns while they dug in to get set for the counterattack; Erasmus Pistone and Henry Dart who bound up their wounds under fire; Bill Pettit who kept them in touch with home; and the cooks and bakers who never seemed to take offense at the constant griping even when the chow was hot and the coffee was strong enough to be used for bore cleaning, were the heroes of their everyday lives. They, like "Pop" Milligan, will live in Stumpy's heart as long as he draws breath.

A few days after Stumpy's return to Company I, the Germans surrendered unconditionally. Stumpy didn't remember there being much of a celebration. The following week there was a big wedding of a Polish couple who had been slave laborers Netchcau. Capt. Lewis, because for the first time had a surplus of 2nd lieutenants, decided the only way to keep Stumpy out of trouble was to keep him out of sight. He made him the Burgomeister's personal body guard. It was rumored, with good reason, that some of the displaced persons (slave laborers) who had worked in his woolen mill, might kill him. Stumpy could see why. Although most of the men and women had been tattooed with a serial number on the inside of their forearms, some of them had been branded with a hot iron. The first time Stumpy saw that he got violently ill and threw up. Stumpy reported to Dick Lewis that he would sleep at the Burgomeisters house and raise the alarm if anyone tried to do him in but he sure as hell was not going to place himself between that "Pompous Bastard" and some pointed projectile like a knife or rifle ball. Capt. Lewis just grinned and said, "Have you seen his good looking daughter? She is waiting for her SS Officer husband to come home." So Stumpy went to guard the local Nazi and his women folk from the wrath of the justly angry displaced persons. The week that Stumpy was living with the family was OK. The daughter was good looking but stayed out of sight except at meal times.

About the middle of the week, someone decided to give all the D.P.s who had worked in the woolen mill, all the cloth that each of them could carry to take back to Russia or Poland or Czechoslovakia or wherever they were going to go home. The women cried as the D.P.s carried the cloth away. The Burgomeister just stood there sour faced. There wasn't a damn thing he could do but stand there and watch. That night or early the following morning, someone set the woolen mill on fire and it burned to the ground. Stumpy awoke along with everyone else in the Burgomeister's house when the fire bell started it's racket. The Burgomeister got into his clothes and started to go out to help with the fire brigade. Although Stumpy had come down stairs fully dressed with his gun belted and tied down, it didn't look smart to him, to go out and expose any of them to an ideal opportunity for a D.P. who might have a grudge to even an old score. The Burgomeister's niece, who spoke good English, said that it was his duty to go; "He is the Burgomeister!" So they went. They didn't accomplish anything but they did not get shot at either.

The following day it was announced that the Burgomeister was having a dinner party for the officers of the 3rd Battalion of the

"F" Co and the remainder of the 2nd Bn crossed at 0430. It was about this time that Col Sugg called for smoke from the Chemical Bn which was attached to us for the crossing. By 0500 both crossing sites were covered with smoke. The Engineers began building their ferry and putting in a pontoon bridge.

"F" Co was sent along the route "G" Co took -- thru Osterpai, and then out down to the south to meet up with "E" Co. This was at 1400. 2 tanks and 2 TD's were sent up to assist "F" Co.

By dark the 2nd Bn had its objective and was digging in. They had established a line of defense to the east extending from just west of Osterpai, 1000 yards south to elements of the 1st Bn.

The 3rd Bn crossed about 800 yards up stream from the 2nd Bn. Their site was opposite the middle of the town of Boppard. At 2400 both "I" and "K" Co's moved out. Both companies crossed and landed all their boats without a shot being fired. They unloaded and "K" Co started down the river road southeast toward the town of Kamp -- "K" Co following.

Not until "K" Co reached the first buildings of Kamp did they receive fire. The town itself was well defended. Snipers were everywhere armed with small arms, machine guns and burp guns.

It was slow going, clearing the town in the dark. Col Moran had planned on a quick mop-up in Kamp and then pass "I" Co thru "K" Co. But Kamp proved to have too many snipers. "I" Co by-passed the town and moved north on to the high ground where they encountered plenty of 20mm fire. They had orders to reach the high ground before daylight. This they did and the going up was okay. But as daylight came, all hell broke loose.

The Co was pinned down by 20mm cross fire from 0700 until 1300. The smoke from down on the river helped a little but it couldn't stop the flak. Lt Col Moran called for artillery and mortar fire on the Jerry positions -- after 5 hours had passed, Jerry finally quit. One officer and one enlisted man were killed and 6 men wounded

"K" Co in the meantime had finished cleaning up Kamp and started up in rear of "I" Co. After the firing ceased they passed thru "I" on th the top of the hill. By this time they had their tanks and TD's and were able to make good time. They made contact with the 1st Bn and moved southeast to the town of Lykershausen. The town was not too strongly held. Quickly it became 3rd Bn property. "I" and "L" Companies moved up to their objective and on both sides of the town and dug in for the night.

The 1st Bn began their crossing around 0300 after the 3rd was completely across. By this time Jerry had his artillery well zeroed in and shells were dropping right and left of the assault boats. However, they



had no casualties and made a successful crossing.

The Third Army rolls across the Rhine

March 22, 1945



A SECOND BRIDGEHEAD IS FORGED. Jeeps and armor of the 87th Division, United States Third Army, speed across the Rhine to establish the second American bridgehead on the east bank. The German armies west of the river barrier were almost completely destroyed or driven to the east bank. By March 25 the whole Allied front had pushed over the Rhine.

1841

Submitted by: Robert S. Calese, H-347