

RAINBOW TRAIL

The Newsletter of the Millennium (Rainbow Family) Chapter Of the Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation, Inc.

August 2012 Volume 13, Issue 1

“To Find, Preserve and Share Rainbow Division History”

TROY, NY-- New York Army National Guard recruits enrolled in the Recruit Sustainment Program speak to John Walker, a World War II veteran of the 42nd Infantry Division (Co. G-22nd Regiment) during the visit of the veterans to the 42nd Infantry Division Headquarters building at Glenmore Road on Saturday, July 14. Members of the 42nd Division Veterans Memorial Foundation held their annual reunion in Albany July 13-15.
Photo and caption from 42nd Div PAO



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MILLENNIUM CHAPTER MEETING – Albany, NY, Thursday July 12, 2012

--While annual Chapter dues remain at \$5.00, a motion was made and discussed to offer a Millennium Chapter Life Membership for \$100. This motion passed. **Foundation** dues are still \$10.00 annually or \$200.00 Life Membership.

---Motion was made and passed to contribute \$200.00 to the Ted Simonson Rainbow Scholarship Fund.

---Donations to Chapter from Dee R. Eberhart of ten copies of his second book of poetry, “Illusions-WWII Poems” as gifts to whomever we think would most enjoy them.

---Donations from Chapter to Dennis Cox, history teacher and Millennium Chapter member, a box containing an Ike jacket, copies of the DVD “Trail of the Rainbow” and three infantry regiment histories and a copy of the book published by the RDVA in 1987, “42nd Rainbow Infantry Division.” as teaching aids for his Honors History courses.

---Re-Election of Chapter officers for a two-year term. Emily Marcason-Tolmie, President; Suellen R. McDaniel, Secretary/Editor; Sue Cullumber, Treasurer.

SUGGESTIONS for FINDING, SHARING and PRESERVING HISTORY

1 VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Finding Service Records

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/bib-factsheet.html>

2 The 42D Division Summary of Operations in the World War prepared by the American Battle Monuments Commission (ABMC), 1944. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b13524>

3 CUSTOM BUMPER STICKER

ordered for a 222nd Rainbow Veteran- This online company has no minimum order; custom order is printed and shipped in 24 hours and USA shipping is free.

<http://www.makestickers.com/>



ANTI TANK COMPANY 222ND INFANTRY REGIMENT

42ND INFANTRY “RAINBOW” DIVISION

Presidential Unit Citation January 24-25, 1945

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REMEMBRANCES

REUNION AT HATTEN, FRANCE – *Forty Years Later*

SEVENTH ARMY REPORT – What transpired during the period 8-25 January [1945] can best be told chronologically. The bitter fighting which saved Strasbourg does not fit into a neat picture. To emphasize the Gumbsheim action at the expense of that at Hatten would be distortion. Nor should it be forgotten that enemy threats from the Bitche salient and on the VI Corps front continued to be very real long after the Rhine flank claimed first priority.

As expected, the Germans drove viciously into the VI Corps Maginot position in the vicinity of Aschbach on 8 January. Shortly thereafter, the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division made its appearance in the Hatten area, apparently operating under command of 21st Panzer Division in an attack called “Operation Feuchtinger” after the Commanding General of the 21st Panzer Division. It was apparent that the enemy was attempting a quick break-through to Haguenau, a vital communication center, perhaps with the intention of effecting a junction there with enemy troops crossing the Rhine and with forces emerging from the Hardt Mountain salient.

Through January 20, when the VI Corps executed a planned withdrawal, the fighting in the Hatten-Rittershoffen area continued to be extremely fierce. Both 21st Panzer and 25th Panzer Grenadier Divisions suffered heavy losses in armor and infantry. The enemy reinforced his troops in the Rittershoffen area on 13 January with elements of the 20th Parachute Regiment, a recent arrival from Holland. The 10th SS Panzer Division “Frunderberg” was reliably reported in the Kaiserslautern area. Meanwhile, considerable reshuffling of enemy units was on in the Hardt Forest area.



HATTEN : les ruines autour de l'église.

Extracted from the **CITATION OF UNIT** awarded to the First Battalion, 242nd Infantry Regiment, for extraordinary gallantry and outstanding performance of duty in action against the enemy during the period 9-10 January 1945, inclusive, at and near Hatten, France.

“On the morning of 9 January 1945 the first battalion [242nd Infantry Regiment] was occupying a front of 4,000 yards when it was attacked by three regiments of the 21st and 25th German Panzer divisions, supported by

heavy armor and artillery. Ordered to hold its position at all cost, the battalion withstood repeated onslaughts of enemy flame-throwing tanks, self-propelled guns, and infantry. Time after time, small detachments of the battalion remained steadfast after their positions had been overrun by hostile tanks in order to stop the foot troops that followed. Cooks, clerks, mail orderlies and supply personnel fought side by side with riflemen, completely disregarding their personal safety. In spite of the loss of over 500 officers and men, the battalion tenaciously held its position in the face of overwhelming odds for more than fifty two hours until relieved, exacting a heavy toll of men and equipment from the enemy. “

[Above: Die alte Kirche von Hatten; photo taken from the French History, “L’Ostre-Forêt/Revue D’Histoire de “Alsace du Nord”]

AND SO IT BEGAN.

HAGUENAU FOREST – HATTEN–RITTERSHOFFEN

JUNE 16, 1985 (JANUARY 1945)

By Dee R. Eberhart, I Company, 3rd Battalion, 242nd Infantry, 42nd Rainbow Division

This time it is different. We are motorized in rented cars, northbound toward Hatten on hard surfaced D 263, with early morning, early summer sun slanting in through the full leafed beeches and the dark firs—our thoughts merging, mixing with those winter memories of long ago—forty years ago. These woods, still foreboding, but in a strange way, in a gloomy, old world, buried-subconscious way. A faint stirring of half thoughts—of dangers in the dark primitive ancestral forest. This may even be the same road on which we were sliding, falling and struggling southward, during the night, away from Hatten. We called it the “Death March”—the night of January 20, 1945. Although the summer woods look different, we can see deeply past the bordering trees and into the recesses where new snow once covered the forest litter and where engineers placed charges on the trunks of roadside firs, waiting for the last vehicles and men to pass before detonating the charges and blocking the forest road to impede for a few hours those who might be following too closely; our struggling columns leaving behind Hatten, Rittershoffen and our Maginot Line MLR to the enemy.

Northward now past the forest lane to St. Arbogast, over the Eberbach and Halbmühlbach brooks and quickly out of the forest into the quiet Sunday morning Alsatian countryside. Schwabwiller and Betschdorf to our right—to the east; farther on at the D 28 junction a right turn to Hohwiller and Kuhlendorf past two weathered Maginot Line block houses out of place in a farmer’s well-tended field, west of Rittershoffen.

You would remember it all. Rittershoffen to the west; Hatten to the east, one kilometer apart; flanked respectively to the west of Rittershoffen and to the east of Hatten with massive French Maginot fortresses—cold, clammy and stripped of guns. To the south, less than one kilometer lies the northern edge of the great Haguenau forest. It was there then; it is there now.

The road blocks are in place today. No casual visitors and no Sunday drivers allowed. This is a day for us—Laissez Passez documents for the civilians and for the soldiers—those who wounded and killed each other; who wept at their losses and buried their dead; who destroyed these villages, and who left their burned out tanks, unexploded shells, their mines and their debris of battle in and around the rubble of these two tiny towns and then moved on to finality—to victory and defeat—to the boundary of Austria for some—to the smoking ruins of Berlin for the others.

This time we are welcomed—by the villagers, by the French gendarmes, the French and American Honor Guards, and even by our old enemies.

“Ich bin Weiss—I was in the 25th Panzer Grenadier Division. We were in both Rittershoffen and Hatten. I want you to meet Karl. He speaks good English.”

The monument is there now for all to see—a place to reflect upon and to remember, a place to grieve and to give thanks—a red sandstone slab on a solid stone platform. Engraved are two Sherman tanks in bas relief—

Full throttle forward from Rittershoffen toward Hatten—

Now frozen in time and space—

Where they will endure until the melting winter snows and gentle summer rains gradually over the centuries quietly wash away the final last vestiges of that epic, that titanic battle. Freshly

planted flower beds and young ornamental trees which will grow into sturdy sentinels border the monument. The topsoil alongside the road has been carefully removed and replaced with fine coral colored sand that has been brushed and groomed cleanly and lies smooth and unmarked until Americans, French and Germans crowd forward to lay the wreathes, present the colors, and speak of past tribulations, glorious, terrible deeds, and high hopes for the future. Afterwards, no marks of combat boots, shoepacks or hobnails on the sand—just the imprints of smooth soled shoes, indistinguishable one from another.

At 0915 the doors of the churches in Hatten and Rittershoffen are opened and the villagers stream forth from east and west walking slowly toward the rendezvous with their past and our past, to the monument where the veterans and other dignitaries are assembled. Today of all days it is especially good to be an American. No arrogance—just great pride for the bravery and heart of our comrades and for the dedication, skill, ability and determination of all our people.

The thoughts of the former enemy soldiers are veiled, but the gratitude and love of the villagers is clear. The old lady in black who hesitantly approaches an American wife—learns her nationality—impulsively hugs and kisses—“Non Anglais—Kein English,” but emotion and thanksgiving bridge the language void.

Military vehicles—American and German—have been restored—and are driven exuberantly by young Alsatians, more or less in proper uniform. The most lethal looking—a German tank destroyer rattling and clanking past us taking up its position directly in front of the school, now the battle museum, with muzzle-braked gun pointing menacingly at the village street. Directly behind it is the French flag, flanked respectively by the American and German flgs. The Rainbow flag, on loan for the day, is on display inside the museum with the uniforms, weapons, photographs and colored position maps which mark the day to day changes in land lost and gained during those short gray frozen days and long black nights of the Hatten-Rittershoffen January fortnight—when more and more men, armor, and artillery fire poured into the killing fields, forests, streets, houses and churches of the battlefield.

At 1330, it is time for the Vin d’Honneur—for the Veterans—speeches by the hosts, by the German commander and by the American 14th Armored Division delegates who give many gifts and mementos. Cakes and heady Alsatian wine—a time of toasts—to the French Resistance fighters—to the American liberators. And then dinner—platters of food and many more bottles of wine for the boisterous old men who are reliving their youth—their testing time. The ancient German Panzer Grenadier General rises to speak. Gradually as knives clink against wine glasses, the great hall becomes quiet. He tells of death and destruction in the terrible winter of 1945; he thanks the French for inviting the former enemies to come together again at the place of the battle, this time in a spirit of reconciliation. He speaks for all in expressing his hope for permanent continued friendship. After the applause—and the noise reaching crescendo levels again, the Rainbow representative, and his buddies, think it time for the infantry to be heard from. “*Achtung! Achtung! Achtung! Achtung!*” Instantaneously hundreds of Wehrmacht veterans with startled expressions brace to attention at their tables. Absolute silence.

“We come to you with empty hands but full hearts—we are from the 242nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd Rainbow Division, and on behalf of our Division veterans and those of the 79th Infantry Division, we wish to thank you, the honorable mayors of Hatten and Rittershoffen, and the people of these communities for the honor that they have paid to us in building and dedicating this lasting

memorial monument. We also thank you for the outstanding hospitality shown to us today. We recall those early dark days of January 1945, during which the only Americans here were the infantrymen of the 42nd and 79th divisions—long before there was a 14th Armored Division (pause for laughs). We are pleased to see you, (waves hand toward Germans) our former enemies, meeting here today in a spirit of peace, friendship and reconciliation. Those of us who are here may not, in our few remaining years, be able to return to this beautiful land. But for us, for all of our people and your people, you have marked well this epic place of battle, with your monument and your open arms. The histories of our lands, long intertwined, are closer than ever today. Thank you, Merci, Danke.”



At the eastern edge of Hatten, Company A's block house still stands stark as it did on January 9, when the wounded occupants with ammunition gone exited as prisoners of war. Beyond it to the east close enough for interlocking fire, B Company's C.P. block house, blasted, and shattered on the outside but neatly restored on the inside, monumentally testifies to the

folly of the thin crusted Maginot Line defense in an age of armored warfare, for, parked permanently on the top of the fortress is an American Sherman tank—as if to express its dominance over immobilized men and guns. Inside is the French machine gun, mounted at the firing port with its box of shiny brass cartridges, still waiting for the enemy who did not come in frontal assault—at least not until January 9, 1945.

PHOTO taken in 2009 by Jenna Robertson, granddaughter of Sgt. William B. Murry, Co. A, 1st Bn., 242nd Inf. Regt., who was taken prisoner by the Germans at Hatten, France, was a POW in Bad Orb (Stalag IXB) and then transported to Kassel, Germany.

It was here that the one armed German and his comrades strode forward and asked, *“Was this your position? It was mine. We captured it on January 9. Do you remember the ten American tanks which attacked us on January 16? We knocked out two of them with our Panzerfausts, but they killed my second-in-command.”*

I Company's Third Platoon block house was next in line. Just inside the edge of the forest which is as dark and damp today as it was open and frozen in that winter of desolation. Even on a sunny day, it is dark where vines and trees grow over and around the steel reinforced hardened concrete. Only the firing ports and casement door stand open and ready for the forest creatures to enter and leave. An archeological find, seemingly engulfed by the creeping jungle, a witness to history, as its empty eyes gazed out across the Hatten fields to its neighboring fortresses changing hands; at two villages pounded into rubble; great fighting machines racing, firing and destroying each other—men in green—men in grey and white struggling through the snow to take and retake positions, ground won and lost. Flares turning night into day—the pitch of battle rising and falling—the cold—intense, bone chilling, crippling cold. Foreign voices, screams of the enemy wounded—sound and sight and fury and times of quiet before the next onslaught.

It is not a happy place; no restoration and few visitors. Just some old soldiers who peer into the recesses, standing uncomfortably, trying to balance the past and the present—weighing this day's events against the totality of that long-ago battle and unforgotten war. And perhaps concluding that these ceremonies, the new and old monuments have special meaning for those who were participants in those events which helped to wrench civilization into new directions. The world changed in January 1945 for both the dead and the living. Such momentous episodes and cataclysmic times deserve mementos of remembrance—a monument dedicated, villages rebuilt, fortresses restored (or left in place even if abandoned), and local people expressing their gratitude for freedom forty years later. Old soldiers deserve to see the resurrection of the places they destroyed, peace and prosperity restored, and most of all to feel the still bright friendships of old reunited comrades at the place where the young died early and the survivors remember well and long.

The forest and fields are quiet now—no peasants till the land on this special Sunday. The celebrants are beginning to drift away and the villages will begin life anew after the great celebration. These Alsatian people will now weave into their lives and their rich history tales of when the Americans and Germans first met in the furious battle for their villages and then two generations later some of the very same soldier veterans came once again together to sit and eat and drink together with their hosts who themselves had once been victimized and imprisoned by the battle which raged around them. Truly a marvelous story.

To view photos of present day Hatten, France and to follow one family's journey to find the story of their Veteran, killed in action in the vicinity of Hatten-Rittershoffen on January 17, 1945, please visit this excellent web page in honor of Irwin W. Newman, Private, 315th Regiment, 79th Infantry Division. <http://www.your-krav-maga-expert.com/finding-Willie-BattleField.html>
[Keywords: Finding Willie, the Battlefield]

REMEMBRANCES

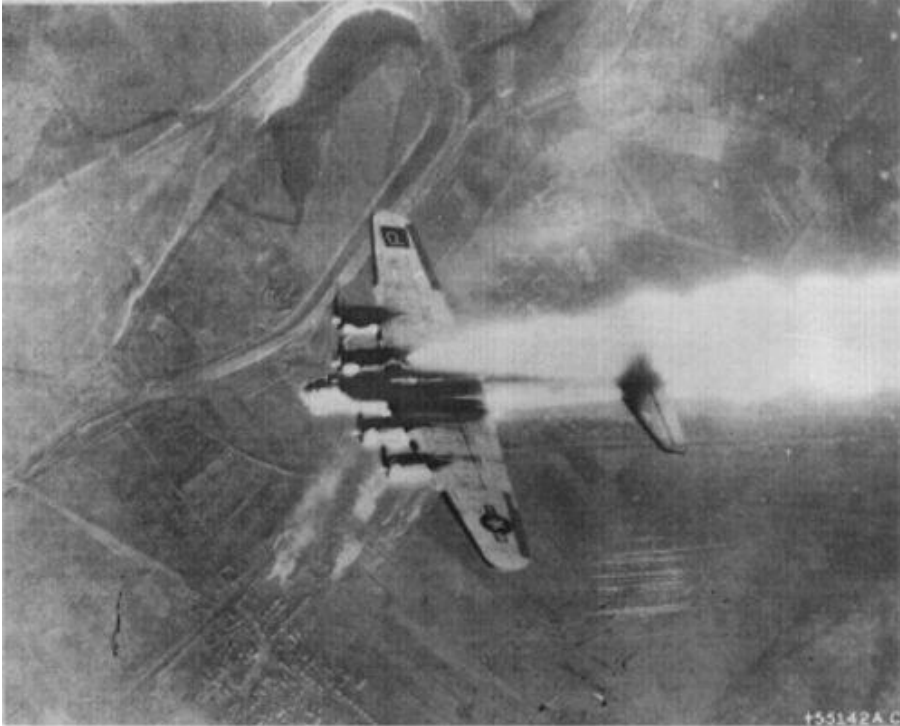
REUNION – An Incredible Encounter 54 Years Later

Recently my wife and I were on a vacation trip out west. Near the end of our driving trip through the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State, we made a decision to go to the coast. The weather in November there is usually rainy, cold and dreary, but Thursday, November 5 seemed to hold some promise with large patches of sunshine between showers. By evening we found ourselves on a small peninsula along the coast and at the little village of Long Beach. Alive with tourists in Summer, the area was pretty deserted in November. After some debate over a location right on the beach or in town, we selected a motel a block off the beach, in town.

As we checked in, we commented to the clerk that the outdoor sign indicated a reunion of the 42nd Rainbow Division on the weekend. He replied that some had already arrived and had gathered in a meeting room adjacent. My wife, Marian, suggested that I drop in to say hello to this famous WWI and WWII group that fought on the ground in WWII through France and southern Germany, to end up liberating Dachau. Since I was an 8th Air Force navigator, not a foot soldier, I was somewhat reluctant to interfere with their conversations. However, I did enter the

room and strangely approached one table of men, looking particularly at one man as I announced that I was an 8th Air Force man just dropping in.

The gentleman arose and came over to greet me. He then proceeded to tell me that he had a cousin in the 8th. The two of them grew up together and felt as close as two brothers. Then he said that his cousin was shot down and killed in an air raid on the oil refinery at Merseburg. He added that all the men on the plane were reported killed except one who suffered a broken leg. Since Merseburg was deep penetration for the 8th Air Force in WWII, there were few raids to that town and my interest immediately heightened, since I had participated in one of the raids. I asked, "What day was the raid?" To which he replied, "November 30, 1944." I then asked the man's name and the response was "Duke Eberhart." In complete shock, I replied. "That was the name of our radio man and I was shot down on that day. I was the one who had the broken leg."



From the National Archives –
photo of the 30 November 1944 loss of the
487th Fort 43-37877 on which T/Sgt. John D.
"Duke" Eberhart, was Radio Navigator.
<http://www.486th.org/Photos/AC2/SquareP.htm>

Further discussions throughout the evening with Dee Eberhart and his wife, Barbara, confirmed that we were indeed talking about the same incident and the same crew, headed by Pilot Lloyd Kersten.

I confirmed to Dee that one other man parachuted, our bombardier, Lt. Warren Ritchhart. Through Dee Eberhart's help, I found out that our bombardier returned to the States and died on Oct. 18, 1981.

I prefer to leave it to the

mathematical wizards to determine what the odds are of such an incredible encounter!

James Hyland, 487th BG Maumee, Ohio

James Hyland and his crew were shot down on their 30th mission. Pilot was 1st Lt. Lloyd Kersten, Logan IA [from a September 1999 unnamed publication]

Postscript from Dee R. Eberhart, August 2012: *"Re My first meeting with Jim Hyland. Across from the entrance to the Hospitality room at the Long Beach Super 8 Motel was a large, accurate, colored painting of a low level B-17 in flight. This probably caught Jim's eye and moved him to cross into our well bannered and signed Reunion room. The Super 8 was sold a few years ago, and recently Roger, the son of the original owners and well known to most of us stopped at our Hospitality Room for a visit. He explained that when they sold the business, everything was included. I asked him about the Flying Fortress painting. He replied, "Oh no. Not that. It was specifically excluded in the sales documents and now hangs in my house."*

"THE EIGHT BALL PLATOON" an anecdote of post-WWII Military Experience from the letters of Edwin Rusteberg, who commanded the First Battalion, 242nd Infantry Regiment, 42nd Division at the Battle of Hatten, France in January 1945; Col., U.S. Army, ret. d. 1990 - written to his children, Bill Rusteberg and Suellen McDaniel [photo of Col. Rusteberg 1964 at Fort Knox, KY].

During the summer of 1949, when I was ordered from the Armed Forces Staff College at

Norfolk, Virginia to Fort Sill, Oklahoma to command an Armored Infantry Battalion, I was to begin one of the most interesting years of my career. As the Infantry Commander at the Field Artillery Center, it was my primary mission to provide the Infantry element for the military problems presented at the Artillery School. Since my parent unit was the Armored Division at Ft. Hood, Texas, several hundred miles away, I had considerable freedom of action in the training and operation of my unit. As we were in the “limelight” as the only “doughboy” unit on the post among the numerous “Redleg” Artillery battalions present, it was essential that we maintain the fine image expected of us. So at periodic meetings with my company commanders I would stress not only the proficiency required in the field, but also the conduct and discipline expected of our troops on and off post.

At one such meeting one day, my company commanders complained that they were spending an undue portion of their time with problems created by a few “Eight Balls” in each company. If they could just get rid of these men it would certainly help them in maintaining the best image possible. Having been a company commander myself for many years, I recognized their problem instantly. These were not criminals or men who should be eliminated from the service – there were regulations which took care of such cases – they were primarily adventurers testing the regulations to see how far they would bend.

Being in a position of considerable independence and latitude in my actions, I decided to experiment with a solution to the problem by forming an “Eight Ball” Platoon by transferring from each company those so designated by each company commander. Checking first with the Post Inspector General to insure that such an action was “within the law,” I selected a tough Lieutenant to command this platoon, and transferred the twenty odd “Eight Balls” to HQ Co and housed them in a special wing of their barracks.

“They are to learn to March, Shoot, and Obey!!!!” I told the Lieutenant, and directed that he prepare a schedule of training to accomplish this mission. It was like “Boot Camp” or recruit training all over again with rigorous discipline enforced at all times. By the end of the day, when taps sounded, they had little time or desire to complain or cause trouble. As time went on a certain “Esprit d’Corps” became evident in this unit and their training seemed to become a challenge to them. In addition, since the rigorous schedule of this unit was observed by others in the battalion, it had a dampening effect on any other potential “Eight Balls.”

Before the course was completed, the Korean War came into being and one day when volunteers were called for, the entire “Eight Ball” platoon volunteered for combat. “War couldn’t be any tougher than this!!!” they said. Not long after they had left, I followed them



for an assignment in the Far East Command. About a year later, by strange coincidence, I ran into my Lieutenant who had commanded the “Eight Ball Platoon” at Ft. Sill. After the usual greetings of old comrades, the Lieutenant, now a Captain, said:

“Colonel, you remember the “Eight Ball Platoon” at Ft. Sill, in which all members volunteered for combat over here? – Well, so far, I’ve run into two of them on the battlefield!!!” The Captain continued with: “Both were well decorated Lieutenants with Battlefield Commissions!!!!”

“Hmmm!!” I said, “Strange things happen in Peace and War!!!!”



CPL Robert Hoskinson, 779th Coastal Artillery Battalion
c: 1943, probably taken at Camp Haan or Camp Irwin, CA

In July '43, at age 27, he was heading to Camp Haan.
In July '44, he was heading to Camp Gruber, where the 799th was disbanded
and he joined the Rainbow Division.

A VILLAGE CALLED OFFENDORF A Narrative by SGT Robert Hoskinson, Co. G, 232nd Infantry Regiment, including information from "Hold at All Cost/42nd Rainbow Division Prisoners of War"; research and presentation by his daughter, Kathleen Hoskinson Hemard; Sgt. Hoskinson's words are in Bold print.

In 1992, Robert wrote: "This, Kathy, is a sketchy description of wanderings around Germany. Now that I've gone this far, I'm tempted to use this as an outline and try to fill in all the blanks so maybe when you read the letter, maybe you could send it back to me so I could write my memoirs of the war years, all the other guys did it, Churchill, Eisenhower, etc."
Here are your memoirs, dad.

On January 2nd, 1945: "We (Rob Fallis, my BAR man, {*Elmer*} Bickerstaff, a little guy named {*Rex*} Germany, {*Charles*} Chaffee, and {*Everett*} Dale) were dumped off at a railroad bridge where we relieved the outfit that was guarding the ridge. It wasn't a bad set up, we were completely on our own, about five miles from the CO. We found nice quarters in a large modern building that houses a bunch of the local gendarmes.

At noon time McCurdy didn't show up with our food and what was more important we didn't have the new password which is always changed at noon. Not having the password didn't amount to much during daylight hours but after dark you just don't walk around without the password on account people have been known to shoot people quite dead who walked around at night without the password. So you can imagine my concern when Mc didn't show up at supper time either.

All day long I had noticed a lot of activity. As a matter of fact the French 1st Armor was moving thru the city all day long heading south. Things like this don't happen without a reason. Also that afternoon two MGE 109s (*Messerschmitt*) swooped down at us a couple of times.

On January 3rd, 1945: About 1 o'clock in the morning, here comes McCurdy. He explained that the CO had moved and all transportation was needed for the move.

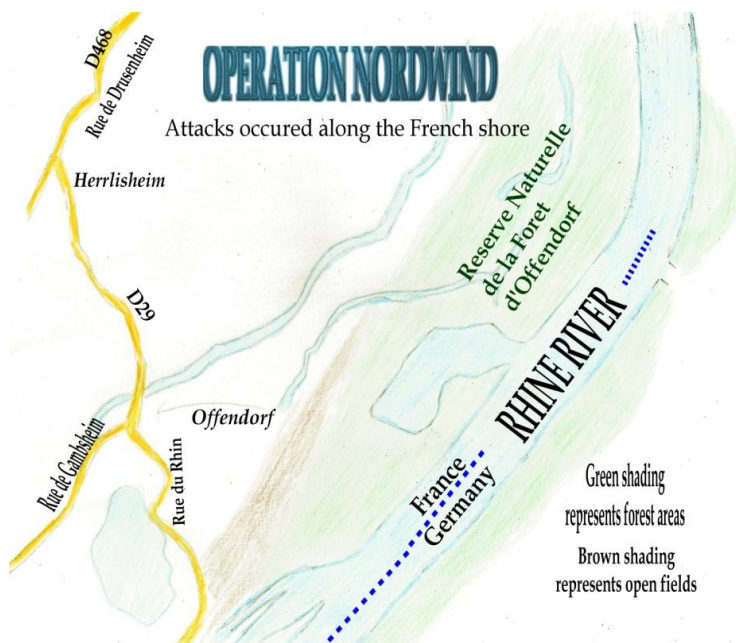
We moved out to the Island and joined our platoon. They were all in a house. This house was right out in the open and Jerry was just across the river not over 200 yards.

In the daytime you could see Jerry walking around outside his pillbox and he could see us too I suppose. Occasionally someone would fire a few rounds. Jerry would do the same, sometimes he would drop a mortar round right up by the house just to let us know he could obliterate it at will. We were plenty nervous because all of us knew that the enemy could cross the Rhine any time they wanted to because we were scattered too. In spite of our anxiety, we started to enjoy the house. It was rather large, about 12 rooms, I'd say, and in fair condition. Ray (*probably Gremore*) and I cleaned up the kitchen and found a bunch of C rations, some potatoes and a 5 gallon can of Jerry jam. I started cooking up C rat, frying spuds and making coffee. We left some 12 hrs later.

We had men in several foxholes down close to the water and when they came in every two hours I wanted to have coffee and food ready for them. That went on all that night. Then about 0300, we were called back to the Platoon CP. “

Lt. Fruman said they 'heard the alarming news, or rumor, that the whole army of which the Rainbow was a part was withdrawing to the Vosges river far to the rear, that Strasbourg was to be given up, and that our division was chosen to be the force covering the retreat.'

“Lt. Fruman unfolded a large map and showed us how we were more or less surrounded by Von Rundstedt's drive across Colmar. He explained that the 7th Army was withdrawn 25 miles to reorganize. He said that Strasbourg was to be turned over to the Germans the next day at 0600. We were to start moving out immediately. The Platoon moved out of the house back to the Platoon CP about 700 yards back, with the exception of 1 NCO and three men with automatic weapons who had to remain as a covering force. I was the NCO. Bickerstaff had a Jerry machine gun that we had found and Kraft and Placido had BARs. We were arranged along the top of a little ridge made by an air raid shelter.



As part of Operation Nordwind, a German officer was ordered to form a combat team and decide when and where to attack next. The woods on the eastern bank of the Rhine would provide cover for building ferries. The woods on the western bank of the Rhine would stop US tanks. He decided to launch the attack in the areas of Offendorf, Gambenheim and Herrlisheim January 5th.

Around New Year's Eve, the citizens of Offendorf held a ball for the US soldiers who were about to leave. The citizens and soldiers danced together and had a great time.

The citizens thought it was a bad omen when they learned that some of the soldiers were actually Germans in disguise. They became even more anxious when they heard intense activity and noises coming from the forest near the Rhine.

January 4: "We took these positions about 0700 and remained there until 1600 when new orders came thru and we were relieved by Co. A of 222. I was really scared out on that ridge; there we were the only thing between the whole Seventh Army and the Jerry. However, there was no attack and aside from being scared, cold and hungry I was none the worse for wear when A Co. relieved us. We were taken to Offendorf, a little village about 500 yards from the Rhine, about 1900. *{There were about 25 – 30 men.}*

We were billeted in a school house again but it was precious little sleep we did. I had just been issued a nice little sleeping bag and longed to try it out but I never had a chance. As soon as our equipment was unloaded we set about moving the outposts. Ray and his squad were put in a pillbox on one side of town and Rucker's squad was on the other side of town. I remained with my squad in the schoolhouse.

January 5: We were no more than settled down when one man came running in looking for an interpreter. He told us that Jerry was crossing the river and you could hear motors on the other side.

The LT didn't believe him but we sent out a patrol anyway. The patrol went all the way down to the river and along it for some distance but found nothing.

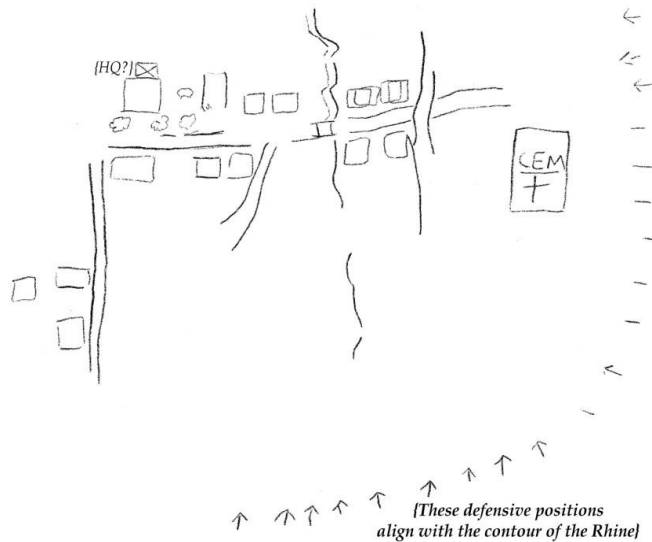
However by 0600 the next morning dozens of FFI [French Forces of the Interior] men were clearing out of town which meant that Jerry was undoubtedly coming."

The FFI in Offendorf went into the forest to fight the Germans. There was a fierce fight and several of the FFI were killed.

Platoon Sergeant Charles Moore woke up Lt. Fruman, yelling "Jerries!" The LT and about 12 other men ran out the door and down the street toward the edge of town, nearest the Rhine. They saw around 1,000 or more German soldiers with mortars, guns, and tanks coming towards them from the edge of the woods, about 500 yards from the east.

"There was only one thing to do and that was pull the two squads out of the pillboxes {about 8 to 10 blocks from the church} and set up a perimeter defense around the town. We didn't have to send for Rucker's squad here they came running like mad. As for Ray's squad, Herman Zeh started out to them but soon discovered that they were cut off. Rucker told us that they were coming by the millions.

With little choice and no time the LT spotted men around in different houses and waited."



Map drawn by Robert Hoskinson



Map drawn by Kathy Hoskinson Hemard

{Lt. Fruman and some men were billeted in the second floor of a tavern. There is a tavern, "La Flammestuebel", near the rectangle with an "x" on my dad's map.}

"Soon Jerry was much in evidence and even a buck Sgt could see that it was no patrol action. We could see that at least two companies were attacking us, probably a battalion. Frantic calls for help were sent but we had a pretty good idea that no one was coming. It had been unusually quiet, but about 0830 you could hear the chatter of machine guns and the occasional crack of ac rifle.

When we first sighted Jerry he was brazenly approaching in a close skirmish formation. We broke this up quickly. From the upper stories of the houses we were in, we were able to plunk away at will. There was an hour or so of shooting which Jerry was doing most of the receiving. We were sniping away at individuals while Jerry was firing at buildings and he didn't know which ones we were in."

The church bell tower provided a good view of the countryside. Lt. Fruman and a few others ran up to the tower. It was very intense as they watched the Germans approaching closer and closer. The men opened fire as soon as the Germans were within range. The Germans quickly fled back to the woods.

The lieutenant said the main German force seemed to be bypassing Offendorf, leaving only enough troops to take the town.

Meanwhile, at Company G Headquarters in Herrlisheim about 2 miles away, 2 jeeps went out on morning chow runs. One headed north to serve the men in pillboxes at Drusenheim. The other jeep headed south to serve the men in Offendorf. One jeep quickly returned with bullet holes and stunned men. The second jeep never returned.

In the church, Humphreys, the radio man, discovered the radio batteries were missing. The only telephone in town was in a tavern about 5 blocks away, in the direction of the Germans. He finally got an operator to locate someone at the company headquarters and called in their coordinates for artillery support.

Lt. Fruman felt the church tower was getting more dangerous. Bullets that ricocheted off the bells could wound or kill them. He said 'the sharp clang of the struck bells right above our heads was terrifying and a constant reminder that any of us could be hit at any moment.' The lieutenant went to SGT Moore, who was in charge of a small group in the city hall controlling the main road. A man ran in and yelled that they should surrender. Fruman and Moore looked at each other, then at the men who were staring at them. They were certain that help was on the way.

Several houses around the church had been hit with mortar fire, one was on fire. The streets were empty and all the windows were shuttered.

In the early afternoon, Lt. Fruman and a few men went to the southern edge of town to head off a large number of Germans approaching from the woods. The Germans saw them and laid down in the snow covered field, leaving the men nothing to shoot at.

Six P-47s appeared, circled over the Rhine, then came back to strafe the German line and sometimes the men. When the Germans fired back at the planes, they flew off.

During a period of quiet, a squad or 2 of reinforcements appeared in the distance. They soon came under attack and had to retreat.

By this time, most of the men were in the church. The men were ordered to take positions in the church and to guard the side doors. The lieutenant returned to the tower and saw Germans closing in from several directions. A mortar shell exploded nearby. Right after he left the tower, it took a direct hit by an 88 shell and was demolished.

Suddenly there was an explosion that tore the 2 front doors off their hinges. They emptied their magazines into the smoke and dust. Then it was quiet.

Raymond Essig, guarding the anteroom, heard gun burst. He looked through an open door to the pew section and saw 2 or 3 of the men, with their arms raised, shot. Suddenly, it was quiet in the square. One of the men, Stanley Kubas, went to the doorway, with his arms up, yelled "I surrender! Don't ..." There was a burst of rifle fire. His knees buckled and he pitched forward.

By sunset, with no more ammunition and the church surrounded, Lt Fruman and the men decided to surrender. A German soldier entered the church door and told them to surrender. As the men were pushed into an empty store, the Germans slammed them with their rifle butts and demanded their valuables.

The German Commanding Officer asked where the other men were. Lt. Fruman explained that there were no more. The German said that in 30 minutes he would have given up the attack till the next morning.

The men were marched down the main road. They heard "Halt!" As they were lined up against a wall, a machine gun was set up and pointed at them. A German corporal squatted behind the machine gun and put his finger on the trigger. The men waited. Again, the men thought of the Malmedy Massacre. The German officer came up to Lt. Fruman and smiled as he said "We won't shoot you in front of civilians."

(In December 1944, near Malmedy, a lead truck in a U.S. convoy was shelled. The soldiers surrendered. An SS officer ordered a German soldier to set up a machine gun and shoot the prisoners. When the firing stopped, a German soldier asked, in English, if any of the prisoners were injured. Anyone responding was shot in the head. Of the 84 soldiers, only 3 survived. The survivors waited for the Germans to leave then walked to a nearby US base and reported "Germans are shooting POWs."
The incident was called "The Malmedy Massacre.")

* * * * *

From Kathleen Hemard - Here are some websites I found helpful in creating a picture of what the men went through.

National Archives World War II section:

<http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=WR26>

Go to the World War II Army Enlistment Records and type in the family member's name in the search box. From the search results, click the appropriate "View Record". This record will have the year of birth, place of enlistment and his Army Serial Number.

If he was a WWII Prisoner of War, go to the WWII Prisoner of War Data file and type in his name or serial number. You will find the date of his capture, his regiment number is found under the "Parent Unit Number", and the "Camp" indicates what Stalag he was sent to.

"Enlisted Record and Report of Separation":

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/>

This form has a lot of information, place of separation, battles/campaigns, decorations and citations; dates they departed and returned to the US, etc. When you request the form, you will also receive the medals the family member is entitled to, including Bronze Star, American Campaign medal, World War II Victory Medal, etc. It takes about 1 week to get the form and about 9 months to get the awards.

"42nd 'Rainbow' Infantry Division: a combat history of WW II" has a lot of helpful information and interesting photos:

<http://cgsc.cdmhost.com/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4013coll8/id/3158>

Google book search:

<http://www.google.com/search?q=42nd+Rainbow+Division+in+WWII&btnG=Search+Books&tbm=bks&tbo=1> The most helpful book is **"Hold at All Cost" written by Rainbow Division**

Prisoners of War. All of the narratives are informative regardless of what regiment your family member belonged to.

“Final Crisis: Combat In Northern Alsace” by Richard Engler and “Winter Storm: War in Northern Alsace” by Lise Pommois”.

To travel through Offendorf or any other village, go to Google Maps:

<http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&tab=wl> or Google Earth:

<http://www.google.com/earth/index.html> . Zoom in until you see the street names, then drag the little yellow icon to the street you want to go.

To visit Offendorf, zoom in and drag the icon to the corner of Rue de Principale and Rue des Ecoles, you can see the church, rebuilt around 1960, if you go to the side of the church adjacent to Rue des Ecoles, you’ll see a monument to the WWII dead; travel down to the corner of Rue de Gambenheim and Rue De Principale to see the City Hall; there is a tavern ‘Foret du Rhin’ on Rue Principale, heading east, it may be the one Humphreys ran to in order to call HQ.

The official Offendorf website: http://www.offendorf.fr/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=25

Under the Conseil Municipal, Dossiers, there is a section “Il y a 60 ans ... les evenements de 1944/1945”, which has nice old pictures of the village and describes what they went through during WWII. To translate the information into English, highlight the narratives, copy and paste into a word document. Highlight the text in the word document, click on “Review” in an upper tool bar, on the next screen click on “Translate”. Specify translation from French to English, then click ‘Translate the whole document.’ It’s a very rough translation but you can get the gist of what happened.

In March 45, many POWs were in the month long ‘death march’ from northern Germany to Stalag VII-A in Moosburg. This link gives a great description of

the liberation of Stalag VII-A: <http://www.moosburg.org/info/stalag/14theng.html>

Most POW and RAMPS (Recovered Allied Military Personnel) were sent to ‘cigarette camps’. This link gives a good **description and pictures of life at the “cigarette camps”**.

Many of them, like my dad, were sent to Camp Lucky Strike:

<http://www.skylighters.org/special/cigcamps/ciginintro.html>

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Education agreement signing ceremony between Excelsior College and the Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation, Inc. Albany, NY July 14, 2012

Left - MG Joe Taluto, RDVMF Chairman ; Right - Excelsior College President, John F. Ebersole; Center – MG Steven Wickstrom, Commander, 42nd Division.

Assembled behind them are members and veterans of the 42nd “Rainbow” Division

Photo by Tim Remple

For further information please go to -

<http://www.rainbowvets.org/excelsior-college-partnership>



Excelsior College Launches Online Veterans' Center

By Judy Reed, Director of Veteran Services and Outreach

At a time when traditional colleges provide a space on campus for veterans to come together to socialize, support each other in their academic pursuits and provide advocacy for appropriate resources to aid success in attending college and obtaining a career, veterans attending Excelsior College can now do the same!

Excelsior College's over 3,000 veterans will soon have an online space of their own. The veterans' center provides a mentorship program, an area to share educational and career achievements, have access to resources, college orientation materials, and a discussion area on numerous topics to include degree programs, exam study buddy search, job search, mentorship program, starting a veterans group, textbook exchange and VA educational benefits.

The purpose of the Excelsior Veterans' Center is to provide a place for veterans to connect, ease their transition to the online campus, access to resources, and enjoy peer support and camaraderie. The veterans' center is a foundation for providing veterans the ability to provide feedback to improve the center as well as be connected to information useful to them while they are attending the college as an enrolled, degree seeking student, an alumni or simply a visiting student taking one class. There will now be that sense of connection with other veterans at Excelsior College.

The Excelsior College Veterans' Center, which launched August 17, is accessible to student veterans who have identified themselves to the college. If you are a veteran and do not have access to the Veterans' Center please contact the Center for Military education at 888-647-2388, ext. 1352. Links to enter the Excelsior Veterans' Center are located within the military and veteran web pages: <http://www.excelsior.edu/military>

Excelsior College has an education partnership with the Rainbow Division Veterans Memorial Foundation. Members, employees and their spouses or domestic partners will receive reduced pricing on tuition and fees while pursuing associate and bachelor degrees at Excelsior College. For more information on the partnership go to: <http://www.excelsior.edu/rainbow-division-veterans-memorial-fund>



Scenes from the Albany Reunion July 2012 from the 42nd ID – New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center and the Formal Banquet Saturday evening.

For many more photos, go to –

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nyng/collections/72157630605897420/>