

# Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII

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# Chapter 1

## Preface

This collection contains raw material about brothers Edward Randolph Hersman (Ed ) and Ernest Ray Hersman (Ray) and their exploits in World War II. Ray was taken prisoner in WWII by the Germans and was liberated, incredibly, by his brother Ed 's Division.<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Ed was, in every sense, a war hero. I am struck with the similarities to his account of WWII with that of Audie Murphy in his autobiography *To Hell and Back* [5]. Both went through a transition of assuming they were already dead - a state of mind allowing a soldier to do what he needed to do. Both were heros. Ed was recommended for two silver stars, and received one. His account of his deeds in WWII, carefully read, are astonishing. This was a man of enormous courage.

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<sup>1</sup>Ed and Ray are my mother's brothers.

Ray's war experience shaped much of his philosophy and later life. Personally, I count Ray Hersman as one of the most influential men in my life. In the awkwardness of my college days, I would often drive to his home in New Albany and spend hours talking. He was instrumental in introducing me to Christ. This initial embracing of Christ's Lordship and role as intercessor to the Creator has remained the center my life.

Little in this collection is written by me. Chapters 2 through 5 are written by Ed. Chapter 7 was written by Justine McHenry, Ed and Ray's youngest sister. Chapter 8 is written by Ray Brent Hersman, Ray's oldest son. The material from Chapter 6 is a result of my investigation on the web. The material in Chapter 6, also written by others, contains accounts about the 83rd (Ed 's Division). Chapter 9 contains some of my speculations about Ray's internment.

βMy Contribution My small contribution is organizing the material. I have also added headings in an attempt to better document the accounts. I have added images and footnotes in places, often to better crystalize my understanding of the accounts. From Ed 's account, I made a map chronologically tracing his experience from his landing on Omaha beach at Normandy, across Europe, and to within 60 miles of carbine at the end of the war.<sup>2</sup>

This typesetting is done in LaTeX which allows me to provide a table of contents and an index to the account.

#### βAcknowledgements

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<sup>2</sup>The map is on page 49.

Ed Herman's original manuscript was handwritten. Ray Alan Marks, my brother, typed it. In typesetting this work, I have used Ray's original.

Ray Brent Hersman, who wrote Chapter 8, has spent hours talking to me about his father and his military experience.

And Ed and Ray. The more I read about you and your experiences, the more I wish I knew you better.



# Chapter 2

## Ed 's Early Memories

by Edward Randolph Hersman

### 2.1 Prologue

Grandchildren and descendants generally can find out very little about their ancestors so I am writing this history of myself for their benefit.

### 2.2 Ancestry

I was born October 21, 1921 in a small town, Iuka, West Virginia, in Tyler county.

My parents were Ernest Hersman and Hazel Grace Haught Hersman. I know very little of my ancestry other than both sides of the family apparently

came to America in the late 1700's or early 1800's. On my father's side, the family was apparently of pure German descent. On my mother's side, the ancestry was primarily Dutch (Haught) and Scottish (Campbell). All my ancestry seem to have been engaged in farming as an occupation. The first six or seven years of my life were spent in Akron, Ohio, at a home on Baird Ave. which is presently the site of East High School. I can remember very little about these years. I recall that we owned a car called a "Star". I remember that there was a big fire which burned down a rubber factory a block or two away from the house and water being sprayed on the house to keep it from burning.

My father was injured in World War I by being thrown from a horse and became mentally incompetent. My mother had to take over the support of the family when I was around seven years old.

In addition to myself there were four other children, in order, Iris Bernice, Ernest Ray, Lenore Ethel, and Justine Joy.

## **2.3 Akron, Ohio**

Mother obtained a job on the "tube" line at the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. We children were under the care of a "hired girl" who had been brought up from West Virginia. (Susan Farr)

My kindergarden was spent in Siebuldge Grade School. I remember walking up and down the hill (Goodyear Heights) to go to school. My first and

## **2.4. RETURN TO WEST VIRGINIA** *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

possibly the second grade were attended at the Hotchkiss Grade School. I can recall crossing over a railroad track on a foot bridge to reach this school and that the wind was often so cold that I had to walk backwards into it. The “hired girl” was completely unable to handle my brother and I and with other boys we “ran wild”. As a gang we were often out at the airport (Akron Municipal now) and around Lake Springfield. We swam naked in streams between the airport and East Market Street. We roamed the storm sewers that dumped into old Blue Pond. These sewers had big blue crabs in them that seemed to be as big as lobsters to us.

There was a wooden pier which ran practically across Blue Pond, and I nearly fell off it. I lost a shoe but would have drowned if I had fallen in. A boy named Floyd and I stole a leaky canoe and went out on Springfield Lake. We didn’t know how to paddle and the wind gradually blew it across the lake. It sank just as we reached what was then Springfield Park.

## **2.4 Return to West Virginia**

My mother decided that we would move to West Virginia where she believed she could get a position teaching school.

βNicut, Calhoun County

We moved to Lower Nicut (1928?), Calhoun County, West Virginia (the post office was Euclid). My mother obtained a job teaching in the Minnora Grade School. My mother had to walk over a big mountain about 4 miles to

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her school.

The people at Nicut lived almost exactly the same way that their ancestors had since they settled the area. Many of them lived in log houses. The old methods at “slash and burn” was still being used to clear forest land for planting. Some families still cooked in open fire places, and in many homes the open fire place was the main method of heating. Most of the men’s time was spent eking out a living by farming the poor West Virginia land. One of the entertainments was the cane mill. This mill shed sorghum cane to produce juice, which in turn was reduced to sorghum molasses in a channeled tray type boiler. People would congregate around the tray with spoons and eat the froth (called “skimmings”) on the molasses in its final channels. The original froth at the start of the heating process was green in color. This was skimmed off and thrown in a hole in the ground. It was great sport to get somebody to fall in the “skimming” hole.

The Nicut School was children attended was a one room frame school for grades one through eight.

The principal games played at school were direct carry downs from pioneer days. The games I remember are Red Rover, prisoner and Draw Base and a ball game called “Long Town”. At this time I became interested in reading and read everything I could get my hands on.

This was during the last years of the American chestnut tree and chestnuts could still be found although most of the trees were dead. The nearest stores were about four miles away and it was quite a job getting supplies such as

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flour, sugar etc. This chore fell on me as the oldest and at eight years old lugging flour, lard and sugar over West Virginia hills was not my idea of fun.

We children were city raised but it didn't take long to adjust to the new type of life. We learned to like meals generally consisting of potatoes, sorghum, corn bread, milk etc. My mother cooked in the fire place with big iron kettles and skillets. We persisted in calling stones bricks and had other city traits which our neighbors found amusing.

βPoor and Hungry in Minnora

We moved from Nicut to Minnora after about one year (1930?) so my mother could be near the school she taught. My mother bought a 300 acre farm which is where the Minnora parsonage is now.

The farm was mostly hill side and woods. We bought some cows, pigs and a horse. The horses name was "Dan Patch" and was one of the meanest horses around. He would bite or kick any of the children he could reach as long as somebody did not have hold of his head. However, once he was haltered or bridled he was O.K.

My mother lost her job teaching school. At the time the members of the board of education insisted on being paid by teachers to whom they assigned schools. My mother refused to do this and lost her job. Our income for a long time consisted of 40 to 60 dollars a month, from my father's disability.

My brother and I hoed corn from six o'clock in the morning to six at night, and things were in general very hard.

Our meals were very skimpy and at times almost non-existent. My mother

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raised two big gardens and we butchered hogs, raised chickens and cows, but even so we were often hungry.

One summer most of our hogs died from cholera, and we didn't have any meat for a long time.

At Minnora our main friends were the Hamilton children. We were always getting in scrapes together. Edward and John Hamilton, together with my brother Ray and I had one main ambition: to build a raft and go to the Ohio River.

The raft when finally built consisted of several different length logs fastened with boards and nails. The latter were stolen from the local store. The stealing process was accomplished by sitting on the nail kegs and slipping nails in our pockets. I've always believed that the store proprietor knew we were doing it but said nothing.

The Hamilton boys had a concession to sell a weekly paper called the "Grit". I'm afraid the "Grit" received very little money, since the effort at selling was so great that refreshments such as pop, candy and roll your own pipe tobacco were required. We found roll your own pipe tobacco to be superior to "corn silk". We did not get the habit of smoking at this time though, in fact we became ill.

The Hamilton boys and my brother and I often got "lickings". These lickings were with willow or hickory switches and really hurt. We managed for a while to eliminate the pain by hiding cardboard in our pants. The day our parents caught on wasn't a pleasant one. My brother and I used to listen

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to the Hamilton boys get “licked” then go home and get ours.

Fishing, swimming (nude mostly), playing games, shooting and just plain goofing around was our main recreation.

We were very poor and went bare foot most of the time. Even when frost was on the ground we would go bare foot, and run like the dickens between home and school (about 1 mile).

“Relief” or what is now called welfare was looked down upon even though we were in the great depression. Only “no good” or lazy people ever went on relief. Therefore most people would rather starve than go this route. Our clothes for every day consisted of either bib type overalls or riveted blue jeans (called overall pants). We did not wear shirts except for dress up occasions.

βGrantsville

We could not meet payments on the farm and lost it.

My mother decided to continue her education so we moved to Grantsville so she could go to high school (1932?). Although she had went to Glenville Normal School when she was young apparently it wasn’t equivalent to a high school education.

I remember reading an average of a book or more a day at Grantsville. The principal finally ordered that I was not to be allowed to sign out any more books from the school library. I read pulp magazines, then from the Democratic Headquarters (Hoover vs. Roosevelt) until the principal saw me in there one day reading and told them not to let me in.

There were two loosely organized gangs in Grantsville, the “town” gang

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and the “south side” gang. I was the unofficial leader of the “town” gang and we would skirmish with the other group. Our gang generally won these skirmishes since we were equipped with single band sling shots (from my Akron days), rubber band guns (also from my Akron days) and bows and arrows. The other gang could only throw rocks. No one was ever really hurt in these fights. They organized a troop of Boy Scouts which I joined, but I was kicked out when I had a big fight with another boy. (No winner, he was kicked out as well).

When my mother graduated from high school she obtained a school teaching position at Cotrell.

Cotrell was six miles from the nearest hard surfaced road. In winter the dirt roads could only be traveled by horse or foot. This was my freshman year in high school. My mother wanted me to board with someone on the hard surfaced road but I decided to try to walk to school, to save money. (1935)

The trip each day consisted of walking twelve miles over two mountains each way and riding a school bus for about 50 miles.

I was joined in this walking by another boy named Waldo McClain. Waldo was a direct descendent of the Scotch Irish who settled this area and knew all the old ballads which I learned. I also learned to play a harmonica at this time.

We started for school at 4 o’clock in the morning and arrived back home at eight o’clock in the evening. Generally we took a dog with us and hunted



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as we walked to school. One day we tangled with a skunk and had to come back home.

In the spring we were joined by three Cotrell girls who decided to walk to school (they transferred to Calhoun High from Clay High).

We lived in what had been a storage building for corn. The walls consisted of rough lumber nailed side by side and of course there were big cracks between the boards. The cracks allowed ample ventilation especially in winter. Lighting was from kerosene lamps. Our toilet facilities were an outside john. Heating was accomplished by using wood in a big pot bellied stove in the center of the main room (there were two rooms). Cooking was on a wood fired stove.

Food was generally of a dried and canned nature. In the fall cases of salmon, salad dressing, canned vegetables and fruit, prunes, flour, sugar and lard were stored for the winter. Biscuits and corn bread were all we ever ate in the bread line.

My brother and I had the chore of furnishing wood for the stoves. Waldo generally helped us with this work.

We would take McClains horse and go to the woods where we would cut down a tree. After the tree was trimmed we would hook a drag chain around the tree and the horse would drag it to the house. We cut the tree into lengths of wood with a two man cross cut saw. Axes, a mallet and wedges were used to split the wood. We generally cut about a chord of wood at a time. Our main entertainment was hunting. We hunted rabbits, pheasant,

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quail, squirrels and “possum”.

“Possum” hunting is quite an experience. It consists of walking over the mountains and through the valleys and woods at night with lanterns and flashlights. The dogs range near and far around the hunters as they walk hunting for a “possum” trail. When the dogs find a trail they follow it until they “tree” the “possum”. Someone climbs the tree, grabs the “possum” by the tail and brings it to the ground. The possum’s neck is then broken by placing his head on the ground and pushing on its neck with a large stick. Ammunition was never wasted on “possums” and besides it ruined the fur.

Waldo and I missed the bus one day and stopped to look around the cemetery on the way home. He made the remark “Wouldn’t it be funny if one of us were in here next year?”. This was an omen.

Things turned better for the Hersmans in the spring and summer of 1936. Mom bought a new car, a 1936 standard two door model Chevrolet.<sup>1</sup> We found a better house to move into during the fall.

βGlenville

When school closed we moved to Glenville, West Virginia so mom could attend Glenville State Teachers College.<sup>2</sup>

I did not associate with the boys in town but Ray did. I think he fought with about every boy around. On the few occasions when he lost the fight to older boys I would have to go down and beat them up. Living in a decent

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 2.1.

<sup>2</sup>Formerly Glenville State Normal School. See Figure 2.1.

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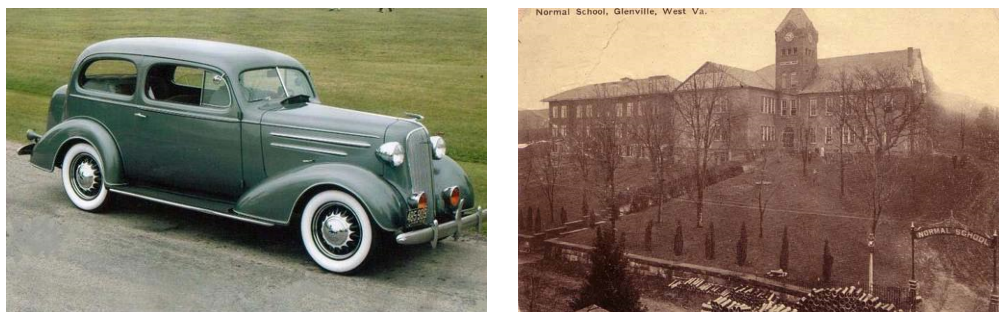


Figure 2.1: LEFT: 1936 two door model Chevrolet. RIGHT: Glenville State Normal School circa 1936. The school was later renamed Glenville State Teachers College and is currently called Glenville State College.

house was a luxury.

We moved into the house in Oka, near Cottrel, in the fall. Mom was still to teach school at Cottrel.

Waldo McClain went to Akron, Ohio to live with his brother and attend East High School. I never saw Waldo alive again after he left.

The county school board had noticed the surge in people trying to go to high school from the Cottrel-Oka area. They had a large truck fixed up with a cabin, which could come within two miles of Oka in winter.

Riding in this truck was interesting since the roads rutted and the truck was always on the verge of sticking in the mud in damp weather, or the chassis scraped almost continuously in freezing weather.

I walked the two miles to the truck with two Jarvis girls. I had a crush on Irene but she never found it out.

With the advent of winter, Mom decided we were affluent enough to allow

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me to board on the hard surfaced road.

I stayed for a while with the Carl Knotts family, but later boarded at Hamiltons. Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton refused in the spring to accept any money for my board and I have always been grateful for their kindness and consideration.

John Hamilton and I went out for football at Calhoun High, he for end and me for tackle. I had only stubbornness going for me as a football player and although I could have played in a few games getting to Grantsville on Saturdays was nearly impossible.

I do not recall this period very well but I remember that John's shooting ability had developed to the point that he could kill a running squirrel with a .22 rifle.

Waldo died from an ear infection and was buried in the cemetery which we had visited the year before. He was sixteen years old. The Hamilton boys, and other friends, and I were pall bearers at his funeral. The family moved to Glenville in the spring where mom attended college and obtained her bachelors degree.

ßSand Fork

In the fall we moved to Sand Fork in Gilmer County where mom would teach school.

The high school at Sand Fork was very small and there were no courses given at the time in mathematics. The only sport offered was basket ball which I detested. At noon the boys boxed and I participated in this but it

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was not a school sport.

During this year our house burned to the ground, with all our clothes and belongings (1937). The car was saved but since the keys were lost it could only be driven after I jumped the switch. It was weeks before we found a person who could make a key from lock numbers. The people at Sand Fork were wonderful. They took up a collection of canned food and clothes for the family. The Hayes family allowed us to stay with them until we could find another house. For a long time in the new house our main furnisher was orange crates.

The house we found was really half a house. The other half was occupied by Pentecostal “missionaries”. These people had come to Sand Fork from Akron, Ohio to bring religion to the natives.

After a series of “rolling in the leaves”, speaking “strange tongues” type of revival meetings the populace tired of them and withdrew their support. The Pentecostals would not plant a garden or otherwise do useful work. They spent hours praying for food and if someone brought them a jar of canned foods, more hours giving thanks for it.

We moved to another house and left these people. We still had our 1936 Chevy and Ray and I became interested in working on it but we had no tools. I would let boys who couldn’t drive drive for a block or two in exchange for a wrench, pliers etc. and gradually obtained tools enough to work on the car.

In exchange for a boat I let one boy drive about four blocks. He had found the boat after a “raise”. I paddled many miles up and down the Little

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Kanawha River in this boat and had it for many months. Finally a raise took it away after somebody cut my cable.

Summer work consisted of hoeing corn (75 cents a day) picking black and blue berries (5 - 20 cents a gallon for black and 50 cents a gallon for blue) to sell.

Ed Hamilton, another fellow whose name I don't recall and I obtained a job on a contract basis for cutting brush (called filth) near Tanner. There were many acres to be cut and the tools we had to use were scythes, axes and sprouting hoes. The pollen and dust was too much for Ed , who had had hay fever every summer since I knew him. We made him our cook and we slept on straw in a deserted house.

We finished the job but didn't average more than 50 cents a day since we had to replace broken and worn out scythe blades. These blades had to be replaced since we were using borrowed tools.

I made a minor amount of money using the boat during floods to catch and salvage lumber which I sold.

Near Sand Fork there is a cave called the Kennison Run Cave. It is a fault type cave and is very muddy and dirty inside. One bright spring day Ray and I decided we were tired of school and decided to take to the woods (play hooky). We took a skillet, eggs, bacon and potatoes and went up Kennison Run. We cooked a meal at a place a scout troop had started to build a cabin at one time. Mom found out about our outing and wrote a note to the principal telling him to take appropriate action in our case. We

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had to compile huge compositions explaining how we learned more in the woods that day than we would have in school. I visited that cave with my son Frank 30 years later and it is still as dirty as ever - but interesting.

Interest in the opposite sex began to develop. With John Hamilton at times but more often with Gib McCullough, we started chasing girls. These girls for the most part would have not have received parental approval.

Word got around that I was "wild". I do not know why this happened since all I ever did was drive a car real fast.

One of Gibs and my favorite tricks was to step on the brake and turn the wheel slightly on icy roads. This turns the car instantly 180 degrees hence facing in the opposite direction.

During my senior year in high school I became interested in chemistry. The teacher pretty well gave me the run of the lab because "Ed knows what he is doing". I performed the regular work book experiments but became interested in the reaction equations and went beyond work ordinarily done in high school. I made explosives and bombs of various sort and would take them out in the fields and set them off. One day I made ammonium iodide, a harmless explosive when wet but one which becomes very ticklish when dry. I sprinkled the ammonium iodide in the halls and rooms in the school. for day people walking around would step on it and it would go off with a bang like a cap pistol. Nobody could figure out what the noise was or where it was coming from. Many times when a teacher was teaching he would step on one and set if off but nobody ever figured it out.

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I was showing Taylor Kieth (killed in World War II) one of my concoctions and it blew up just as a teacher walked in and my chemistry days in high school were terminated.

My interest in girls had increased. I dated two for a few weeks but settled on number three and dated her more or less steadily for two years. It ended when I caught her dating another boy and I have never seen her since. Following my graduation from high school I enrolled at Glenville State Teachers College, which I attended for a year.

I took scientific courses and found them very difficult due to my bad school background. Physics particularly was hard for me although I made very good grades in such courses as chemistry, qualitative analysis, history, economics etc. I was actually very bored with college.



# Chapter 3

## Before Combat

by Edward Randolph Hersman

### 3.1 Early Jobs

When school finished in spring I decided to hunt for a job. I had always been interested in seeing how far I could go on one dollar so I took a dollar and hitch hiked to Fairmont, W.Va. to try and obtain work at the Westinghouse plant they were building there. I stayed at my Grand-dad's (Emerson Haught) but there was too many people and not enough jobs (1940) in Fairmont. With job possibilities exhausted in Fairmont I decided to go to Akron, Ohio. Grandma fixed me some sandwiches and Grandpa gave me an old pair of work shoes and one morning I started hitch hiking to Akron.

I hitch hiked up US-250 through Wheeling and spent the first night sleeping beside an abandoned brick kiln near New Philadelphia. The next morning I hitch hiked on into Akron, Ohio.

With less than a dollar and no room to stay in the first days in Akron were rather hectic. I ate day old bread at about 10 cents a loaf, ate green apples and slept in used car lots near the Goodyear plant #1 on East Market Street. One night the owner of a used car lot opened the car door and grabbed me while I was sleeping and I hit him with my fist. He wasn't hurt and was drunk and when I told him I didn't have any place to sleep told me to sleep in the car any time I wanted to.

Every day I made the round of Firestone, Goodrich, Quaker Oats and Goodyear but they were not hiring anyone.

I went in a restaurant once put a nickel (my last one) in a slot machine and it gave me 15 cents. With my money gone I wrote home and mom sent me \$20. I rented a room for \$3 a week on Broadway in downtown Akron. The first night in this room was rather exciting. I went to bed and turned out the lights and in a few minutes felt as though I was being eaten alive. I turned on the lights and the sheet was covered with little black bugs who quickly disappeared. These were bed bugs, the first I had ever seen. I worked out a system of turning on the lights, killing bugs like fury, turning them out then on again, killing bugs etc. until I reduced their population substantially. When I left this room a few days later it still had bugs though.

I made the rounds of the plants hunting work every day. Since I had very

little money I did not ride the street cars but walked. After several days I obtained a Cleveland paper and the want ads indicated that Cleveland might offer more employment opportunities than Akron.

I hitch hiked to Cleveland and found a room on 81st St. off Euclid Ave. I told the landlady I was hunting work, didn't have any money, and she agreed to let me have the room on credit.

I started answering ads in the paper but found only a couple days work pasting ads on books at a book-keeping firm.

I was walking down Euclid near East 79th one day I ran into the Moss brothers from near Glenville. Jennings Moss told me I might get a job washing dishes at a small restaurant called the Toddle House which is where he found work when he first came to Cleveland.

#### βWashing Dishes in Cleveland

I obtained work at the Toddle House and since food was part of the salary I really ate well. I would only drink pure coffee cream and ate plenty of pie, hamburgers, waffles etc.

In addition to washing dishes I had to make the coffee in big metal urns. One day everyone kept remarking how horrible the coffee tasted. When the coffee was consumed, I opened the urn to clean it and found the big cleaning brush inside.

One day I cut my hand while washing dishes. Later I heard an argument rather the dirty cup with coffee a man and woman had was tainted with blood or lipstick.

### βInstalling Phones and Drilling Flutes

I left the Toddle House after a few weeks and went to work for the Ohio Bell Telephone Company as an apprentice installer. The work was very low pay and with work opening up due to World War II I found a better job at the Cleveland Tool Company.

For the winter of 1941-1942 I spent milling flutes on drills at the Cleveland Tool Company. I worked from 6 o'clock at night to 6 o'clock in the morning. I was the only person in the department at night and a supervisor would stop by two or three times to see how I was doing. I had charge of six or seven milling machines and had to keep them going.

I was walking along one night on a dark street when suddenly I felt something clamp on my leg. I looked down and saw a big dog. I hit him with my lunch pail and he let loose and ran away without a sound. My main recreation in Cleveland was roller skating and going to the movies. I visited all the museums and read a lot.

## **3.2 Pearl Harbor**

I was in a movie December 7, 1941 when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and didn't hear about it until the movie was over. I walked through the heart of the Negro district going back and forth to work and carried a .32 revolver in my lunch pail. I never had any trouble from Negroes.

### **3.3 Enlistment**

Spring 1942 was a restless period with a war going on. I left Cleveland Tool and went to Charleston, West Virginia to enlist in the Army Air Force. I passed everything except the eye tests. My eyes eliminated any chance I ever had at being a pilot, bombardier or navigator.

John Hamilton was working for Dupont at Belle, West Virginia and I stayed with him for a few days. We spent most of our time looking for excitement, preferably feminine.

I went to Canton, Ohio with two other men and obtained work at the Timken Roller Boaring Company in the steel mill. This work was terribly hard. We removed red hot brick from open hearth furnaces. We would squirt a stream of water on the brick, cool it down a little bit, rush in and throw out bricks using asbestos gloves for about five minutes, then come out and cool off for fifteen. We ate salt tablets like candy and I lost a pound of weight a day. After two weeks we all quit and went on to Cleveland.

I obtained work at the Aircraft Fitting Company. My work was operating a turret lath making various fittings for airplanes.

I stayed for a few days in a room on East 77th street, but later moved to the Y.M.C.A. on Prospect Avenue, not far from downtown Cleveland. My brother Ray came up from West Virginia and obtained a job at a storage battery firm. He later obtained work at Thompson Products. He later moved from a room on 77th St. to the Y.M.C.A. as well.

I ran on the indoor track, swam in the swimming pool and took steam baths at the Y.M.C.A. and started to get in shape for the Army.

### **3.4 Army Training**

One day I received notice to report for induction into the Army. I was inducted into the Army at the induction center on West Third St. in Cleveland, Ohio.

βFort Haynes, Colorado

We were sent to Fort Hayes, Columbus, Ohio, where I received my first real introduction to the Army. The soldiers who took care of the inductees seemed to have been chosen for their ability to yell, and generally make our lives miserable.

We were run from place to place, where we received our uniforms and shots. Naturally after the running we had to stand in line for hours. We learned at once the old Army adage “Hurry up and wait.”

After running around all day we were glad to turn in that night. Our sleep was interrupted constantly by the soldier bellowing things over the loudspeakers. About four o'clock he bellowed “All K.P.'s turn out.” Somebody yelled back “Go to hell you sons of bitches.” Promptly the order came back “Everybody turn out and stand by their bunk for inspection.” They walked up and down looking at us but didn't find who yelled. They finally let us go back to bed for another hours sleep.

In the latrine at Fort Hayes was a urinal with a sign over it “For Venereal Disease Only.” I have always been puzzled by that sign since it seems unlikely that anyone would admit having something by using that urinal.

βCamp Atturbury, the Hellhole in Indiana

We left by train from Fort Hayes and didn’t figure out where we were going for many miles. Finally one man said “I know where we are going, to that hell hole Camp Atturbury, Indiana”. That is where we ended up. We were met by “cadre” at Atturbury, were taken to our quarters and had to fall out right away. We were then taken on a ten mile forced march. This march was very tough on all of us since we were very soft. We learned the Army stride. This stride is 30 inches, is hard on a tall person, and sheer murder for short people. Two of the latter soon found this out.

The outfit I was assigned to was the 3rd Platoon, Company G, 2nd battalion, 329th Division.

Three months of hell followed. Calisthenics, long night and day hikes, forced marches at double time extending for miles, with and without full field gear, obstacle courses galore, and training with all sorts of weapons, but mostly the rifle and carbine.

My first time on the rifle range I belsod (missed the target) and received “Maggies drawers” many times. The second time I fired sharpshooter and the third time I fired expert, the Army’s highest rating. I also fired expert with the M1 carbine. I didn’t do well at all with the .45 pistol.

**The Company Idiot**

The company idiot's name was Crouch who was from Kentucky. He was the butt of many cruel jokes and pranks. He invariably lost his pay through bad loans, poker etc. Some of the fellows would get him to drink a lot of beer at the PX, then when he became a little drunk they would put him in a cold shower.

On the rifle range Crouch could absolutely not be taught to fire Army style. The sergeants tried to teach him, the lieutenants and captains also worked with him and failed. One day the colonel was observing us fire and swore he would teach Crouch to shoot. The colonel attempted to teach Crouch how to shoot rapid standing fire. He made him rig his sling right, he kicked his feet into the right position, he forced his right arm into the high position the Army advocates. The colonel stepped back and confidently told Crouch to start firing. Down came the arm, the feet shifted to a new un-Army like position, the back assumed a backward bow, the rifle barrel weaved in a circle and Crouch fired eight times. The target went down and the came up with all hits marked in a very small pattern in the center of the target - a perfect score. The colonel threw his hands over his eyes and said "Oh no" and walked away. Crouch was one of those rare people who are natural "dead" shots. Nobody ever tried to show him how to shoot again.

I became involved in a fight over Crouch one time. A big Italian tried to steal Crouch's ramrod and since I had seen him borrow it from Crouch, I took his part. That fellow could have killed me but he was all mouth and



gave up quickly, he also gave the ramrod back.

**Fist Fighting with a Supply sergeant**

I had another fight with the supply sergeant over a pair of shoes, which he claimed I should have turned in at an earlier time. We agreed before we started that neither of us would let the old man (first sergeant) find out about it since either one of us could get in big trouble. I let him hit the first blow, and we started swinging at each other. The fight rapidly became ridiculous. We kept falling over foot lockers and supplies just trying to dodge each other's blows. Finally we both started laughing and called it off. This man was my friend for the remainder of the war and later helped my brother Ray in combat. It turned out that the old man heard it all since his office was next door. He showed a lot of respect for me after that, and it is the only way I know he knew. This fight took place during my second or third week at Atterbury.

**Conley, the Drunken Platoon sergeant**

Conley, our platoon sergeant, was a big red-headed Irishman from Boston and was a real man. We liked him a lot and he could do just about anything athletic better than most of us. Conley had two problems. He drank and when he drank he became violent.

One Friday night he drank too much and started to tear up his room. With inspection the next day, we knew he would lose his stripes if he was

caught, and three of us went up to stop him. Conley would not listen to reason, so we decided to tie him up and gag him. This was almost a mistake since he was nearly a match for all three of us. He hit me once and nearly knocked me out. The other two men didn't fare much better. We finally did get him tied up and gagged. We put the door back on, the bunk back together and cleaned up. We passed inspection O.K.

Conley's other problem was his inability to read and understand what he had read. I spent hours reading and explaining the field manuals to him. Another person I read for was named Stilwell. He was from Louisville, Kentucky and seemed to be a man of some means. At least that's what the three women writing to him thought. Stilwell was later killed in Normandy. The food in basic training was pure slop. Breakfast for a while consisted of heavy soggy pan cakes with thin sugar. After a while even dehydrated eggs looked good to us. We hated mutton which we called "goat", it tasted so bad it well might have been the latter. Unfortunately we had this quite often. We ate a lot of PK food, ice cream, candy etc. whenever we could.

### **Lieutenant Ziegler and Special Training**

With basic training over the spring and summer were to be spent perfecting the units. Some of us were actually beginning to like the tough Army life and we showed it by "griping" about everything. Lieutenant Ziegler told me that he had up me in for the rank of buck sergeant and that I was to lead the third squad. I was horrified. I told him I didn't want the job and wouldn't

do it well and that a good leader would be a dead leader in real combat. He tried to “reason” with me and I told him I had read hundreds of books about wars and it was true. He said he would respect my reasons and request what had said to Captain Sharp. So I didn’t become a squad leader.

One day we were on a field problem and lieutenant Ziegler told me that a Jeep<sup>1</sup> had come for me to report back to camp to enter a special school and for reassignment.

I do not know to this day why I was reassigned. It could have been that my turning down the squad leaders job was the key. It could also have been that I really was “hand picked” for the job as they claimed. The training consisted of the following: ground and motorized reconnaissance, map reading, map sketching, terrain study, aerial photograph interpretation, recognizance and combat patrolling, infighting with knives, garrotes, hand to hand etc., setting up and manning observation posts, camouflage, firing and knowing how to use enemy weapons (German) aircraft identification, mine detection, getting over rough terrain (Ranger courses), radio use (but not Morse code), setting mines, tank identification, calling mortar and artillery fire. The training lasted for about three months. Weekend leaves were spent in Indianapolis. We had USO to go to, and generally there were shows, dances etc. which service men attend. One weekend I saw “Truth Or Consequences” by Ralph Edwards.<sup>2</sup> One weekend John Hamilton came down from the Great Lakes

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<sup>1</sup>See Figure 4.8.

<sup>2</sup> *Truth or Consequences*, an American quiz show, was originally hosted on NBC radio by Ralph Edwards (1940-57) and later on television. Contestants had to answer a trivia question correctly. The question was usually an off-the-wall question that no one would be

Naval Training Center, and we ran around for a day or two.

I received my first furlough at around this time and went home for two weeks.

#### Maneuvers in Nashville

In July 1943 we went on maneuvers near Nashville, Tennessee. The area where the maneuvers were held was hot, dry and extremely rocky (limestone). The maneuvers consisted of two armies, “red” and “blue”, who fought against each other in mock battles. We made many forced marches and were allowed only one canteen of water a day. Many men passed out on these marches due to lack of water.

My section’s job was to work behind the enemy lines to see what they were doing and report it back by radio. Often our forces would pull back out of range of our radio and we couldn’t report anything at all.

Other than the forced marches, I enjoyed maneuvers immensely.

Our section was often captured by the “enemy” and I generally escaped almost immediately. I was then on my own among the enemy and lots of fun. We carried C-rations and this was my food when I was on my own.

#### **Being Stealth**

One time we were left behind when our forces withdrew, to try and determine where the enemy would bring up assault boats and try to cross the Tennessee River. One of our men was careless and we were captured. That night we

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able to answer correctly, or a bad joke. If the contestant could not complete the “Truth” portion, there would be “Consequences,” usually a crazy and embarrassing stunt.

were being marched to the “prisoner of war camp” and I escaped by simply walking over to the side of the road and hiding in a ditch. I still had my equipment and food since these were not taken from “prisoners”.

I crawled through an open field between two woods full of the enemy, and since it was night they didn’t see me. I slept in some bushes that night and the next day decided I would go to the river and swim across to the other side. I believed our forces, “red”, were just on the other side of the river. I started sneaking through the woods and across fields using what ever cover I could find, but saw seen by the enemy twice.

Once was by a spotter plane. He kept circling over me, trying to get some of his men to come capture me. I kept moving and they couldn’t catch me. The plane finally gave up. The other time I took a chance and crossed an open field to a woods. At the edge of the woods I hid behind a dead log. In a few minutes I saw a full scale skirmish line sweeping the woods, trying to capture me. One man passed within a few feet of me but didn’t see me. Once the line had passed I went on through the woods behind them and got away. I arrived at the Tennessee River and saw that the opposite bank was occupied by the “enemy”. I had now way of knowing where my side were located, so I started putting together some logs with vines to flat my equipment on while I swam the river, which I had to do at night.

I heard some of the enemy coming and hid in some “hog weeds”. They came to the river and took off their clothes and went swimming. This was too good a chance to miss. After they were in the water I sat down beside

their clothes.

There were three men in swimming, and in a few minutes one of them looked at the bank and saw me.

“Hey, you aren’t a ‘red’ are you?” he asked hopefully.

“Yes, I’m a ‘red’ scout and you people are all dead, I’m going take your clothes and guns”.

“Hey fellow, please don’t take our clothes, we’d never live it down if we went back to camp like this.”

This conversation went on for a few minutes, and since I had no way of keeping prisoners and it would serve no useful purpose, I decided to let them go.

I pulled back from the river and watched. In a few minutes the river bank was covered with “blues” hunting for me. Of course they didn’t find me. I decided I would stay on the river bank and not swim across. I hid in the “hog weeds” and although the “blues” walked within a few feet of me they never found me. I stayed here for two or three days.

One morning I woke up at day light and “scouted” down towards the “blues” bridgehead. I was stunned to find the security for one side of the bridgehead (about twenty men) asleep in their fox holes and slit trenches. They had two machine guns set up, and their rifles were laying beside them. There was a huge cornfield covering several acres near the men, so I gathered up their machine guns and rifles and hid them in this corn field. I made several trips between the field and the men but not one ever woke up. I went

back up on my hill and watched them scout the river bank for me, and again they never found me.

The signal of the end of the maneuver was a plane flying over with a siren. On the morning the plane was due I decided to see if one man could bring a bridgehead end under fire and stop proceedings for a while. The bridgehead end was fed by a road that came over the river bank. The bridge itself was of the pontoon type.

I walked out of the corn and started shooting (with blanks) ever “blue” I saw. The umpires and “blues” were stunned because they thought there wasn’t any “red” closer than ten miles (I found out later). Since every “blue” coming over the bank or across the bridge was declared captured or dead by the umpires, and the “blues” couldn’t even see me ’til I had the drop on them I had the end of the bridge captured for about a half hour. The umpires were delighted.

The plane finally went over with the siren and the maneuver was over. The “blues” took me to their camp and their cook fed me a big meal. That was his way of saying thanks for not taking his clothes while he was swimming. I told them where their guns were.

### **Dysentery**

In addition to the forced marches without much water, we had the problem of dysentery.

Dysentery is spread by flies and since we could not dig decent “straddle

trenches” due to the rocky nature of the terrain, it became wide spread. It was a common thing to see people running off to one side on a march to conduct business in the weeds and cornfield beside the road. One day the colonel was watching us march along and he said “Tell that soldier to take that roll of toilet paper from his bayonet handle.” The soldier was kept and later was killed in a bayonet charge in the Hurtgen Forest in Germany.

βCamp Breckenridge, Kentucky

With maneuvers over, some men were given furloughs, but the remainder were told they had to hike from Nashville, Tennessee to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, near Evanson, Indiana. This meant we would walk halfway across Tennessee and through Kentucky.

I remember hiking through small towns and Hopinsville and Paducah, Kentucky. The women of the towns would pass out cookies etc. as we marched.

I went on furlough for two weeks after we arrived in Camp Breckenridge. We spent time there developing combat skills, firing with live ammunition, running field problems etc.

One day we were told to fall out with all our equipment and to load on trucks. We thought this was “it”. We went to Pennsboro, West Virginia and set up camp in the fairground. I was thirty miles from home but couldn’t call mom, since she had no phone. We were at Pennsboro to guard Roosevelt’s train as it came through. They spread us out for miles along the tracks and after the train had passed we boarded the trucks and went back to Camp



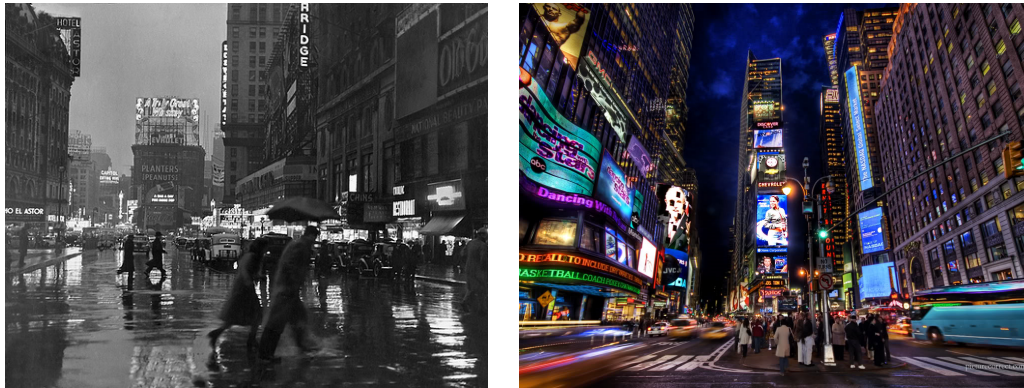


Figure 3.1: Times Square in New York City in 1940 (LEFT) and today (RIGHT).

Breckenridge.

βCamp Shanks, New York City

Finally the big day came, we boarded trains and went to Camp Shanks near New York City. At this camp we were issued new equipment and given countless “shots”. We were allowed to visit New York City one night. I teamed up with two men who made me promise that I would see that they got back to camp by morning.

We crossed the Hudson River on the Hoboken ferry and took the subway to Times Square.<sup>3</sup> My friends instantly started drinking in bars and the only worthwhile thing we did was visit the stage door canteen.

One of the men kept insisting we visit the Bowery. We went there via the subway but saw no derelicts or human flotsam.

The men I was with were drunk by now and I had my hands full. I lost

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<sup>3</sup>See Figure 3.1.

one of the men in the subway station. We boarded a train and when I looked around he was gone. I looked and saw him on the platform arguing over the fare. I never did find out how he got back to Camp.

## **3.5 Europe**

We embarked on a British ship with a Hindu crew, bound for England. I do not remember the name of this ship.

βAcross the Atlantic

The ship was in a convoy with dozens of other ships. A big cruiser was in front of us and a battleship, the USS Texas,<sup>4</sup> was behind us. We slept in hammocks and I had trouble with mine the first night. The hammocks were strung from hooks in the ceiling. I was late stringing mine up and could only find hooks that I could tie to in the cross ship direction. I tied the hammock up and climbed in. In a few seconds I felt the head end of the hammock come untied. All I could do was grab on to the hammock edge and hold with both hands. The foot end held and I turned a somersault and landed on my feet. I would have cracked my skull if I had hit on my head. That night I was miserable as the ship wallowed and pitched and do to the way I had the hammock pitched I felt every motion. I didn't get sea sick but it was close. I never pitched a hammock across ships again.

The food on this ship was terrible, and we couldn't eat it. One morning

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<sup>4</sup> See Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.2: The USS Texas was commissioned on 12 March 1914. It made numerous sorties into the North Sea during World War I. In World War II in 1941, the USS Texas took on the role of escorting war convoys across the Atlantic, and she later shelled Axis-held beaches for the North African campaign and the Normandy Landings before being transferred to the Pacific Theater late in 1944 to provide naval gunfire support during the Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

we were given smoked fish which were plain spoiled, I don't believe a single fish was eaten. Another favorite was a very thin oatmeal called porrage. We could have tea any time we wanted it but this wasn't very good either. One day we were ordered off the decks and we could hear depth charging not far away. We were told we could go back on deck in a few minutes and saw a destroyer signaling. The loudspeaker announced that the destroyer had just sunk a submarine.

One day a British Sunderland flying boat (see Figure 3.3) flew over the



Figure 3.3: LEFT: British Sunderland flying boat. RIGHT: Mount Snowdon, the highest mountain in Wales.

convoy and a short while later we saw the coast of Ireland.

βAcross England

We arrived at Liverpool<sup>5</sup> (Wales) and loaded into trains.

The English trains look almost like toys when compared with American trains and are boarded through doors that open directly into compartments. We went into the mountains of Wales from Liverpool, and without further ado started on hikes over them.

We hiked through Welsh coal towns in the mountains. These towns names were in Welsh and we couldn't even pronounce them. We left the roads and started climbing the mountains. I was quite confident of my mountaineering ability since I was raised in West Virginia. The Welsh mountains are the only ones I ever saw though where you could step on apparently solid ground and get your feet wet up to your knees. We camped for a few days at the

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<sup>5</sup>See the map in Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.4: Europe Map #1. Continued in Figure 4.1 on page 49 after entering continental Europe at Omaha Beach.

base of Mount Snowdon,<sup>6</sup> the highest mountain in Wales (see Figure 3.3). Two of us hiked up as high as the snow line just for fun one day but went no higher.

We went from Wales and set up camp at Babbins Woods near Chester,<sup>7</sup> England. On pass one day I listened to the London Philharmonic Orchestra play in the Chester Cathedral. (See Figure 3.5.)

Some of us were assigned to train with the British Commandos and that is where I was when whistles started blowing announcing that D-day was on. Inside minutes we were on our way back to our units. The unit was getting on trains when I arrived: destination Plymouth Harbor then Normandy.<sup>8</sup> We disembarked from trains, marched through Plymouth and boarded ships.

<sup>6</sup>See the map in Figure 3.4.

<sup>7</sup>See the map in Figure 3.4.

<sup>8</sup>See the map in Figure 3.4.

Dozens of barrage balloons (see Figure 3.6) were floating over Plymouth like big sausages. All the school kids were out to cheer the troops as they marched through.

#### Normandy and the Aftermath of Battle

We laid off Normandy for several days unable to land due to a big storm. We saw our first dead people, mostly American sailors, floating around in the water. We concluded that there weren't more soldiers because their equipment would drag them to the bottom.

We finally started to land at Omaha Beach. The boats which would take us ashore were L.C.I.'s (Landing Craft, infantry). (See Figure 3.6.) We climbed down the side of the ship on landing nets. When the boat rose on a wave it would come in against the side of the ship. When the wave went down the boat would move away from the ship. Jumping from the net into the boat had to be timed perfectly, because to fall into the water between the two would lead to crushing to death.

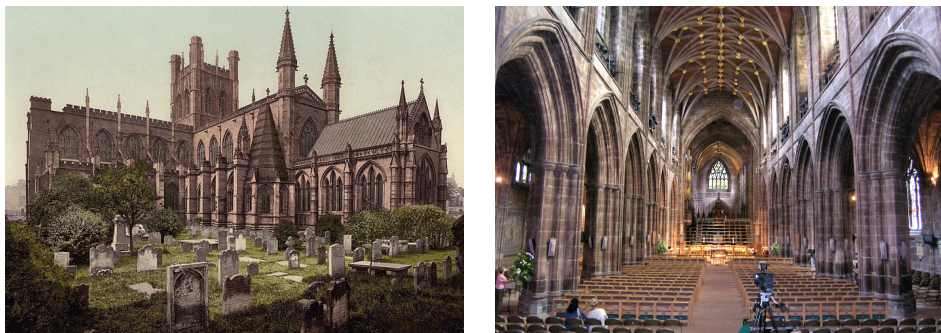


Figure 3.5: Chester Cathedral.



Figure 3.6: LEFT: barrage balloons at Normandy. RIGHT: L.C.I.'s (Landing Craft, infantry).

The L.C.I.'s let down their ramps when the water was about waste deep and we waded to shore.

# Chapter 4

## World War II: Combat

by **Edward Randolph Hersman**

There was no fighting taking place on Omaha Beach when we landed. It was strafed and shelled occasionally but the fighting had moved away from the beach. To climb up the bluff from the beach the G.I.'s had to walk between strips of white tape since the areas outside these tapes were still mined. We had our first casualties when some of the men stepped outside the tapes and set off some mines.



## 4.1 Relieving the 101st Airborne Division at Carentan

We marched inland and relieved the 101st Airborne Division near Carentan.<sup>1</sup> We maintained a static front until July 4th, we did not attack the Germans and they did not attack us during this time. There was excitement in the air on the morning of July 4th. We moved up to the front line before daylight and prepared to “jump off”. The work of our section of seven during an attack was that two of us more or less, were to go with each line company and make sure that the colonel and his staff knew what was going on. We could give reports back by messenger, telephone, radio or in person.

I went with F Company on this first attack, my partner was Marino. The artillery opened up just at dawn along with our machine guns and mortars. The air was filled with the whine of shells and explosions to our near front. The tracers from the machine guns looked like big fireflies following each other very closely. After a few minutes the artillery and machine guns stopped firing and we began our first attack of World War II.

We saw before us a swamp about a half mile across full of smoking holes which were filling with water. Marino and I jumped off with F Company. The Germans had been quiet up to this time but now they opened up with artillery. I flopped down behind a tree and then ran to a shell hole. The tree I had just left exploded as a German shell hit it. Fun was over, a man could

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<sup>1</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1, #1.

#### 4.1. RELIEVING THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION AT CARENTAN

*Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*



Figure 4.1: Europe Map #2 continued from Figure 3.4 on page 44. Cities are numbered in the order mentioned. A clear path is shown from Omaha Beach at Normandy to Berlin. Other cities mentioned in the commentary. (a) Gürzenich is a few kilometers west of Duren #13, (b) Neuss is few kilometers west of Düsseldorf #14, and (c) Trier is about 30 km northwest of Luxembourg City #7.

get killed very easily, as far as I was concerned, from then on.

The leaders of our attack was lieutenant Jacobs, a big brute of a man fond of hand to hand combat and a G.I. I didn't know. They outran the rest of us getting across the swamp and were floating dead in the drainage ditch on the German side of the swamp. This ditch had water in it about waist deep and was about six feet wide. The bank facing the Germans was about seven feet and to shoot at the Germans we had to dig foot holds.

The Germans had pulled back from this bank and could not hit us with small arms fire. Our men were green. We had seen Jacobs and the G.I. dead

#### 4.1. RELIEVING THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION AT CARENTAN

*Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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and along with making us sick, it frightened us. As a result very few men would climb the bank and fire at the Germans. I am sure that the very few that did used the same reasoning that I used. If the Germans counter-attack us and we are not on line to stop them, they'll drive us into that open swamp and kill us.

I couldn't see a single enemy when I was up on that bank so I fired at the next hedgerow where I was sure they were. A German tank pulled up on our right flank and although he couldn't hit the men at the bank, nobody could cross the swamp and we were for all purposes cut off from the rear. I saw a man cross that swamp stringing wire as calmly as though he was just running it for a training exercise. The tank was trying to cut him down with both machine gun and cannon fire. He wasn't hit and we had telephone communication with the command post for a few minutes.

##### ßBattle Fatigue

One of the first orders that came over the telephone was one to me telling me to come to the command post and give a situation report and to point out on a map where the enemy line was.

I started back across the swamp with Membresse, another member of my section. How he got with F Company is beyond me because he started out with E company. I hadn't seen Marino after the first rush into the swamp. We crawled in a small ditch, knee deep and full of water. Due to spotty high grass the tank could only see us now and then, but when he did he tried to hit us with both machine gun and cannon fire. About half way across a shell

#### 4.1. RELIEVING THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION AT CARENTAN

*Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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hit, practically burying us in mud. I started crawling on since I was leading and I heard Membresse crying and yelling “Help, Hersman! Help me!” I crawled back to help and found that his foot was tangled in some grass. I called him every vulgar name I could think of but untangled his foot and we crawled on. Membresse kept crying and whimpering every time they shot at us.

Membresse was showing symptoms of battle fatigue (shell shock) but I did not know those symptoms then and he only made me mad.

We came out of the swamp near a French farm house, made a run for it and went in the end of the house away from the German tank. The tank started to demolish the house with cannon fire.

In the house was a G.I. named Fyfe. Somewhere he had found some hard cider or calvodis to drink and was really “lit up”. Every time a shell would hit the house he would say “Ha, missed again you sons of bitches.” Fyfe was later killed by a sniper while hunting for him alone. I understand he had been drinking heavily as usual.

Shortly after we crossed the swamp, we heard a lot of shooting. The Germans had counter-attacked and pushed our men into the open swamp and killed a large portion of them.

We finally found the command post and reported to the colonel even though the German counter-attack had made it after the fact. I lost Membresse somewhere.

βSniper

I started to dig in along side a road across from a house. Shells and mortar fire were coming in and two rounds were so close they made my ears ring, but I could not see where they hit. I yelled up the road at another G.I. and asked him if he could see where they were hitting. He yelled back that it wasn't mortar shells but that a sniper was shooting at me from the house. I raised my rifle to firing position and watched the house. The house had a sheet metal roof. A vee shape had formed between two sheets of roofing and I saw the German raise up with his rifle to shoot at me. I sent eight rounds of rifle fire into that vee and the G.I. up the road emptied his rifle into the same place. We watched a while but did not see the German again.

## **4.2 Resolved Not to Run**

Our men were running up the road and away from the enemy and the swamp. Rank made no difference in this panic, officers were running with the men. Fear is contagious and after a while I ran with them. After about a quarter of a mile three or four of us stopped and agreed that even if we were killed we'd "be damned if we run another step." We stopped running and strung out along a hedgerow and waited for the Germans. Other men including the first sergeant of G Company saw us stopped and filled in the line. Finally the colonel and his staff came and stopped. The Germans never came.

That night one man slept while the man nearest him stood guard. I was teamed with a man named deGutis who was later to be placed in the

section. We agreed that if the guard saw anything he was to fire and that the sleeping person was to wake up and start throwing grenades. I had just finished my guard and had laid down, when deGutis started shooting and yelling “Hersman, Hersman”. I ran around the bushes with a grenade but didn’t pull the pin. I didn’t see a single German. deGutis had saw the wind blowing some grass in the moonlight and mistaken it for a German. The colonel came up and gave him hell.

The next day we were relieved by the 4th Division who were in the original beach head and were more experienced than we. I heard from one of them later that they attacked across the swamp and really were clobbered. That swamp finally had to be out-flanked.

#### βThe Fear of Dying

We were moved to an area near Sainteny<sup>2</sup> which is slightly right of Saint Lo.<sup>3</sup>

I suspect that every man reacts to combat differently. Starting the first battle is the feeling of excitement followed quickly by the realization that this is real, and that dying is very possible. There is a feeling of what am I doing here and panic, for a while. There is in battle a constant fear of being badly hurt, which is much greater than the fear of dying. As friends are killed there may develop a fatalistic attitude that a person will be hit and he hopes it is not too bad or anger at the enemy. Sometimes as other people are hit a

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<sup>2</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1. #2. The citizen’s of Sainteny erected a monument in honor of the 83rd. See Figure 4.2.

<sup>3</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #3.



Figure 4.2: A maintained monument was erected by the citizens of the village of Sainteny to honor the 4th and 83rd infantry divisions. Ed was in the 83rd.

feeling of everyone else but not me will be killed. A weird sense of humor sometimes develops that makes events that aren't funny seem that way. The big worry for most men are shells, because you cannot shoot back at them.

I believe the word "shell shock" used in the First World War is more descriptive than the word "battle fatigue". Men who suffer from this are not tired, they generally have let the fear of being hit by a shell over-ride all other feelings or reasoning. Their faces are pallid, their hands shake, they tremble and shake at the slightest sound. They lose the ability to distinguish between friendly and enemy guns and will jump for cover when they hear either. Their fear is contagious.

We were never to allow Membresse to go on a patrol or man an O.P.<sup>4</sup> with us again. His proneness to battle fatigue and its effect on us were too great. He was the biggest athlete in the group, and was practically a professional tennis player but he could not stand the rigors of combat. He survived the war unscratched.

For months I did not know that there were any other survivors of our section than Membresse and I. Months later I found out Marino had received a bare scratch and was sent back to England. By hook or crook he was able to avoid fighting for the rest of the war. Marino had been a boxer but he sure couldn't take combat.

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<sup>4</sup> observation post



### **4.3 The Attack on Sainteny**

The attack on Sainteny began with our battalion in reserve. Hence we followed behind the 1st and 3rd battalion as we approached the town. Dead men were everywhere, both American and German. Some of the bodies had been blown into parts and I saw men vomit when they saw them. I began to think of bodies as ‘bags of oats’ which was sort of a protective mechanism. The first and third battalion cleared the approaches to Sainteny but the second was delegated to take the town.

Taking Sainteny involved fighting from what was left of building to building. Jeeps were flying everywhere. I ducked into a house with one side blown out and in a few seconds Jeeps were coming in the open side of the house and hitting all around me. I vacated in a hurry. The only place that the shots could have been coming from were the remainders of the church. It is fantastic the number of times a person can be shot at and not get hit. Between buildings and rubble we ran. To pause for even a second could mean death.

Bodies were everywhere but we gradually pushed the Germans out of the town. We continued attacking the Germans in the hedgerows after we had driven them out of Sainteny and it here I was involved in an incident that has haunted me all my life.

#### Machine Gun Fire

We were right on the edge of Sainteny and were pinned down by machine

### 4.3. THE ATTACK ON SAINTENY *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

gun and tank fire.

One of our tanks was hit within a hundred and fifty feet from where we were crouched behind a hedgerow. The tank caught on fire and one of the tankmen tried to crawl out the top. He either became stuck or was wounded and he burned to death screaming. There was absolutely no way we could help him, since for us to expose ourselves in any way meant sheer death. We had a private commanding this company. As is often the case, the true combat leaders come forward when the chips are down. Most of the officers had been killed and the captain was in too bad a state of battle fatigue to lead.

There was an artillery observer with the company, and he tried to call artillery down on the German machine guns, which were only about two hundred feet away. The shells hit us instead and one of the first persons killed was the observer. I picked up his radio and yelled to stop firing and lift their range 300 ft. The first shells hit behind the German hedgerow and I had them shorten range slowly until I could see the bursts and they were on the hedgerow. After firing for effect, the Germans were either killed or withdrew and we advanced to their hedgerow. It was too late to help the man in the tank.

We pushed the Germans a short distance out of Sainteny and stopped and took defensive positions for a few days.

Since Membresse was worthless, I was the only effective member left out of our original section. I visited each line company several times a day to see

### 4.3. THE ATTACK ON SAINTENY *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

what was going on. Since I always knew where the companies were it became one of my jobs to get replacement men and officers to their new companies. A unit in the American army can lose most of its men and the people back home will never know about it. The men killed or wounded were replaced by new men from a *replacement center* (slang: repple-depple).

Some replacements came to take the place of the men who had been in my section. deGutis came from a line company and volunteered for the job. Eudy and later Williams came from the repple-depple.

#### βThe German Tank

We were having trouble with a German tank. He was using his guns as artillery instead of direct fire and we couldn't locate him. deGutis and I tried to locate him by sound. We took a shot with a compass on his gun noise and then moved another position a half mile or so away and took another shot. By plotting two intersecting lines on the map, we hoped to determine his position. We were in a hedgerow and I was trying to plot the position when a German fired in between us. He was so close we felt the muzzle blast from his gun. The brush was so thick we couldn't see him and most likely he was shooting at our voices. We quickly left that hedgerow, but I threw a grenade where he was.

#### βThe Sound of Bullets

We called for artillery fire on the tank position we plotted and we were close. We heard the tank start up and move away but we didn't get any hits. snipers were everywhere in Normandy. The German sniper in general was a

lousy shot. Bullets have about four distinctive sounds depending how close they are. A high pitched speeding bee sound means it is not very close, a high pitched bumble bee sound means it is pretty close, a sound like a loud bang or crack means it is within a very few inches, if near your head your ears will ring, and of course the that hits you, you don't hear. The bullet noises are generally followed by a loud crack which is the sonic boom of the bullet. Scouting between the line companies I was constantly shot at by snipers and learned the bullet noises. I generally ignored the high pitch bee sound but would use concealment and cover for the bumble bee sound. I only heard the loud ear ringing crack once or twice and I moved fast when I did.

## **4.4 Hunting Snipers**

I hunted snipers. The sniper is afraid and generally to get him to stop shooting, I would put my binoculars to my eyes and scan the place I thought he was hiding. Sometimes I would point my rifle at where I thought he was. Sometimes I would actually shoot up the tree or hedgerow I thought he was in. Nearly always he would stop shooting.

It is almost always fatal for one person to hunt a sniper. Our unit used four men. If a hedgerow was suspected of hiding a sniper, two men would sneak to one end of the hedgerow, without letting the sniper see them. The other two men would go to the other end in such a way that the sniper would see them and know they were hunting him. The sniper tries to leave at the

end of the hedgerow away from the men he knows are hunting him and runs into the other two men who are waiting for him.

I was taking an officer to the line one day and he was following me by several feet to cover me in case I was fired on. I walked under a tree and heard the branches move above me. I gave no outward indication at all that I knew there was a sniper in the tree until I was about a hundred feet from the tree. I wheeled about and pointed my rifle up into the tree, and the officer did the same. Neither one of us fired and neither did the sniper. I have no doubt that the sniper would have shot me if I had been by myself. He could not shoot both of us, as spread apart as we were, without being shot at himself. We didn't shoot at him because if we missed he would have shot back and one of us would be hit. We had a stand off.

We were marching down a road once between two hedgerows. Only the men's heads showed above the hedgerows and a German with a Schmeisser sub-machine pistol<sup>5</sup> kept shooting at them. The G.I.'s would duck so fast their helmets would stay up in the air just like the comics. I watched this a while and warned the men coming up. I decided finally to try to locate the sniper. With a well camouflaged helmet I peeked through the bushes on top the hedgerow. I saw a field beside the road covered with high grass. I continued to observe for a while and the sniper raised up to take an ammunition clip from his belt. I emptied my rifle at him instantly but don't know if I hit him.

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<sup>5</sup>See Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.3: LEFT: A German sniper KIA at Normandy. RIGHT: A Schmeisser sub-machine pistol.

## 4.5 All Quiet on the Front

The front being static meant things were relatively quiet. Shelling went on constantly, but by digging in well and taking precautions which we knew only too well by this time casualties were held to a minimum.

About this time I started writing to a girl in the States named Margaret Brown at the suggestion of my sister Justine.

Eudy and I were becoming great friends. He came in as a replacement and after I showed him the ropes we got along well. He and I both took a slap happy attitude about the fixes we got into. Again, this was a survival mechanism since we both knew that it was inevitable that we would be hit sooner or later.

About this time, I started smoking. The G.I.'s coming from the reple-

#### 4.5. ALL QUIET ON THE FRONT *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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depple brought cartons of cigarettes since they had heard there was a shortage at the front. There was no shortage and since an ounce of extra weight could get a person killed, packs were thrown away. These cigarettes laid around about everywhere. One day I started smoking because I figured like most G.I.'s that I wouldn't make it through the war.

One day we received another replacement named Williams. The morning after Williams arrived, the German guns were shelling us as usual, and then suddenly stopped. Everything became real quiet.

βWatching the fighter-bombers

The air became full of noise and became full of fighter-bombers, P-51's and P-47's <sup>6</sup>, which were headed straight for the Germans. They started strafing, dropping bombs and laying down colored smoke (I think). Our artillery opened up with everything they had and may or may not have been firing colored smoke shells.

The fighter-bombers pulled out and waves of light bombers came in and bombed where the colored smoke was and moved on. The sky then became filled with thousands of heavy bombers, B-17's, but mostly B-24's, and they started dropping bombs on the Germans.<sup>7</sup>

We crawled out of our holes to watch. The ground trembled and vibrated like a big earthquake. Wind started to blow the smoke in our direction and the bombs started coming back towards us. The bombing stopped before

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<sup>6</sup> See Figure 4.4.

<sup>7</sup> See Figure 4.5.

## 4.6. ATTACKING THE GERMANS *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*



Figure 4.4: LEFT: P-51's. RIGHT: P-47's.

they reached us.

## 4.6 Attacking the Germans

The following morning we opened an attack on the Germans. This morning was different because Eudy and I both felt that something terrible was going to happen. I believe that men under great stress develop a sort of sixth sense and can tell the future to a degree. So Eudy and I both felt that one or both of us would be hit or killed that day. We did not normally have this feeling.

There was one other thing that happened that day, before the attack. I was informed that I had been promoted to staff sergeant and a friend of mine, Kelly, had been raised to first sergeant.

β“Are You Dead?”

The line companies jumped off and ran into fierce German resistance. It



#### 4.6. ATTACKING THE GERMANS *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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Figure 4.5: LEFT: The B-17 bomber. RIGHT: The B-24 bomber.

was as though they hadn't even been bombed the day before.

A forward observation post was set up. After about 20 hours of fighting, all contact was lost with F Company. Eudy and I decided to find out where F Company was located and what their trouble was. Williams, since he was green, was to be left behind where it was relatively safe in a German-dug slit trench. We left the O.P. and started in the direction we thought F Company had advanced. We began to run into trouble, from German machine gun and small arms fire. By crawling, running and sneaking we kept going until we found F - Company.

F- Company was trapped, the Germans had cut them off from the rear and had the flanks and front covered. machine guns, small arms fire and mortars had them pinned in their holes.

Eudy and I's arrival drew instant fire from the machine guns and mortars of the enemy. Without any hesitation at all we jumped in some holes on top of some men already dead. The one I jumped one said "Are you dead? Are

#### 4.6. ATTACKING THE GERMANS *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

you dead? If you're dead I don't want you on top of me".

When the fire let up I looked over the hedgerow, and instantly a machine gun tried to pick me off. I picked up a radio to call for artillery or mortar fire but the antenna was shot off and the radio was useless. There was only one thing that Eudy and I could do, we had to go back and get help.

We went back much the same way we had come but more Germans had come in and about half way back, Eudy was hit. I was leading and I went back to him, but he had been hit several times by a machine gun and was dead. I was extremely angry, but continued on until I arrived at the hole where we had left Williams.

##### ßSpurting Blood Makes Me Mad

The Germans had been following me close with mortar fire all this time. Every time I went over a hedgerow, mortar fire would fall right behind me. I took the map from Williams, spread it on the ground in front of me, and started marking down the location of the German machine guns so that I could call mortar fire down on them.

Three mortar shells hit the ground in front of me and fragments hit me in the arm, face and neck. Blood spurted like a water stream from my neck all over Williams. The wounds were like a bee sting and I was so mad I hardly noticed them.

Williams tied my bandage around my neck and I went to the O.P. and obtained a walkie-talky. I climbed up on the hedgerow, contacted our mortars and started placing white phosphorous shells on each machine gun location

#### 4.6. ATTACKING THE GERMANS *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

in turn. A captain came over from the O.P. and said he would take over. I pointed out the gun locations to him, showed him where F Company was, and started to the aid station. Williams stayed at the O.P.

I came upon a G.I. who was apparently hit in the chest and was trying to walk to the aid station. Since I didn't feel like I was hit bad, and he didn't look like he was going to make it, I put his arm over his shoulders and supported him as we walked.

We came to the command post and Kelly took the man and helped him on to the aid station.

I went into the aid station and Captain Overdite, the doctor, looked at me, bandaged my wounds and tagged me as severely wounded.

A shell went off in the farm house yard where the aid station was located, and they carried Kelly in. He had been hit by the shell.

It was the general's ruling in our division that anyone who was wounded lost his N.C.O.<sup>8</sup> stripes so that somebody else could have them. Hence I was a staff sergeant and Kelly a first sergeant for only one day. An ambulance took me to a field hospital on Omaha Beach. I ran into the G.I. I had helped and he thanked me for "saving his life." After staying in the field hospital for a day, I was sent to a hospital in England on an L.S.T.<sup>9</sup> which had been converted into a hospital ship.

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<sup>8</sup>non-commissioned officer

<sup>9</sup>See Figure 4.6.

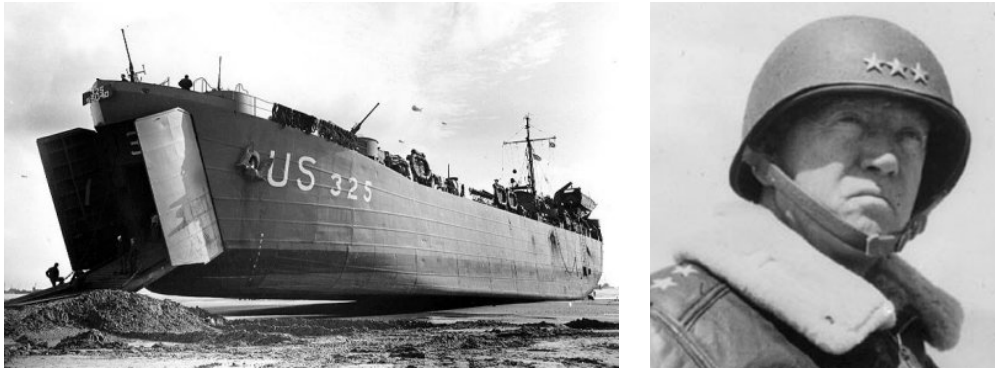


Figure 4.6: LEFT: Landing Ship, tank (L.S.T.) was the military designation for naval vessels created during World War II to support amphibious operations by carrying significant quantities of vehicles, cargo, and landing troops directly onto an unimproved shore. RIGHT: General George Smith Patton III (1885–1945) was given command of the U.S. Third Army and led it from Normandy and across France. When a surprise major German offensive at the Battle of the Bulge resulted in American units being surrounded in Bastogne, Patton moved his army over 100 miles in 48 hours to relieve the siege.

## 4.7 Why We Fight

I do not remember how long I was in the hospital. They cut out most (but not all) of the mortar fragments and I goofed around while the wounds healed. I was quite concerned about getting back with my outfit. Patton<sup>10</sup> broke out at St. Lo the day I was hit. If I had made it through that day in Normandy, it is likely I would have made it through the war without being hit. Normandy was the worst battle I was to fight in. The constant fear and dread cannot really be described. A soldier on the line does not fight for love

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<sup>10</sup>See Figure 4.6.

of country or for the reasons people at home thinks he does. He fights simply to keep from being killed. Rarely ever can a soldier be sure he has a shot at the enemy. When a shot is fired, the person shot at “hits the dirt” and the one doing the shooting sees him fall but can’t be sure he actually hit him unless he goes up and looks, which is rarely a safe thing to do.

I was sent from the hospital to a “repple-depple”. They gave me new equipment and I was sent back to my old outfit via Omaha Beach. I passed through the area which had been bombed and it looked like the craters on the moon. German tanks, guns and vehicles had been blown all over the place. I found my old outfit at Vendome, France,<sup>11</sup> and found that a few changes had been made.

My old section had been brought up to full strength with replacements. Pearson, Stanley, Sgt. Mackey, Williams, Marino (he was back now that things were quite), Pardini, and I now made up the section. deGutis had been killed in Normandy, which I forgot to mention.

βThe Silver Star for Gallantry

I was awarded a Silver Star for gallantry in action, for knocking out the German machine guns the day of the breakout. I did not get my stripes back since Mackey now had that job. See Figures 10.8 on page 159 for the wording of the citation.

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<sup>11</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #4.

## 4.8 Back into Combat

The battalion was bivouacked in huge caves at Vendome, and since there was no fighting in the area we goofed around and shot up a lot of ammunition, using German guns which we all had.

The division moved from Vendome to the Loire River, south of Orleans.<sup>12</sup> I do not remember the name of the town my section was located in on the Loire River. We were on the east bank and the other side was supposedly held by Germans. There were 20,000 of these enemy but we weren't sure exactly where they were.

βA French Welcome

The day after we set up in a schoolhouse in the town we were to stay in, three of us went on a patrol on the other side of the river. We crossed the river in a row boat we found, crossed some open fields and entered a French town. We didn't see any Germans and there wasn't anyone on the streets in the the town.

It was an eerie feeling, walking down the main street. We knew we were being watched, and expected to be fired on any minute. About half way down, a Frenchman came out of his house and asked us if we were Americans. When we said we were, he yelled it out and people came running out of their houses all up and down the street.

We were the first American troops these French had seen and they made

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<sup>12</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #5.

us very welcome. Each day when we crossed the river we were guests with a different French family. Their food was meager, so we brought C and K rations to help them out.

The 20,000 Germans were five miles north of us and every day the FFE (French freedom fighters) would report to us what they were doing. Although we were not directly involved in the capture of these Germans, we three were the only Americans on their right flank. The Germans surrendered to the regimental I and R platoon, and went to Orleans where they laid down their arms. I bought a pair of wooden shoes, which one of my daughters has now, in the French town where we were bivouacked.

Some warehouses were captured from the Germans, who had filled them with fancy French wines and liqueurs. Each G.I. was given about twenty bottles of assorted wines and cognac. Being a non-drinker, I used some of my liquor to heat K-rations.<sup>13</sup> The remainder was drunk up by Lt. Hastings and Sgt. Mackey while we were on patrol. These two men were constantly drunk and although they were supposed to lead the patrols, they never did.

## **4.9 Luxembourg**

One day we loaded on trucks and went to Luxembourg. We skirted Paris and eventually went through Saarburg.<sup>14</sup> This was the first town we saw where the signs were written in German.

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<sup>13</sup>See Figure 4.7.

<sup>14</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #6.



Figure 4.7: World War II K rations

We passed through Luxembourg City<sup>15</sup> and disembarked from the trucks in Luxembourg near the Siegfried Line.<sup>16</sup> My section was given three Jeeps and we scouted for Germans. We did not find any, since they had pulled back to the Siegfried Line in Germany. My battalion sat O.P. headquarters in a small town called Herborn.<sup>17</sup>

## 4.10 Herborn

The section was ordered to set up an observation post on a hill overlooking the Lauer Valley and the Siegfried Line. We set up the O.P. behind a row of bushes on a hill. This hill did not directly overlook the river valley. There was another hill not as high between us and the river. We could see the Siegfried Line two hills away.

We mounted our 20-power bi-scope which we had captured from the Ger-

<sup>15</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #7.

<sup>16</sup>See Figure 4.9.

<sup>17</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 #8.





Figure 4.8: A US Army Jeep.

mans and I started scanning the German side. I was amazed to see a rail yard with trains running back and forth.

I called for artillery fire on the rail yard but since we had no map planned, I had to walk the shells in. In order to observe better, I called for smoke shells. The artillery consisting of 105's fired and I couldn't see where a single shell hit. The firing was called off when I still couldn't spot the bursts even though the guns were firing at maximum range. Later, when we obtained a map, we realized that our shells were falling in the river valley where I couldn't see them, that the rail yard was 15 miles away, beyond the range of our guns, and that 240 howitzers would be required to reach it.

βDigging In

Our O.P. had nothing between it and the Germans, and we stuck out like



Figure 4.9: The Siegfried Line was built during the 1930s. The Germans themselves called this the Westwall, but the Allies renamed it after the First World War line. The Siegfried Line was a defense system stretching more than 390 miles with more than 18,000 bunkers, tunnels and tank traps. It went from Kleve on the border with the Netherlands as far as the town of Weil am Rhein on the border to Switzerland. Adolf Hitler planned the line from 1936 and had it built between 1938 and 1940. LEFT: Americans crossing the Siegfried Line into Germany. RIGHT: “Dragon’s teeth” tank traps on the Siegfried Line.

a sore thumb since there was nobody on our left or right flank. The nearest friendly troops were in Herborn, three miles to our rear. Mackey stayed in the C.P.<sup>18</sup> and somehow or other I ended up being in charge at the O.P. I didn’t do this voluntarily, the other men just did what I did. I dug in, and after a while they did too. I put logs over my hole and so did they. I sketched the area to our front and shot locating azimuths so every morning we could check and see if anything had moved. We had a telephone put in and started observing, using sound at night and sight by day.

Since there was nobody between the Germans and us, Williams and I set

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<sup>18</sup>Command Post

trip grenades along our front. We did not have enough pull devices so we set some of the grenades by tying their boxes to trees, leaving the grenade in the box with its pin pulled and the trip wire attached to the grenade. When the wire was hit, it should tilt the box, spill the grenade, which should then go off. We kept three men in the O.P. for a and night, at which time three other men took over. The three men not on duty rested at the C.P. in Herborn. Once we reported the train activity, the air force tried to bomb with fighter-bombers. The German anti-aircraft was so bad that they didn't even get close. One day at dusk they bombed with B-26's. That night the Germans fixed the tracks and ran trains the same as ever.

We finally got 240 howitzers zeroed in on the tracks and stopped them from using the trains in daytime.

#### βPlum Wine

In the house we stayed in at Herborn, we found a keg of plum wine. Everybody except Williams would drink a cup of this wine when they came in from the O.P. One day Williams said he had a horrible feeling that something bad was going to happen and started drinking the wine. Since he was not due to man the O.P. and the C.P. was a safe place to be, we did not pay much attention to him. Williams was quite and highly dependable, and had never said anything like this before.

#### βShelling

There was a tunnel at the railroad and the next morning we saw the Germans pull a giant railroad gun from the tunnel. We called the C.P. and

warned them about it.

The first shell hit in front of the C.P. and killed Williams, along with a man named Ptasek. Shells hit all over the town after that, and at times they even shelled Luxembourg City, about 20 or 30 miles away. We finally got so we would chase the gun back into the tunnel with our 240's.

We finally got a machine gun crew to guard our right flank.

ßambushing an ambush

At the foot of the hill, immediately in front of the O.P., there was a small village unoccupied by either side. One morning when the fog lifted I was one of our patrols entering one end of the village. I swept down the length of the village and saw a German patrol setting up an ambush for our men. I picked up my rifle and started trying to shoot the Germans. The range was 650 yards. The machine gunners saw what I was shooting at and opened up on the Germans. The Germans ran back over the hill towards Germany. Although we broke up the ambush, we didn't hit anybody.

That evening we changed shifts at the O.P. and it was my turn back at the C.P.

ßFun With Germans

The next morning the Germans started shelling the road leading to the O.P. Stanley called on the phone and said the O.P. was being hit by heavy mortar fire, then the phone went dead.

Lieutenant Hastings and I piled into a Jeep and went lickety split up the road to try and get to the O.P. Shells hit all around us but we made it to

the woods on the hill just behind the O.P.

The shelling had stopped and we circled around through the brush which kept us hidden while we approached the O.P.

No one at the O.P. or at the machine gun had been hit. Over fifty rounds of mortar fire had been poured on the O.P. All telephone wires had been cut. Our 20-power scope which was in the open had all of its knobs knocked off. The heavy logs over the holes had protected the men. Although several shells had landed on the logs, they did not penetrate.

We had sort of a game going with some Germans in a pill box in the Siegfried Line. They would come out of the pill box and defecate on the ground. We would wait 'til they got their pants down then throw a couple of shells at them to make them run.

βThe Moving hay stack

One morning I was running my usual azimuth check on objects when I discovered that a hay stack had moved during the night. We called for a couple rounds on the grid coordinates of the hay stack. When the shells hit, the hay stack started moving across the field. Hay fell off and we saw it was a German Tiger tank. We couldn't hit it and it went over a hill out of sight. One night I and Stanley were assigned to participate in a patrol to capture a prisoner. We ran into wire as we approached the line and started to cut our way through. It takes two men to cut wire, one to hold the ends of the wire so they won't "spong" apart and the other one to do the cutting. The other men crawl behind the me doing the cutting.

We had cut our way part way through the wire when we set off a German flare. When the flare went up, the Germans saw us and opened up with machine guns. All we could do was crawl back through the wire the way we came. Five of us were killed and we had to help two more back.

βMines

We were in Patton's army and he had decided to attack Trier<sup>19</sup>, which was about 20 miles to our front. One day the order came up that we had to go out again and try to capture a prisoner.

The next morning just as the fog lifted I saw a German running as fast as he could towards our O.P. with his hands up. He was headed straight towards the trip wires. I jumped out where he could see me and yelled "Minen! Minen!" (mines, mines in English). He hit the first trip wire and stopped dead. I went down and led him around the mines and brought him in. The trip wire he hit was one with a grenade in a box tied to a tree. Fortunately for us and the German they did not work too well. Because of this prisoner we did not have to go after one that night.

Finally the day came when we were ordered to set up an O.P. at a different place. Since the Germans knew where we were, we were happy to leave.

βTrip Wires

At dawn I went down to take up the trip wires we had set. To deactivate a grenade the handle must be held down, and the pin be reinserted. I was holding one with the handle down and was trying to insert the pin. The

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<sup>19</sup>Trier is about 30 km northwest of Luxembourg City. See Figure 4.1.

grenade was still tied to the trip wire. Suddenly I heard the striker hit and because of the wire I could not throw the grenade.<sup>20</sup> I dropped the grenade on the ground and ran down the hill until I counted three. I threw myself flat on the ground and the grenade fragments all went over me. I just untied the wires, put the lids on the boxes and buried the rest of the grenades without trying to get the pins in.

## 4.11 Siegfried Line

Our new O.P. was at the edge of a sheer cliff in a forest directly overlooking the Siegfried Line and Echternach<sup>21</sup> which was in Luxembourg. One steep path lead up the cliff and it was in front of where we decided to put the O.P.

Again we had no security for the O.P.

BA Stealth O.P.

We dug a pit deep enough to hold three men out of solid limestone. We dug deep enough so that we could put three layers of logs covered with dirt and leaves and still be level with the forest floor. We used a trap door to get into our O.P. The trail up the cliff we blocked with a grenade using a trip wire with a regular pull device. Observation was through a narrow slit under the bottom layer of logs. Each morning before dawn we replenished any wilted camouflage with fresh so that our location would not be given away. The O.P. was so well hidden that it could be walked on and

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<sup>20</sup>See Figure 4.10 on page 79.

<sup>21</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 on page .



Figure 4.10: LEFT: Pineapple grenade used in WWII. RIGHT: German Halftrack.

not discovered.

To cover our flanks and rear I rigged trip wires two ways: One fired detonators without grenades and others caused lights to turn on in the O.P. showing the direction which the enemy was coming in.

To my knowledge the Germans never located this O.P.

Later we rigged woven wire covered with a light layer of dry leaves. This was intended to trip any Germans who stepped on it and warn us they were around.

There really wasn't much to observe from this O.P. We rarely saw any Germans.

At night one of us always stayed outside the O.P. and listened. One night I finished my turn and climbed into the O.P. and told Stanley it was his turn to go out. It was cold out and Stanley didn't go. A few minutes later we



heard something walking on top of the O.P.

Stanley would not open the trap door and see what it was. I was afraid as well, but I knew if a German opened that door and threw in a grenade we were dead. Very slowly and cautiously I opened the door. I stuck my head out into the pitch black night and couldn't see a thing. I listened and listened but didn't hear a sound except a light breeze blowing. In retrospect I believe it was a deer on top the O.P. since the forest was full of them.

An armored artillery unit which was in combat for the first time set up an O.P. a few hundred yards on our left. They were extremely careless, the Germans saw them, shelled them and knocked out two of their halftracks.<sup>22</sup> One day one of our trip detonators went off. I scouted out to see what had set it off and saw one of the artillery officers looking all around to see who "shot" him. I went to him and guided him around the wires, and warned him about running around in that forest by himself.

We couldn't hear German activity from our O.P. and decided to man it only during daytime. We would use a Jeep to get to the O.P. and back, leaving at dusk and arriving at dawn.

Four of us would go in, one man on the machine gun, two with their guns in the ready to fire position.

One day the Jeep didn't reach us at dusk and we could hear an engine racing in the distance and concluded he was stuck in the mud. The road we used was just a fire break in the forest. The forest was made up almost

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<sup>22</sup>See Figure 4.10 on page 79.

entirely of pine trees and even in daytime was dark. We decided to walk out. We formed a regular three man patrol position and with guns at the full alert position walked out. This position insures that each man is covered by fire from the front or flanks by the other men. We came to our Jeep at the edge of the forest, helped get him out of the mud and went to the C.P.

The next morning at dawn we boarded the Jeep and went back to the O.P. At the edge of the woods we noticed a truck full of men and two half tracks from the armored artillery outfit. They fell in behind us and followed us into the woods and to the O.P. They told us that day that one of their trucks was shot up coming out of the woods. This was shortly after we had walked out. I can only assume that we walked through an ambush but the Germans didn't shoot any of us because they knew they would instantly have a fight on their hands. We were very angry with the artillerymen who let us lead into that forest when they had so much more firepower than we did. We were relieved by the 4th Division.

I picked up our trip wires and discovered something strange. The detonator in the grenade had fired but had not set off the grenade. Something had climbed the trail at one time, up the cliff, but when we didn't know. The 4th Division was coming from the Hurtgen Forest and that was our destination. The 4th had been literally shot to pieces.

## 4.12 Battle of the Buldge

It is noteworthy that we knew and reported back at our first O.P. in Luxembourg that the Germans were unloading tanks at the railroad at night and we could hear them. One night the British bombed the woods we believed these tanks were in. We on the front knew the Germans were building up for something. It turned out later to be the Battle Of The Buldge.

We went through Belgium to Maastricht, Holland,<sup>23</sup> where we stayed a few days. We then went through Aachen, Germany<sup>2425</sup> to the Hurtgen Forest where we relieved the remainder of the 4th Division. The Hurtgen Forest was dark even in daytime, the roads were dirt at one time but now were mostly mud which was knee deep in places. The woods beside the roads were heavily mined so we were forced to stay in the roads during our march into the forest. Our biggest fear were tree bursts, which occurred when shells would hit trees and spray shrapnel on everything beneath. We relieved a battalion of the 4th and took up a position in the woods. We would attack the next day and try to drive the Germans out of the forest. We started digging in and two German planes strafed the road near us. A strafing run sounds like popcorn going off all over the place. No one was hit that I know of by the strafing.

βFull Scale Bayonet Charge

The next morning we attacked the Germans with a full scale bayonet

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<sup>23</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49 #9.

<sup>24</sup>See #10 the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49 on page 49.

<sup>25</sup>See Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11: Bunker ruins on the Siegfried Line near Aachen, Germany.

charge. A friend of mine kept among others and was killed here. The Germans did not have time to retreat and a large portion of them died in their holes. We forced the Germans out of the woods first into a place called Hat Hardt and then into Gürzenich, which is opposite Duren.<sup>26</sup>

I was given the job of taking some prisoners down a road from Hat Hardt<sup>27</sup> to the rear. The German artillery was shelling the road but most of their shells were hitting in a little valley beside the road. Freeman led, next came the Germans and I brought up the rear.

#### ßKilling Germans

When we reached the area the shells were hitting I gave the order to "Mach schnell!". Freeman and the Germans promptly ran off and left me. I couldn't keep up. Fortunately some dud shells hit just as we ran through, and there was no shrapnel.

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<sup>26</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49 #11.

<sup>27</sup>See the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49 #12.

#### 4.12. BATTLE OF THE BULDGE *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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We ran across an open field into Gürzenich.<sup>28</sup> Germans ran in front of us and many were cut down by tank fire. Some of the tanks caught up with running Germans and mashed them flat as pancakes. It was very sickening. The Germans took refuge in some trenches they had dug in Gürzenich.

They wouldn't surrender and they didn't really have a chance. Some of our men were hit before we located the trenches. tanks were brought up and turned their cannon and machine guns on the trenches and killed all the Germans. The trench was filled with Germans. Some of them were poorly armed and were actually using old-time cross bows.

We moved on into Gürzenich until we held about half the town and stopped since night was coming.

A G.I. named Western went back to the trench. He cut off some of the Germans' fingers with an entrenching tool and took their wedding rings. In the street were two dead women killed by shells. They were apparently prostitutes who had been with the German troops.

Gürzenich was heavily damaged by bombs, but the basements of the houses had all been made into bomb shelters. We stayed in those basements for the next day or two. The basement my section occupied had German money all over the floors and was apparently an Army payroll. We swept it into one room so we would have a place to sleep. No one kept any of the money since to us it was worthless.

One night the German artillery laid a heavy barrage on us. German

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<sup>28</sup>Just northeast of Duren.

#### **4.12. BATTLE OF THE BULDGE**      *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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paratroopers were dropped on us but did little damage. We could hear Germans infiltrating between and around the houses we were in. At dawn the next morning the Germans attacked us. There was no rear since everybody was fighting either the paratroopers and infiltrators or the main German attack.

The main attack consisting of infantry and several light tanks was made across an open field and down the main street of the town. The German infantry came down the street as though they were doing close order drill. Our men waited until the Germans had marched almost down the street, then opened up on them from houses beside the street. tanks were knocked out with bazookas and the Germans were massacred. The Germans who were coming across the open field were cut down by machine guns which were in houses beside the field. We asked a German prisoner later why they made such a dumb attack and he said they didn't know we were that far into town.

The fighting with infiltrators went on all day and was house to house. That night one of our kitchen Jeeps which was bringing up hot food was captured by the Germans. Three of us went out to capture it back. We tried to go up the street but there were so many dead Germans that we kept stepping on and falling over them. We found the Jeep and driver eventually and for some strange reason the Germans had turned them free.

The next morning we attacked and drove the Germans across the Roer River into Duren. They blew up the bridge so we stopped at the river.

βMy Brother Ray

#### **4.13. CHRISTMAS IN BELGIUM** *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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I did not know it at the time but my brother Ray was fighting with the 78th Division on our flank. They were hit by the same attack we were and being green were badly mauled. My brother was listed as "missing in action". I saw my brother months later under "one in a million" conditions.

Out of Gürzenich

We stayed in Gürzenich for another day and were abruptly relieved by a green division fresh from England.

We marched out of Gürzenich and back through the portion of the Hurtgen Forest we had just captured. German planes kept flying over us did not strafe. They were probably reconnaissance planes. We were loaded on trucks and driven to Belgium. We were to help try and stop the Germans in the Battle Of The Buldge'.

### **4.13 Christmas in Belgium**

My section spent Christmas in a schoolhouse in Belgium. We moved further into Belgium the next day and spent the night in one of King Leopold's castles.<sup>29</sup> It was bitterly cold and some of the men built fires in the center of the stone floors. That night we captured a German paratrooper dressed in an American uniform.

My section was assigned three Jeeps for motorized reconnaissance the next day. Our job was to find the Germans. In the Buldge battle for a

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<sup>29</sup>Possibly the Boechout Castle pictured in Figure 4.12.



Figure 4.12: Boechout Castle (Kasteel Boechout), lies in the town of Meise, just north of Brussels in Belgium. In 1879 the castle was bought by King Leopold II for his sister, Charlotte.

period of time nobody knew exactly where the Germans were.

We scouted for miles and miles on the Belgian roads and didn't see a single German. Finally we went back to the battalion C.P. and the division was moved up to the point of the Buldge where we relieved the 82nd Airborne. The 82nd had been fighting the Germans and there was no doubt where they were. We started attacking the Germans the next morning. Company E became too exuberant and charged into Rochefort. There was a whole German Panzer division in that town and they trapped E Company.

The battalion attacked Rochefort in an effort to release E Company. The Germans apparently thought there were a lot more of us than there were and retreated. We then moved into Rochefort and E Company was free. The next day we were relieved by British troops. These troops were clean shaven, had all their equipment and looked like they had just come from England. They lost Rochefort the next day. We were loaded on trucks and sent to



another point of the Buldge. Our job was to cut the Houtilize highway and try and cut the Germans off. The weather was extremely cold, snow was about a foot deep and to get wet feet could be fatal. The towns we fought for were called Langlir and Petite.<sup>30</sup>

## **4.14 Freezing in Langlir**

We attacked the Germans near Langlir and started pushing them back. It was almost fatal to be wounded since death would come very quickly from freezing. Some G.I.'s I saw laying dead had their arms raised in a boxing condition, the result of freezing I suppose.

We carried dry socks and whenever possible would change, since wet feet could lead to frozen or trench foot. To sleep at night required sleeping for a short while then getting up and exercising. Most of us did jumping jacks to get warm.

Pearson, Freeman and I were sent to scout a large U-shaped farmhouse for Germans. We crawled up to the edge of the woods and the house was only about 200 yards away. There were many Germans at the house, and even worse they had a Tiger Royal tank.<sup>31</sup>

The woods was shelled while we were scouting and Pearson was hit by shrapnel. It stung him but didn't break the skin. We reported our findings back to the colonel at the C.P.

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<sup>30</sup>See #13 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

<sup>31</sup>See Figure 4.13.



Figure 4.13: LEFT: Tiger tank, RIGHT: U.S. Sherman tank.

The battalion advanced towards the edge of the woods until it arrived at a small hill and they stopped on the side away from the Germans and the house. A road went over the hill in front of the house and down into the valley to Langlir. We brought up some tank destroyers to take on the German Tiger. The only way the T.D.'s<sup>32</sup> could get at the German tank was to charge over the hill firing as they went. In general a T.D.'s gun could not knock out a Tiger tank, since the latter had such heavy armor.

βCourt Martial for Cowardice

The captain leading the T.D.s refused to attack the Tiger. By refusing the colonel's orders he was subject to court martial for cowardice and refusal to follow orders. He was arrested on the spot.

A sergeant from one of the tanks offered to charge the German tank if two other tank men would go with him. Two men volunteered. They revved up their engine and charged over the hill with his tank cannon firing as fast as they could load the gun. The Tiger could have easily knocked out the

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<sup>32</sup>tank destroyers

T.D. but he chose to run instead. He roared out of the house courtyard and down the hill. Our T.D. reached the edge of the woods, ran over a mine and blew a track off. None of the tank crew were hurt.

βPity for Germans

We moved right up to the edge of the woods and started shooting at the house. The Germans panicked and tried to run through the foot-deep snow down the hill. Our men shot a few of them, then everyone stopped shooting. I guess our men felt sorry for the Germans since they so obviously didn't have a chance. We let the Germans for the greater part get away.

We moved into the farmhouse. It was so big with its attached stable and sheds that three companies could squeeze in. Anything to get out of the cold. The German Tiger tank moved into Langlir. From the farmhouse we could see several of our tanks coming over a bald hill on the other side of the valley. The tanks were in line, a skirmish formation. The Tiger opened up on our tanks and knocked five of them out, he wasn't even touched.

β Tank Fight

The Tiger was setting beside a house in Langlir and a couple of our men too a bazooka and went down to try and knock him out. Ordinarily a bazooka couldn't hurt this type of tank but the men did damage a track so he couldn't move. One of our tanks went down from the farmhouse to Langlir to get a shot at the Tiger. It roared around the house and jammed the front end of the German tank. Our Sherman tank has a little short 75mm cannon while the Tiger had an extremely long .88. The Tiger turned his gun to

blast the Sherman but all they could do was bang the gun's side against the Sherman's turret. The Sherman fired several rounds at the German's turret and knocked the tank out.

#### βNight Patrol

That night we were to go on patrol.

The patrol was to be a combined combat reconnaissance patrol consisting of about ten men commanded by a lieutenant. I was to be point man since I was most experienced. The lieutenant had never been on a patrol before and was all gung ho.

We left the farmhouse after dark, went down the hill, waded a partially frozen stream and climbed a long steep hill to the road which was about halfway up the hill, and which was our destination. I led, the lieutenant followed me and the rest of the men were behind him.

I whispered to the officer that we should not walk on the road but should walk in the woods beside the road even if the going was rougher. He said no, that we should walk in the road.

We walked about a quarter of a mile down the road when suddenly my instinct told me to hit the ground, which I did instantly. The men behind me also hit the ground, that is everyone but the lieutenant. A German tank fired on us almost point blank. At night a white tank, in white snow is almost impossible to see and since the Germans didn't make any noise, we didn't locate it soon enough.

I rolled into the woods and looked around just in time to see the men

running up the road after the lieutenant. The tank did not fire again. I caught those men only once going back to the C.P. That was at the foot of the hill, since we scooted down it on our tails I out-scooted them. They ran up the other hill to the C.P. I walked.

The lieutenant was barely scratched, but when he ran the other men followed. The lieutenant was sent to the rear and I never saw him again. I was really down on the colonel. When I told him about the tank he said he knew one was there and forgot to tell us.

βAttack from Langlir

The next morning we attacked from Langlir and the house and drove the Germans into Petite Langlir. G Company did most of the fighting and prepared to spend the night on the mountain overlooking the town. After dark I lead food vehicles along the road and they looked like they were dug in for the night. I went back to the C.P.

Some of the men in G Company started thinking about the Germans in the warm houses in Petite Langlir while they were freezing on the mountain. They decided to attack the Germans and run them out. The word spread and E Company decided to go with them.

The companies went down the mountain and into town. The Germans were taken completely by surprise. They had no guards out. The Germans had to be woke up so they could surrender. The next morning German Volkswagens bringing hot food to the Germans were captured. The battalion aid station also moved into town.

As soon as the Germans became aware of the town's capture they counterattacked with tanks. The Americans had no tanks or anti-tank guns and the Tigers shot up the companies pretty bad. The mountain down into the town was subject to German direct tank fire and hardly anything could reach them.

βGerman Weasel

I was ordered to go with a captured German Weasel and see if we could get some medical supplies supplies to the aid station. There was a road down the mountain but our driver went cross country because of German tank fire. It was the most frightening ride I was ever on. The Weasel was going as fast as it could down the mountain, we were being shelled and we made it.

American and German medics were working together in the aid station to take care of the wounded. The German tanks had hit a lot of German P.O.W.'s along with the Americans.

I started calling artillery down on the German tanks but couldn't get it in right since we were at the foot of the mountain. It did worry the German tankers though and eventually they pulled out.

That night we sent a patrol to the Houtilize highway. The next day an armored division moved through us and cut the highway and linked with Patton's army which was coming up from the south. This was our last fight in the Buldge battle. Our next fight was to be in the Rhine Valley in Germany.

About this time an offer went around to some of us to get battlefield commissions. Generally only non-coms got this offer but to some of us they

said they would make us non-com's and then we would be put in for the commissions. The catch was that the new officers could not serve with their old outfit. As far as I know nobody ever took one of those offers.

## 4.15 Düsseldorf

After the Buldge battle we went into Germany and attacked towards Düsseldorf.<sup>33</sup> After the preceding battles this was almost fun although we lost quite a few men.

We drove the Germans into Neuss<sup>34</sup> which is directly across the Rhine River from Düsseldorf. trains were still running across the river from Neuss into Düsseldorf and since we had captured a train the colonel had an idea. He thought it might be a good idea to load the battalion on the train and go across the bridge into Düsseldorf. Fortunately he finally decided it was too risky. We attacked across some open fields and captured Neuss. The Germans blew the bridge up when we were about a block away. We stayed in Neuss for several days and it was almost like a vacation since we had no fighting. Several .88 anti-aircraft guns were captured around Neuss. The German crews fired these guns at the American troops as long as they could then ran into their underground concrete bunkers. The Americans turned flamethrowers into the bunkers and burned them alive. For days the stench from the burned bodies was terrible.

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<sup>33</sup>See #14 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

<sup>34</sup>Neuss is a few kilometers west of Düsseldorf.

The anti-aircraft guns were used by the Americans to shell Düsseldorf. The gunners didn't know the fuse settings so shells were exploding in the air all over the place. It was like steel hail but it could also kill a person. One night the British bombed Essen<sup>35</sup> not far away with over a thousand planes. Every so often a plane was hit by anti-aircraft shells and became a big ball of fire in the sky.

ßAcross the Rhine

We were loaded on trucks and taken north to the point where we were to cross the Rhine River. We crossed the river as far as I know near Cologne. We met no resistance and our assault boats rowed across without incident. We fanned out across the country and tanks, Jeeps, trucks etc. were brought across on pontoon ferries. We were now ready to spearhead across Germany towards Berlin.

The G.I.s rode in trucks, Jeeps but mostly on the backs of tanks. The leading vehicles were the point, next came the advance party, the main body and finally the rear guard. The most dangerous place to be was in the point since it ran into the enemy first.

The British were supposed to be going along with us on our left flank. I suppose units of the First Army were on our right. We were in the Ninth Army at this time.

My unit was in the main body until we reached Paderborn.<sup>36</sup> At Pader-

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<sup>35</sup>See #15 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

<sup>36</sup>See #16 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.



born two armies linked up and the German Ruhr Valley industrial area was completely surrounded.

Beyond Paderborn my battalion was often in the advance party and I was often with the point.

The general procedure was to go as fast as we could until we met resistance. If it were a town as was generally the case, it would be surrounded with tanks and the rest of the division would go around it. The tanks would shell for a while and the town generally surrendered.

The G.I.s found German cars and trucks, made them operate and sometimes even outran the point.

I was riding with G Company in the point one day on the back of a tank with Conley and some other men. We saw a German army truck moving along a road parallel to ours. Each tank had a .50 caliber machine gun mounted on it. Conley and I cocked the gun and tried to blast the truck. The gun was jammed and wouldn't fire. The truck came into our road and drove towards us. It was driven by two G.I.s and they were very concerned when we told them how near they came to being killed.

One day the point came over a small hill and a German tank fired at us just one shot. Shortly afterwards the armored cars drew fire and had to retreat. We jumped off the tanks and scattered and dug in. German infantry started shooting at us. Two or three of us ran to a house beside the road. We shot the lock off the door and went inside but didn't find any German troops. The basement door was closed and locked. I yelled for the Germans to come

#### **4.16. ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE**     *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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up "hande lach" (hands up). There was a hesitation, the door opened and a real old man and woman came out. We searched the basement and found no troops.

I asked the old man for a pencil and paper and put a sign on the door saying that there were no troops in the basement only civilians. I told the old man and woman to go back down until the shooting stopped.

ßGermans surrendering

The advance party came up and made a skirmish line. When the Germans saw the line coming towards them, they put up their hands, climbed out of their holes and surrendered. We smashed their guns and sent them marching to the rear without guards. They were happy the war was over and certainly didn't want to escape. We had so many prisoners by this time that they were a nuisance.

We crossed the Weser River on German ferry boats at Hanlin. I didn't see any rats or a single pied piper.

### **4.16 All Hell Breaks Loose**

I cannot remember most of the towns we passed or went through. One time I was riding on the back of a tank with the main body. The main body had guns set up beside the road to protect against aircraft. Most of us were dozing on the backs of the tanks when "all hell broke loose".

I woke up and saw a ball of fire coming (it seemed) straight towards the

tank I was on. It hit the ground about 100 yards from the side of the road, scooted to the road embankment and blew up. Noises like a giant popcorn popper started. The tanks speeded up and we went by this spot in a hurry. A German plane had tried to make a tree top strafing run on the road. He had flown over our .50 caliber anti-aircraft guns and they had shot him down. The popcorn noise were his ammunition exploding.

## 4.17 Schieder

We came to a town called Schieder<sup>37</sup> in some mountains. Schieder was in a pass in the mountains and could not be bypassed.

There was an open field, a stream spanned by one bridge and then the town. The enemy were in houses along the stream and could shoot across the open field. Our tanks lined up abreast in the open field and opened fire on the houses. Conley crawled through the field towards the houses to try and determine how many enemy there were. He came back after while and reported to the colonel.

Conley said we could take them. It was rather funny to hear him say that since he had a bullet hole through the top of his helmet. The bullet would have killed him if it had been an inch lower.

Conley asked colonel Sharp if he could use me to help lead a charge over the bridge into town. I was horrified but it was ordered by the colonel to do

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<sup>37</sup>See #17 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

it.

Conley and I running like crazy and with the rest of the battalion behind us, went over the bridge into Schieder.

Conley was right when the Germans saw us coming they must have ran. At least very few of them shot at us.

Conley, I and some other men started searching houses on one side of the street. Other men split left and right from the road as they came over the bridge. We found civilians in the basements of the houses but no troops. Most of the German troops must have exited out the other end of town and since it was getting dark we stopped once we captured the town.

Some Germans dug in a low spot at the intersection of two roads. The low spot was surrounded by houses. The Germans would not surrender so the G.I.'s climbed upstairs in the houses, set one house on fire so they could see and shoot the Germans in their holes.

Conley and I were recommended for Silver Stars for leading the charge but we didn't get them.

## **4.18 Harz Mountains**

We came to the Harz Mountains. These were the mountains written about in "Grimm's Fairy Tales". The mountains are beautiful and are covered with pine forests.

The Germans attacked at our rear and cut off our entire division. Two

regiments turned and fought back the way we had come until communications were reestablished.

Some of our men captured some German officers in training'. I talked with these prisoners for a while and they said they would help us fight the Russians who they said were barbarians.

## **4.19 Brother Ray**

We had known for two days that there was a column of prisoners in front of us, and it was decided that two pincers would be thrown around them so they could be released.

Two other men and I had appropriated a German truck and we no longer stayed with the main advance but goofed around over the country side. We scouted towns that the army hadn't taken yet but the Germans never gave us any trouble. This particular day we found several freight cars full of new German motorcycles. We decided that these would be better than the truck and tried to start them. They wouldn't start so we went back to find the column.

We found the column, drove a few miles and found the battalion. The column of prisoners had been cut off and right away the men in G Company sent me to see my brother Ray. He had been one of the prisoners.

βLike a King

Ray said that when he saw the regiment and battalion number on the

first Jeep to come down the prison line he knew it was my outfit. When he told the men in G Company they treated him like a king. They instantly loaded him up with cigarettes and K-rations and sent him to the field kitchen to eat. When I came needless to say we were overjoyed to see each other and since he had been listed as missing in action until that day I wasn't sure he was alive.

Ray had been on a starvation diet and only weighed eighty pounds. He had been in a prisoner of war camp in the eastern part of Germany, but when the Russians advanced we were marched almost to the Rhine River. When we crossed the Rhine the Germans marched the prisoners almost back to the Elbe River where we caught them.

The supply sergeant of G Company who I had fought with, came looking for Ray and outfitted him completely in new clothes. He also gave him candy bars and cartons of cigarettes.

That night we had a hot supper and the mess sergeant really heaped Ray's mess kit full of food. Ray ate some of the food and instantly vomited it up. His starved stomach just couldn't stand decent food.

Conley wanted Ray and I to spend the night with his company but the section wanted them to stay with them which we did.

Captain Overdite, the doctor from the aid station, inspected Ray and said he was going to send him to the hospital the next morning. The supply sergeant gave Ray a new sleeping bag and we slept in a German house that night.

A German plane dropped a small bomb that night on the house G Company was in. None of the men were hurt badly but they were shook up pretty bad.

Our section was holding some prisoners in the basement of the house we were in.

βSouvenirs

After the war at home I saw all the rings and small hand guns Ray had and asked him where he got them. He said the rings came from the prisoners in the basement that night and that he took them because the Germans had taken his class ring the day he was captured. The guns were given to him by men in the section and G Company.

βParting

The next morning Ray decided he didn't want to go back but wanted to stay with my section. I finally convinced him that it would be hard on Mom if we were both killed. I told him that there might be a hard fight coming up for Barby.<sup>38</sup> Finally he was convinced.

Captain Overdite put Ray in an ambulance and he was sent back. I was not to see him again till several months after I was discharged from the army.

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<sup>38</sup>See #18 on the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

## 4.20 Barby on the Elbe River

We attacked Barby on the Elbe River that morning. There was only a minor amount of fighting. The artillery was set up to shell the city and colonel Sharp invited the burgermeister (mayor) to come look. The burgermeister saw what they were facing and convinced most of the German troops to vacate the city. We stayed in Barby the rest of the day and that night.

Barby is near Madgeburg.<sup>39</sup> At the latter place one of our armored divisions tried to cross the river and were thrown back with heavy losses. I was in the first wave of assault boats to cross the Elbe at dawn the next morning. There were no shots fired at us and as soon as we landed we formed a skirmish line and started moving away from the river, across the fields. German soldiers occasionally raised up out of the grass and bushes surrendering.

### ßShooting Down a Plane

We were about a half mile from the river when a lot of firing occurred to the rear on the other side of the river. We looked up and there was a Junkers 88 German bomber right over our heads. I lifted up my carbine and fired a burst at the tail gunner. Only two of us even got off any shots. The bomber crashed a short distance in front of us. Apparently the guns across the river had shot him down.

We advanced across the fields, captured a small town without incident and stopped for a while.

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<sup>39</sup>See #19 the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.



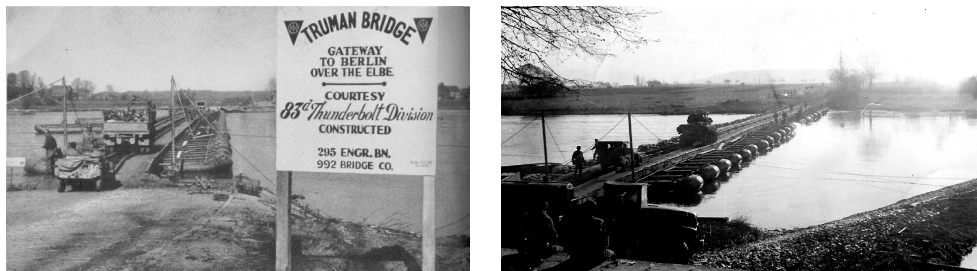


Figure 4.14: The Truman Bridge across the Elbe.

### Attacked by Tanks

We were attacked by about eight German tanks. Their first shells knocked out the only means of defense we really had two .55mm anti-tank guns we had managed to get across the river. We had only bazookas left. We called artillery down on the German tanks - a full barrage. The German tanks weren't hit but the infantry with them was and they retreated. If they had kept coming they could have wiped us out.

## 4.21 The Truman Bridge

The engineers built a pontoon bridge (called the Truman Bridge<sup>40</sup>) across the Elbe and tanks, troops and guns were funneled across. We were now ready to attack Ziripiz<sup>41</sup> which is 65 miles from Berlin.<sup>42</sup>

We captured Ziripiz without much fighting using the burgermeister the same way we did to take Barby. We moved into Ziripiz and moved into some

<sup>40</sup>See Figure 4.14.

<sup>41</sup>There appears to be no such city. Zieser is about 68 miles from Berlin.

<sup>42</sup>See #20 the map in Figure 4.1 on page 49.

## 4.22. END OF THE EUROPEAN WAR Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII

German houses. We were to stay there several days.

As far as we could see the war was over. The Russians were still fighting in Berlin 65 miles away but the German troops coming our way only wanted to surrender.

### German Soldiers Surrender

A column of Germans came in and surrendered one day. I sorted through their guns looking for some to mail home. I found three good rifles, but only managed to send two home.

We sent a convoy to within 30 miles of Berlin to pick up some British and French who had been prisoners of war. The Germans offered no resistance and really wanted us to go on in and take Berlin.

We finally met the Russians at Ziripiz and thought they were a dumb bunch of people.

## 4.22 End of the European War

Some of us were to be allowed to go on furlough at this time. We were given a choice of two weeks in London or Riviera. I chose London. I went to London via Paris. In Paris I sold several cartons of cigarettes on the black market to finance the trip.

I arrived in London and stayed at the American Red Cross near Hyde Park. My stay in London was enjoyable. I went to movies, met four girls (two Irish, one English and one WAC), visited such things as Westminster

Abbey, the tower, Saint Paul's Cathedral, etc. I was in London when the war ended in Europe.

I went back to the outfit at Ziripiz, but they were on the verge of moving out. We boarded trucks and went to Platling in Bavaria. Platling is near Passau, Austria. The Danube River is only two or three miles away. Most of my time at Platling was spent fishing and shooting some of the German guns I had.

ßDachau concentration camp

We started training again to go fight Japan but the war ended while we were out in the field one day. We were all waiting now to come home. We visited Dachau, a concentration camp. There was a horrible smell around this camp. Years later when I passed the slaughter houses at Sioux City, Iowa, I smelled the same odor.

Dachau had been cleaned up somewhat. There were still piles of bones around. We saw the incinerator ovens and the gas chambers. Most of the buildings were off limits since they were infested with lice. Some of the men laid on the oven trays and had their photographs taken with just their feet sticking out.

## **4.23 Going Home**

The day came when I had to leave the old outfit to come home. Each division was to be disbanded in turn. Men who were eligible to come home by the

point system were transferred to one of these divisions. I was transferred to an armored division near Dilsen, Czechoslovakia. We were sent by train to one of the cigarette camps near Rheims, France. In a few days we were on our way home aboard a American troopship, the S.S. Le June. This ship was a luxury liner compared with the other ships I had been on. We had real bunks and plenty of American food. We ran into a terrific storm in the Atlantic and the ship pitched and rolled badly. Even some of the sailors manning the ship became seasick. With a lot of men sick, the men who weren't sick could eat like kings. They had to cook for everybody even if they didn't eat. I don't believe I ever ate more in my life than I did on this trip. I developed a case of constipation on this trip. The head (toilet) was in the bow of the ship. It consisted of a long trough which ran fore and aft with a board laid across to sit on. A stream of water continuously poured in the trough to keep the crap flushed through the drains at each end. This worked fine in a storm but with the ship pitching nothing had a chance to drain out. The ship would pitch and all the crud would flow too violently to one end or the other that it would overflow the trough onto the floor. If you sat near the end of the trough you were in real trouble. The only safe place was to sit dead center. The stench and the tendency to be seasick anyway kept me out practically the whole voyage.

We came into New York Harbor and all the boats were blowing their horns etc. We landed and the Red Cross handed each of us a pint of milk. This was the best milk I ever drank.

#### **4.23. GOING HOME**

*Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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I was demobilized out of the army partially at Fort Dix and finally at Indiantown, PA. So I finally arrived home in November, 1945. I had spent almost exactly three years in the army.

# Chapter 5

## After the War

by **Edward Randolph Hersman**

I stayed with the family from November, 1945 until January, 1946. I then enrolled in the engineering school at West Virginia University. Ray was in the hospital at Martinsburg, W.Va., and was not to receive his discharge for several months.

I had a terrible time buying civilian clothes, which were very scarce at the time.

I started dating the girl, Margaret Brown, to whom I had written while in the army.

I still had trouble with math but my grades were pretty good during my freshman year since I studied constantly.

When Ray was released from the army, Mom and I teamed up with him

and we bought a Kaiser automobile. This was about the only car we could obtain due to the scarcity. Ray entered W.V.U. in engineering during the summer of 1946.

I decided that Peggy and I were getting too serious and we stopped dating for a while. I had decided I wanted a real active life and marriage was out.

I became intensely bored with school during my Sophomore year. I studied hard but it didn't take. The regimen and constant grind was too much to take. I know now I should have taken more time out between the army and school.

## **5.1 Back to Cleveland**

One day another man and I decided we had had enough so without further ado we jumped in the Kaiser and drove to Cleveland. We found a room near East 79th St. on Euclid Ave. and hunted for work. I obtained a job in the Fisher Body Plant on Coit Road. I do not know where my room mate Bob Johnson got his first job.

I was laid off at Fisher Body after about a month. At the time there was great concern about a post war depression and without union seniority I was let out. I found a job working with spinning machines on aluminum pots and pans at the Monarch Aluminum Company, but left due to the low pay.

Bob and I both obtained a job at a machine shop which made small belt conveyers, but we found better jobs as draftsmen at Bobcock & Wilcox,

## **5.2. WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII***

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who's Cleveland office was just off the Public Square.

Bob and I did not get along very well as room mates. He wanted to go out every night and drink. I went a few times with him, although I didn't drink, and then refused to go anymore. We parted company. Bob later let the drinking get the best of him and became a hopeless alcoholic. Bob was from Glenville and I went to school with him there. He worked in Cleveland before we went into the army and I was with him when he drank his first beer. I worked at B & W until the fall when I went back to W.V.U. My drafting work at this company involved using descriptive geometry and trigonometry to design boiler tubes. I became very proficient at this and was rated one of their best men.

## **5.2 West Virginia University**

At W.V.U. I switched from chemical engineering to more active mining engineering. At first my grades were low but as I became more interested in the work they were better and better.

I started dating Peggy occasionally but she had found another boyfriend. I dated some other girls but nothing serious developed. Peggy graduated in the spring and went to a hospital in Wheeling to work. I obtained a job at E.I. Dupont de Nemours Corp. at Belle, West Virginia and stayed with a family named Conley in Charleston.



## 5.3 Getting Married

I drove up to see Peggy in the Kaiser about every weekend. After a period of this we decided to become married in August.

βA Comedy of Errors

Our marriage in August was sort of a comedy of errors.

John Hamilton was my best man, Bob Hensley and my brother Ray were ushers. We were to be married in the Reedsville Methodist Church and the reception would be at Fairfax, Peggy's home.

We went through the rehearsals O.K.

The first mistake was a mess up with the tuxedos. I was as thin as a rail while Bob Hensley was fat. Somehow we got our tuxedos crossed and he wore mine and vice versa.

The wedding ceremony went off O.K. but when we went to get in the car there wasn't any. The Kaiser had broken down in front of the church and my ushers and best man were working on it. My brother-in-law Howard Arbogast brought his car and drove us to the reception.

I started to change clothes to work on the car but John Hamilton and Bob Hensley talked me out of it. Ray found the trouble with the car and fixed it. The bridegrooms then painted it with suitable slogans, tied on cans and fixed screamers to the sparkplugs.

βHoneymoon

We started on our honeymoon and the other cars of course gave chase. I

lost most of the cars quickly but my brother Ray with Peggy's grandfather followed us for miles. I never saw a man enjoying himself as much as Peggy's grandfather.

We spent our first night together in Wheeling, West Virginia. We visited some of Peggy's relatives the next day and drove to Newark, Ohio, where we spent the night in a tourist home.

We drove to Mitchell, South Dakota the next day with a brief stop in Iowa to erase the signs and replace the cracked plugs. Mitchell looked like a real wild west town with dirt streets, horses and an old time hotel where we stayed. The next day we drove to Rapid City where we spent the night in a brand new furnished house for the same price a room would have cost.

The next day we drove through the Black Hills. The big faces were viewed from a hill across from them. There were no buildings or anything else there at that time.

We drove through the "badlands" over washboard gravel roads and spent the night in "Ten Sleep", Wyoming. Peggy never forgave me for eating a steak that night when she could only handle soup due to mountain sickness. We drove through the Yellowstone National Park, the Grand Tetons and spent the night in Jackson Hole. We drove through Idaho and a portion of Utah and spent two or three days in Salt Lake City.

We were having a lot of trouble with the Kaiser. It seemed like every place we stopped we had to replace front wheel bearings or get the car aligned. As a result we did not get to see many of the "sights" in the towns. We drove

from Salt Lake City to the Grand Canyon and viewed it from both rims. We drove through the Petrified Forest, the Painted Desert and spent two or three days in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As usual we had the car repaired here. The car repairs had taken all our money so we decided we had better go home.

Without stopping to sleep I started at Albuquerque and drove through half of New Mexico, the Texas Western Panhandle, Oklahoma and Arkansas to Memphis, Tennessee. Peggy went to sleep and missed Texas and Oklahoma. We drove from Memphis to Chattanooga where we spent the night and the next day we arrived home.

## **5.4 Living in Cleveland**

Being broke is a great incentive for action, so Peggy and I decided to move to Cleveland where I would get my old job back at B & W. I worked there about a year and we went back to school at W.V.U.

Peggy worked part time at the hot lunch program, at the same time she worked towards her master's degree. I went back into the mining engineering school.

We had bought an old car, a 1939 Buick. This was our first car. It ran good but otherwise was always on the verge of falling apart.

We stayed in a real rat-trap of an apartment near the campus. I finished up a very enjoyable summer of surveying both on top of and under the

ground. I now had my degree (B.S.) in mining engineering. This was in 1952.

There were few jobs available in mining engineering in 1952. The only engineers who obtained positions had dads or relatives pretty high up in the mining company.

I obtained a position as a mechanical engineer with my old firm Babcock and Wilcox.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ed Hersman's manuscript ends here.

**Edward R. Hersman**

DOYLESTOWN — Edward R. Hersman, 63, of Fairview Av., Doylestown, passed away Feb. 23.

Mr. Hersman was a stress and design engineer with NASA in Cleveland, a World War II Army veteran, a member of the Doylestown United Methodist Church, and a former Boy Scout leader in Doylestown.

He is survived by his wife, Peggy; son, Frank of Clearwater, Fla.; four daughters, Mrs. Margaret Ann Myslinsky of West Virginia, Sue Coughlin of Novi, Mich., Mrs. Jeanne Evans of Canal Winchester, Ohio, Mrs. Shari Grau of Snellville, Ga.; two grandchildren; three sisters, Iris Arbogast of Norton, Lenore Marks of Garfield Heights, and Justine McHenry of West Virginia.

PRIVATE calling and services will be held Tuesday, at the Monbarren Funeral Home in Doylestown, Rev. Gene Sackett officiating. Interment Chestnut Hill Cemetery, Doylestown. The family suggests memorials may be made to the Akron Zoological Park, 500 Edgewood Av., Akron 44307. (Monbarren, 658-2211.)

Figure 5.1: Ed Hersman's obituary.

# Chapter 6

## Some Relevant Historical Notes

### 6.1 The 83rd Division

Here is an account of Ed 's 83rd Division<sup>1</sup>

βChronology World War II

- Activated: 15 August 1942
- Overseas: 6 April 1944
- Campaigns:
  - Normandy
  - Battle of Normandy: The Invasion of Normandy was the invasion and establishment of Western Allies forces in Normandy, France, during Operation Overlord in World War II...., Northern France,

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/U.S.\\_83rd\\_Infantry\\_Division](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/U.S._83rd_Infantry_Division)

- Rhineland: The Rhineland is the general name for the land on both sides of the river in the west of Germany. After the collapse of the First French Empire in the early 19th century, the German-speaking regions at the middle and lower course of the were annexed to the kingdom of Prussia....
- Ardennes-Alsace, Central Europe
- Central Europe Campaign After crossing the the Western Allies fanned out overrunning all of western Germany from the Baltic in the north to Austria in the south before the Germans surrendered on May 7 1945....
- Days of combat: 244
- Distinguished Unit Citations: 7
- Awards: Medal of Honor
  - Medal of Honor -1 ;
  - Distinguished Service Cross (United States) -7 ;
  - Distinguished Service Medal (Army) -1 ;
  - Silver Star -710;
  - Legion of Merit -11;
  - Soldier’s Medal -25 ;
  - Bronze Star Medal -6,294 ;

– Air Medal -110.

- Commanders:

- Maj. Gen. Frank W. Milburn. Frank William Milburn was a general in the United States Army during World War II and the Korean War. Milburn attended the United States Military Academy and was commissioned as a lieutenant in June 1914....

- (August 1942-December 1943), Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon. Robert Chauncey Macon was a general in the United States Army during World War II. He commanded the 83rd Infantry Division during the drive across Europe and later served as military attaché in Moscow.... (January 1944-31 January 1946)

- Returned to U.S.: 26 March 1946

- Inactivated: 5 April 1946

ßCombat Chronicle The 83rd Infantry Division arrived in England on 16 April 1944. After training in Wales, the division landed at Omaha Beach, 18 June 1944, and entered the hedgerow struggle south of Carentan, 27 June. Taking the offensive, the 83d reached the St. Lo-Periers Road, 25 July, and advanced 8 miles against strong opposition as the Normandy campaign ended.

After a period of training, elements of the division took Chateaufort, 5 August, and Dinard, 7 August, and approached the heavily fortified area



protecting St. Malo. Intense fighting reduced enemy strong points and a combined attack against the Citadel Fortress of St. Servan caused its surrender, 17 August. While elements moved south to protect the north bank of the Loire River, the main body of the division concentrated south of Rennes for patrolling and reconnaissance activities. Elements reduced the garrison at Ile de Cézembre, which surrendered, 2 September. On 16 September 1944: the only surrender of a German Major General B. H. Elster to US-troops with 18,850 men and 754 officers at the Loire bridge of Beaugency. The movement into Luxembourg was completed on 25 September. Taking Remich on the 28th and patrolling defensively along the Moselle, the 83d resisted counterattacks and advanced to the Siegfried Line defenses across the Sauer after capturing Grevenmacher and Echternach, 7 October. As the initial movement in operation “Unicorn,” the division took Le Stromberg Hill in the vicinity of Basse Konz against strong opposition, 5 November, and beat off counterattacks.

Moving to the Hurtgen Forest, the 83d thrust forward from Gressenich to the west bank of the Roer. It entered the Battle of the Buldge, 27 December, striking at Rochefort and reducing the enemy salient in a bitter struggle. The division moved back to Belgium and the Netherlands for rehabilitation and training, 22 January 1945. On 1 March, the 83d advanced toward the in Operation Grenade,<sup>2</sup> and captured Neuss. The west bank of the from

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<sup>2</sup> During World War II, Operation Grenade was the plan for the U.S. Ninth Army to cross the Roer river in February 1945.

north of Oberkassel to the Erft Canal was cleared and defensive positions established by 2 March and the division renewed its training. The 83d crossed the south of Wesel,<sup>3</sup> 29 March, and advanced across the Munster Plain to the Weser, crossing it at Bodenwerder.<sup>4</sup> As opposition disintegrated, Halle fell on 6 April. The division crossed the Leine, 8 April, and attacked to the east, pushing over the Harz Mountain region and advancing to the Elbe River at Barby.<sup>5</sup> That city was taken on the 13 April. The 83rd established a bridgehead over the river.

On 11 April 1945 the 83rd encountered Langenstein, a subcamp of the Buchenwald concentration camp.<sup>6</sup> At the camp, the troops found approximately 1,100 inmates. The inmates were malnourished and in extremely poor physical condition. The 83rd reported the death rate at the camp to be 500 per month. Also, that the prisoners had been forced to work 16 hour days in nearby mines, and were shot if they became too weak to work. After liberation, the death rate continued at approximately 25-50 people per day, due to the severe physical debilitation of the prisoners.

To slow the spread of sickness and death, the 83rd ordered the local German mayor to supply the camp with food and water. Also, medical supplies were requisitioned from the U.S. Army's 20th Field Hospital.

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<sup>3</sup>Wesel is a city in North -Westphalia, Germany. It is the capital of the Wesel.

<sup>4</sup>Bodenwerder is a municipality in Holzminden, Lower Saxony, Germany. It lies on the river Weser, upstream from Hamelin.

<sup>5</sup>Barby, Germany Barby is a town in the Salzlandkreis, in Saxony-Anhalt, Germany. It is situated on the left bank of the Elbe River.

<sup>6</sup>The photo of Ray and Ed was taken on 13 April.

In addition, the 83rd recovered documents for use by war crimes investigators.

βAssignments in the ETO (European Theater of Operation)

- 8 April 1944: VIII Corps, Third Army
- 25 June 1944: Third Army, but attached to the VIII Corps of First Army<sup>7</sup>
- 1 July 1944: VII Corps<sup>8</sup>
- 15 July 1944: VIII Corps
- 1 August 1944: XV Corps, Third Army, 12th Army Group<sup>9</sup>
- 3 August 1944: VIII Corps
- 5 September 1944: VIII Corps, Ninth Army.<sup>10</sup> 12th Army Group
- 10 September 1944: Ninth Army, 12th Army Group
- 21 September 1944: Third Army, 12th Army Group
- 11 October 1944: VIII Corps, Ninth Army, 12th Army Group

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<sup>7</sup>The First United States Army was a Army/Field Army of the United States Army. It now serves a mobilization, readiness and training command.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. VII Corps: The VII Corps of the United States Army was one of the two principal corps of the army in Europe during the Cold War, along with U.S. V Corps. Activated in 1918, it was subordinate to the US Seventh Army, or USAREUR, throughout most of its existence and based outside of Stuttgart, West Germany, until deactivated in 1992.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. 12th Army Group. The Twelfth United States Army Group was the largest and most powerful Military\_of\_the\_United\_States formation ever to take to the field. It controlled the majority of American forces on the Western Front in 1944 and 1945.

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Ninth Army: The Ninth United States Army was one of the main U.S. Army combat commands used during the campaign in northwest Europe in 1944 and 1945. It was commanded from its inception by lieutenant General William Hood Simpson.

- 22 October 1944: VIII Corps, First Army, 12th Army Group
- 8 November 1944: Third Army, 12th Army Group
- 11 November 1944: VIII Corps, First Army, 12th Army Group
- 7 December 1944: VII Corps
- 20 December 1944: Attached, with the entire First Army, to the British 21st Army Group<sup>11</sup>
- 22 December 1944: XIX Corps,<sup>12</sup> Ninth Army (attached to the British 21st Army Group)
- 26 December 1944: VII Corps, First Army (attached to British 21st Army Group), 12th Army Group
- 16 February 1945: XIX Corps, Ninth Army, 12th Army Group
- 8 May 1945: XIII Corps

ßGeneral

- Nicknames: Thunderbolt Division, and Ohio.

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<sup>11</sup>British 21st Army Group: The 21st Army Group was a formation comprising United Kingdom and Canada forces stationed in the United Kingdom. who were assigned for the invasion of Europe.

<sup>12</sup>XIX Corps (United States): XIX Corps started as the III Armored Corps at Camp Polk, Louisiana on August 20, 1942 under the command of Major General Willis D. Crittenger.

- Shoulder patch: A black isosceles triangle with its vertex pointed downward in the center of which, within a gold circle, appear the letters “O,” “H,” “I,” and “O,” in a monogram pattern.

# Chapter 7

## Justine Joy Hersman

## McHenry's Account

by Justine Joy Hersman McHenry<sup>1</sup>

### 7.1 Junior McHenry in the War

Junior's<sup>2</sup> War service, 1942-1944.

He was assigned as a paratrooper to go to the South Pacific War zone. The day he was to go over via boat, peace was declared and he went as an occupational troop. [He] went to [the] Philippines/indexPhilippines and to Sendi, Japan.

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<sup>1</sup>Ed and Ray's sister, Justine, writes of her memories of her childhood and World War II.

<sup>2</sup>Justine husband, Junior McHenry.

Junior's parent's house burned at Ellis, Gilmer County, West Virginia. His mother and dad lived in the cellar house until they could build a house on the main road.

[In] 1942, Justine's parent's house burned at Sand Fork, West Virginia. My sisters' new clothes they were going to wear on a trip to Washington D.C. and for graduation from high school burned. We had to live in John Marks's<sup>3</sup> garage 'til we found a house. The community was great to us.

## **7.2 Early Childhood**

[In] 1927, Dad's illness was a blow to all of us. He became ill 3 months before I (Justine) was born. He was working in the Goodyear Rubber plant in Akron, Ohio. We didn't know what caused his illness but relatives told us various causes.

- the chemicals used at the plant,
- he was thrown from a horse and landed on his head while in the infantry in Texas in World War I,
- he had a mental illness, or
- he had a stroke.

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<sup>3</sup>John Marks is the brother of Wirt Marks who is Robert and Ray Marks's paternal great grandfather. Robert and Ray are the sons of Lenore Ethyl Hersman Marks, Justine's sister.

Anyway, my Aunt Mollie, Dad's sister, took care of him the rest of his life and mom took care of us 5 children on a teacher's salary.

### **7.3 Junior's Father**

Junior's dad was seriously injured in a rock quarry at Upper Ellis working for the State Road Commission. T.N.T. blew up in his face and he was off from work for over a year. Broke his hands and injured his eyes - for a long time he couldn't stand much light. Your Uncle Carl Radcliff was the "boss" on the job at the time.

### **7.4 Junior in the War**

1944-1946.

1. Junior Lee McHenry [Army Facts],
  - Service Number: 35785486
  - Job Classification: Clerk-typist
  - Inducted: Ashland, KY, Nov.10, 1944
  - Branch of Service" Army Airborn
  - Grade: PFC
  - Training Camp: Fort Bragg, N.C. - Field Artillery. Fort Benning, demolition.



- Division: 11th Airborne Division, 187th Infantry Platoon, 1945 - Oct, 1946.

[Junior] took basic training in Field Artillery at Fort Bragg, N.C. Junior was on the boxing team and had matches with other divisions.

3. [Junior] went to Fort Benning, GA. to paratrooper jump school. [He] jumped from mock airplanes, then 34 foot tower on a cable, then [off of a ] 250 foot tower with a parachute that they released and you went to the ground. Training jumps - 4 daylight jumps and one night jump.
4. [Junior] went to advanced training school at the Alabama area of Fort Benning. [He] jumped 75 pack housers (guns).
5. [Junior] went to demolition school in Alabama and jumped with 24 pounds of T.N.T. on each leg.
6. [Junior] rode train from Alabama to Fort Ord, California, ready to go for the war in the South Pacific. Junior shipped out on August 16, 1945, 2 days after the Japanese surrendered. Thank God! He was on board [the] ship 21 days going from California to Manilla, Philippines (was deathly seasick). Was stationed in Clark Field Air Base and was on night "KP" duty and learned to [play] [sic] pinnocle.
7. [Junior] left Clark field and went to Manilla at the 24th Replacement Depot and was shipped via railroad car that had nos seats of roof - just open. 15 of US Engineer outfit had already been shipped to Japan - so

we stayed overnight and went back to the same place that we knew the engineer outfit had already gone to Japan. Again, we stayed 1 night and went back to the Replacement Depot at Manilla. Later they put 15 of us on a merchant ship to Japan. While going through the North China Sea, we got into the “tailend” of a typhoon. Seas were very rough! The boat would dip from one end to the other taking water each time.

8. We arrived in Yokohama, Japan, Dec 29, 1945. We were shipped by train to Sendi, Japan - Camp Schimmel finning. Junior got back in with his airborne group and taught others how to purify water. He got his leg broken above the ankle [while] wrestling on the bed with a friend and fell off the bed. [He] stayed in the hospital about a month to 6 weeks while wearing a cast. [He] went back to a desk job with his outfit and assigned men to various jobs.
9. Shipped back to the states the latter part of September, 1946. We were coming into San Francisco<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>The manuscript continues, but this is the last available page.

## Chapter 8

# Ernest Ray Hersman's POW Experience

by Ray Brent Hersman<sup>1</sup>

LTC, IN (lieutenant colonel, Infantry)

Dad didn't talk about his military experience much prior to my enlisting in the Army. And, even then, he only related some experiences concerning his training. It wasn't until after my return from Vietnam that Dad talked about his combat and prisoner of war experience. After Dad's death, we moved to Pekin, IN and it wasn't long till I learned that a neighbor had also been a POW, and as it turned out, was in the same camp as Dad. His name was Ralph (Tub) Russell, and he helped fill in some of the blanks in Dad's

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<sup>1</sup>This is the story of Ernest Ray Hersman's capture and confinement as a prisoner of war of the German's during World War II as told to his son, Ray Brent Hersman.

story, providing explanations of some of the events. (Tub didn't know Dad.)

## **8.1 Deployment**

Dad served in combat in the 78th (Lightening) Infantry Division. In late November 1944, the 78th was pulled from the line and moved to the area between Malmedy, Belgium and Aachen, Germany. This area faced the Ardennes Forest and was considered fairly secure since Allied planners thought that German armor could not penetrate the Forest. They were wrong, and the German high command took advantage of this error.

Dad's company had been assigned a new commander. Their area of the line had a raised rail road embankment running through it with the edge of the forest being just across a clearing. The older, more experienced officers and NCO's argued for using the railroad embankment as cover, making this their main line of resistance. But, the new commander ordered that they dig their foxholes in the clearing in front of the embankment. This was tactically unsound.

## **8.2 Capture**

On December 16, 1944, the Germans initiated their attack with armor supported by infantry. The armor broke out of the forest in front of Dad's company, and while the G.I.'s could keep the infantry at bay, they had noth-

ing that would even slow down the tanks. But, the tanks were unable to depress their main guns, and machine guns enough to hit the American's in their foxholes. So, the tanks simply stopped over a foxhole with their exhaust right over the hole and asphyxiated the soldiers, or locked up one tread over the hole and spun around causing the hole to cave in, crushing the soldiers.

Dad and his buddy had dug their hole right against the base of the railroad embankment and the tanks were unable to get at them. For awhile they thought that the Germans had forgotten about them, but then a tank came up over the embankment behind them and was able to point it's machine gun and main gun right down their hole. They surrendered. They were the only two survivors.

Dad's unit had been near Malmedy, Belgium where the Germans massacred over 80 GI's, and Dad was always thankful that he didn't end up there. When we lived in Cleveland, OH, I remember Dad taking us to meet a friend whom had survived the Malmedy massacre. I have no idea what this gentleman's name is.

#### βGerman SS Uniform

Just days prior to his surrender, Dad had captured a German SS colonel who was wearing a fleece lined leather coat. Since they had not been issued any cold weather gear, Dad "appropriated" the coat and was wearing it at the time of his capture. He was taken to Aachen, Germany for processing and was questioned by the SS. He was severely beaten because of the coat, and was hit in the lower back with a rifle butt. I remember that Dad suffered

from back aches and headaches, but, it wasn't till the early 1960's that the doctors noted that Dad had bone and disc problems in his lower back at the site of the beating. The Germans thought that Dad might be Jewish and assigned him to a special POW unit.

### **8.3 Train Transport**

The Americans in the special unit were stuffed into boxcars on a train that traversed Germany and Poland to the Eastern Front. They went from ten to fourteen days without food and water and had no heat even though the temperatures dropped well below freezing. As G.I.'s died, their bodies were stacked at one end of the boxcar giving the living more room to sit down and even lay down at night. The G.I.'s would huddle together for warmth, and the poor guys on the outside of the huddle often died from exposure. As the men died, their bodies were stripped of coats and clothing to allow the living to keep on living. Even so, there weren't enough coats to go around, and men who didn't have coats would try to steal coats from the others while they slept.

Lane and I had learned early on not to wake Dad by touching him on the upper torso. It was much safer to touch one of his toes since he would throw his arm violently when awakened suddenly. Once after hitting me in such an encounter, Dad apologized, noting that he thought I was trying to steal his coat.

## 8.4 Cold & Close to Russia

The GI's were finally let out of the boxcars just shy of the German Eastern Front somewhere close to Russia. The weather was terrible with a blanket of snow on the ground and temperatures at or below freezing much of the time. The GI's were then marched for 87 days back across Poland to the POW Camp. During the march they received minimal food and no health care. They had to march as individuals, not being allowed to assist another GI in any way. Any soldier who fell out, or was unable to march for any reason was shot. The German guards were SS troops who were armed with rifles and pistols. Since rifle ammunition was in short supply, they used their pistols if they had to shoot a prisoner.

Dad talked about how cold and hungry he was, noting that he had never been that hungry either before or after his military service. He noted that one day he was so weak his legs gave out and he fell to the side of the road. An SS Trooper walked up to him and ordered him back in line, but he couldn't get up. The trooper then reached inside his greatcoat and Dad knew that he was reaching for his pistol. The trooper was a young German, and Dad yelled, begging the German not to shoot him and that he would get up. The German then pulled an apple out of his coat, gave it to Dad, and ordered two other GI's to assist Dad. He noted that this was the only kindness that he ever witnessed from the Germans .

βAt POW Camp

#### 8.4. COLD & CLOSE TO RUSSIA *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

---

I am unclear where the POW camp was located. Dad stated on a number of occasions that it was just on the other side of a German village from the “Bilez” concentration camp. But, in doing some research, I have been unable to locate a camp by that name. I intend to write the National Personnel Records Center and request copies of Dad’s military personnel records. Hopefully they weren’t destroyed in the fire at that facility in 1973. I have done some research and have located camps named Bergen-Belsen, Budzyn and Belzec. If you have any information about this, I’d love to hear from you.

ßBad Bread

In any case, the POW Camp was near a concentration camp, and was divided into four sections. One for the American’s, British, French and Russians. Dad noted that while the Germans didn’t treat anyone very well, starving all of them, they treated the Russians much worse than the other allied prisoners. He related a story where one day a German baker from the village came up to the Russian section of the camp and tossed loaves of stale bread across the wire. The starving Russians wolfed the bread down, and in a short while started passing blood with many of them dying. There were several American doctors and they received permission to treat the ailing Russians. They were unable to help them, but did note that the German baker had baked ground glass in the bread, which had lacerated the Russian’s intestinal tracts causing internal bleeding and death. After they were freed by American troops, several of the American POW’s went to the bakery and



#### 8.4. COLD & CLOSE TO RUSSIA *Ed & Ray Hersman in WWII*

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shot the baker.

##### βStone Quarry

All of the POW's worked in a stone quarry. Since any type of explosive was sent to the military, the POW's quarried the stone with manual labor only. They would work from sun-up till sundown without rest or anything to eat. The quarry was ringed with machine guns, and one rule was that if you ran, no matter what the reason, you would be shot.

When Lane and I were growing up, we used to hear Dad scream in his sleep, "Snakes! Snakes!" After I returned from Vietnam, Dad explained that on occasion, they would pry a large stone loose and it would have a nest of vipers under it. The snakes would come boiling out and the GI's would walk as fast as they could away from the area screaming to warn the other GI's. Tub Russell related the same story.

##### βThe French

Dad hated the French. He often said that he hated the French as much as the German's, reporting that the French had no moral courage. He noted that on one occasion it had thawed and then frozen covering the roads in the village with ice. Tanks are useless on ice because their treads, while fabulous for cross-country travel get absolutely no traction on ice. Since the tanks had to pass through the village, they could not get off the road and were stuck. The Germans asked the American's, British, Russian and French POW's to go out and clear the road, promising a reward for their efforts. The American's, British and Russians refused. The French cleared the road and

received the American's Red Cross packages.

## 8.5 Lines Not to Cross

While I was growing up, Dad liked to relate messages using tales to reinforce his message. One thing he told me was that a man of any moral courage established lines in his head. These were rules that he established for himself, that no one ever knew about, and if he crossed one of these lines, while only he knew about it, he was less of a man. To emphasize this message, he told about the German officers daily amusement.

The back of the German Officers Club abutted on the fence of the American section of the camp. There was a porch on the back of the officers club that was right up against the fence. On the American side, there was what was called a "dead wire" several feet inside the fence. This wire established the limits of the POW's domain. If you so much as stuck a finger over the wire, the guards would shoot you. But, at the same time each evening, the German's would suspend the dead wire rule to allow the American's to come up to the fence. At that time, they would have their cooks pour the kitchen swill over the fence and then would sit on the porch placing bets on the American's as they fought for the garbage.

One day Dad had diarrhea and was late. As he ran around a building, he noted the other G.I.'s hitting, biting and kicking each other to get to the slop, while the German officers laughed and placed bets. He related that at

that time he vowed that he would die before he became an animal. That was one of his mental lines.

## **8.6 Ray & Ed 's Meeting**

One morning, the Germans roused the Russians earlier than normal and marched them off to the quarry. A little later, they got the American's up, but as they were marching them to the quarry, the guards received word that there was an American patrol on the road ahead of them and they took off. The POW's were picked up by the American patrol and taken back to the village where they were repatriated. Dad noted that he gave his name to a lieutenant and was asked if he had a brother named Ed . Dad said yes and the lieutenant ask, "Is that him over there?"

Uncle Ed made sure that Dad was clothed and fed, although the food was too rich and Dad threw-up. He then took Dad to the quarry and showed him where the German's had machine-gunned the Russians. It appeared that the American's were to be next.

## **8.7 Final Thoughts**

In 1996 I had the privilege of being the VA speaker for the national Ex-POW convention. While there I asked about a "special" POW camp run by the Germans and was told about the death train/march and the special

camp run by the SS. The prisoners assigned to this camp appeared to have been singled out by the Germans for especially harsh treatment. During his captivity, Dad was beaten and starved and lost considerable weight. His health and mental problems plagued him for the rest of his life and led to his early death. Dad never forgave the Germans, although he made a valiant effort in his last years.

Dad told me about one other incident in the camp. When the Germans were trying to force the POW's to clear the roads, the POW's began singing their national anthems. But, after the first few stanza's, the Americans were all humming our national anthem since they didn't know the words. Dad said that he was never so embarrassed in his life. He made sure that we knew the words to the Star Spangled Banner and I've made sure [my children] Mikey and Amber know them.

ßSalutation

Bob, [Note: This story was related in an e-mail to Bob Marks] this is about all I remember.

I do remember other stories Dad told about his combat, but they are unrelated to his POW time. I really miss him. I know you miss your Dad, because I miss him too.

Take care,

Love, Brent

# Chapter 9

## Chronology of Ray Hersman's Time as a POW

by Robert J. Marks II

### 9.1 What We Know

Here is what we know about Ray Hersman's internment as a POW in World War II. For later reference, we dub this list WWK (What We Know).

1. Ray Hersman was captured by the Germans at the Battle of the Buldge in December 15, 1944.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>See Figure 10.7 on page 158.

2. Ray was transported as a prisoner aboard an unheated train in the winter for a number of days without food or water.<sup>2</sup>
3. Ray performed manual labor in a mining, quarry or tunnel scenario.<sup>3</sup>
4. There were snakes where Ray worked and, if he ran, he would be shot.
5. The German's thought that Ray might be Jewish and assigned him to a special POW unit.<sup>4</sup>
6. Ray was in a death march. During the march, he was hungry and weak.
7. Germans treated Russians severely. Many Russians were slaughtered prior to Ray's liberation.
8. Ray was liberated in April 1945. The picture with Ed was taken on April 13, 1945.<sup>5</sup>

Oral history will have its errors, so a 100% fit with what we know may not be possible. Ray was also under direct, and the last thing in which he probably was his location and event chronology.

## **9.2 Chronology**

The following is speculative.

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<sup>2</sup>Read Ray Brent Hersman's account in Section 8.3 on page 133.

<sup>3</sup>Read Ray Brent Hersman's account in Section 8.4 on page 136.

<sup>4</sup>Read Ray Brent Hersman's account in Section 8.2 on page 132.

<sup>5</sup>See Figure 10.7 on page 158.

1. After Ray's capture, he was briefly taken to Stalag IX-B, a World War II German Army POW camp at Wegscheide close to Bad Orb<sup>6</sup> in the province of Hesse, Germany. "In January 1945 the commandant ordered all Jewish prisoners to step forward out of the daily line-up. At first none did. But after standing several hours 130 came forward. However the commandant had been requested to provide 350 for the transport... [They] were then selected including anyone who 'looked Jewish'." <sup>7</sup>. This is supported by WWK#5.
2. The Jewish looking prisoners were taken to Berga, a vile concentration camp where prisoners worked. Berga was probably the most vile concentration camp for GI's because the GI's were suspected to be Jewish. The account is documented in three books [2, 3, 6] and a PBS DVD documentary [1].

This hypothesis is supported nicely by the following.

1. Ray Brent Hersman's also suspected that Berga might be the camp. See Section 8.4 on page 134.
2. Berga was the concentration camp for Jewish looking prisoners from the Battle of the Buldge. Ray Brent Hersman writes "The German's thought that Dad might be Jewish and assigned him to a special POW unit." See Section 8.2 on page 132.

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<sup>6</sup>See the map in Figure 9.2 on page 149. Bad Orb is about 300 km, or 200 miles, from Aachen.

<sup>7</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalag\\_IX-B](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stalag_IX-B)

3. The prisoners at Berga were digging tunnels, a concentration camp south of Leipzig in eastern Germany, for the storage of synthetic fuel [3]. This is consistent with Ray Brent Hersman's account that Ray worked in a stone quarry. See Section 8.4 on page 136.
4. There was a train ride from Bad Orb to Berga in unheated trains. It was winter and cold.
5. Near the end of the war, the camp was emptied and the prisoners were force marched away from advancing Allied lines. Forty nine fell during a 125-mile march on which these broken men were dispatched as the SS made futile efforts to distance them from their approaching liberators [3].
6. Berga was not near Poland, but was close to the front line.
7. Ed says "Ray had been on a starvation diet and only weighed eighty pounds. He had been in a prisoner of war camp in the eastern part of Germany, but when the Russians advanced were marched almost to the Rhine River. When we crossed the Rhine the Germans marched the prisoners almost back to the Elbe River where we caught them. "had been in a prisoner of war camp in the eastern part of Germany." See page 101. Berga was in East Germany.

And here are some problems with this account.



1. One group of Berga POWs were liberated by American forces in Fuchsmuhl, Germany on April 20, 1945. The second set other survivors were liberated in Cham, Germany on April 20, 1945. Ray was liberated April 13, 1945 near Barby, Germany. See Figure 10.7. Barby is about 300km from Fuchsmuhl and over 400 km from Cham.
2. An list of Berga American POW prisoners is listed in in Cohen's book [3]. The list, admittedly incomplete and with errors, does not contain Ray Hersman's name.

### 9.2.1 Update October 1, 2015

I just finished watching the documentary *Hitler's G.I. Death Camp* [4]. I am now convinced that Ray Hersman was interned at the Berga concentration camp. Here is corroboration from the documentary.

1. The prisoners in the Berga a concentration camp were captured during the Battle of the Bulge.
2. Prisoners interviewed in the documentary included former POW's serving in the 106th, 70th and 42nd infantry divisions. (On the map in Figure 9.1, we see the 106th close to Ray's 78th.)
3. The 2300 Americans captured were packed tightly into trains. The railroad cars were locked. (Ray told of the cold and tight quarters.

You did not grab Ray when he was sleeping. His instinct is protection against the other POW's who would take your coat if you were dead.)

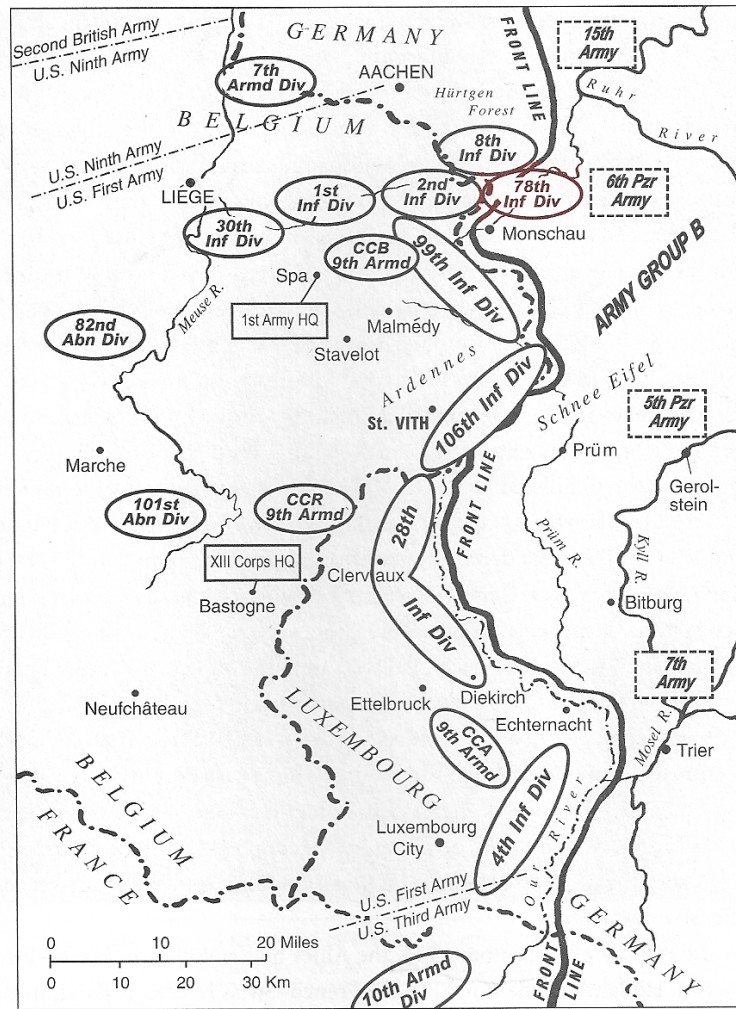
4. The allies, not knowing passengers included Americans, bombed the train.
5. On arrival, prisoners were classified by religion. There was a quota to identify 250 Jewish American GIs. Only 80 were initially identified. To fill the quota, those with Jewish sounding names and those that appear Jewish were added to this group. (Ray always said he was identified as a Jew at the concentration camp even though he was not.)
6. Prisoners at Berga were tasked to build an underground factory. Building of the factory required removing stones in a quarry and transporting them to a nearby river where they were dumped. The quarrying included the prisoners blasting rock. (Ray told stories of working in a rock quarry and being afraid of snakes. You could not run if you saw snakes, or you would be shot.)
7. No food was given to the prisoners. The Germans were invoking a practice called "death by labor."
8. Dysentery was common among the POWs. (Ray was late for the "dead line" feeding because he had dysentery.)
9. In early April 1945, prisoners started on a forced death march after only two months of imprisonment.

10. If a prisoner slow down or fell during the March, they were beat or shot. (Once Ray fell and was approached by a German. Ray thought the German would beat him. Instead, the German reached under his coat and gave Ray an apple. Ray said this was the only nice thing ever done to him by a Nazi.)
11. Prisoners were so hungry they ate anything, including grass.(Ray recounted how he starved. When he lifted up a rock, he would eat all of the goodies he found underneath.)
12. Liberation by the American forces was April 19, 1945. (This is different than documented in Figure 10.7 which says April 13. The dates are close enough though.)

Here's some more information from the documentary.

1. After two months at Berga, only 426 prisoners remained alive.
2. A map of the death march from a screen capture from the documentary is shown in Figure 9.3. The total distance of the march was 125 miles.
3. One of the war criminals at Berga was the Nazi Edmund Metz (See Figure 9.4). When the allies were close, Metz deserted the march on a bicycle. He was later captured and sentenced to death. His sentence was commuted five years later, he was released from prison and died an old man in Germany.

4. The Berga Curator at the U.S. Holocaust Museum is Kyra Schuster



The Western Front, 15 December 1944. (Approximate positions)

Figure 9.1: Ray Hersman was captured on December 15, 1944. He was with the 78th Infantry Division which, as shown here, was on the front line. Ed writes “we went back to the battalion C.P. and the division was moved up to the point of the Buldge where we relieved the 82nd Airborne.” The 82nd is shown on the map at “the point of the Buldge.” This map is taken from Whitlock [6].



Figure 9.2: Map of locations for Ray's POW experience.

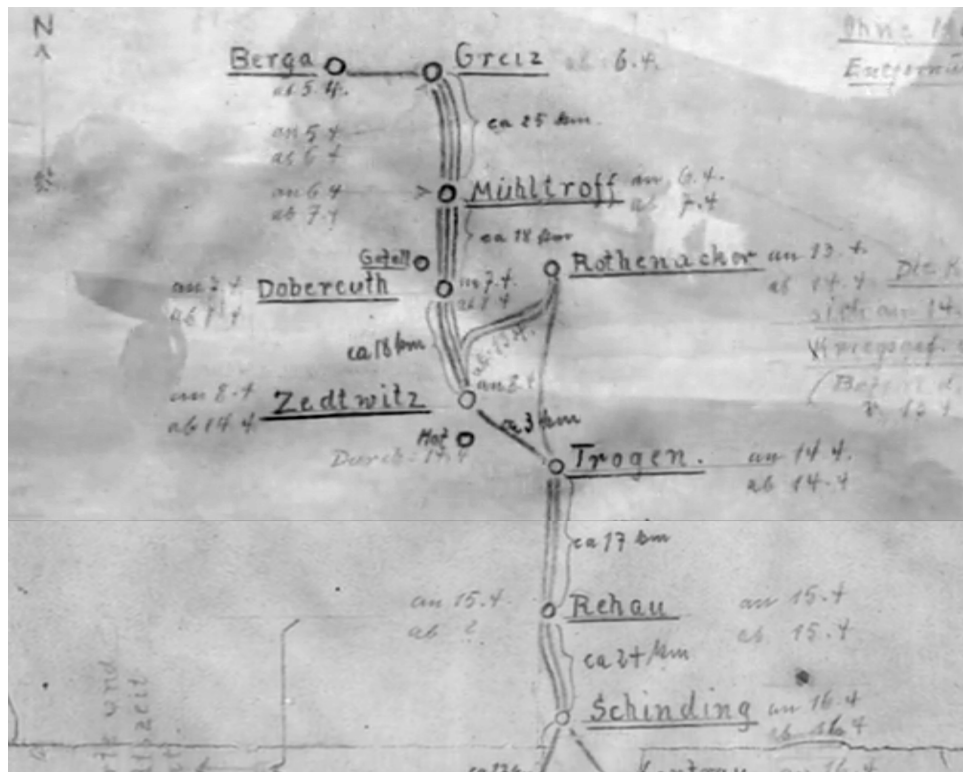


Figure 9.3: Map of location for Ray's death march. (Screen capture from the documentary *Hitler's G.I. Death Camp* [4].)



Figure 9.4: Nazi Edmund Metz. (Screen capture from the documentary *Hitler's G.I. Death Camp* [4] )



# Chapter 10

## Other Documents

### 10.1 The Hersmans

See Figures 10.1 through 10.6 on pages 154 through 157.

### 10.2 The Picture

See Figure 10.7 on page 158.

### 10.3 Ed 's Silver Star Citation

See Figure 10.8 on page 159.

## 10.4 Ray's Capture

Newspaper accounts are in Figures 10.9 and Figures 10.10 on pages 160 and 161.

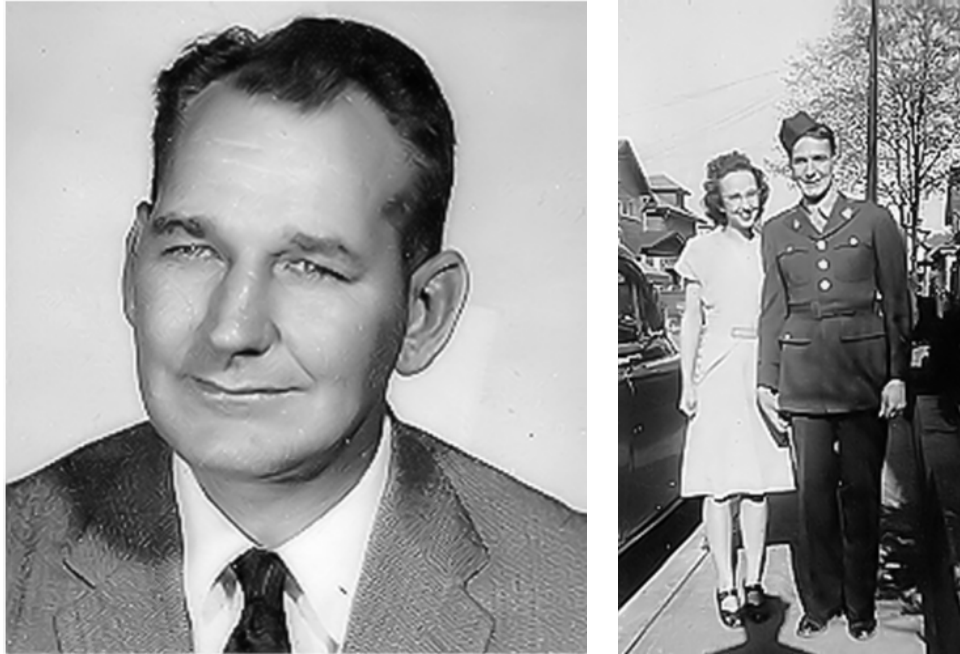


Figure 10.1: LEFT: Ray Hersman. RIGHT: Virginia Hersman with Ray Hersman in uniform. Date unknown.



Figure 10.2: LEFT: Ed Hersman with his family, circa 1965. RIGHT: Ed , sitting to the left of Ray, on Ed 's birthday in 1953. Hazel is sitting on Ed 's left. The sisters, from left to right, are Lenore, Justine and Iris.



Figure 10.3: LEFT: Hazel Hersman outside her house in Sand Fork, West Virginia, circa 1955. The dirt road in front of the house is barely visible in the upper left corner. RIGHT: The porch of Hazel's house circa 1951. Brent Hersman, Ray's oldest son, is shown escaping a bath. Ernest Haught, Hazel's father and Ray, are seen in the background.



Figure 10.4: Ray Hersman (center) poses with sisters Iris (left) and Lenore the day they both graduate from high school.

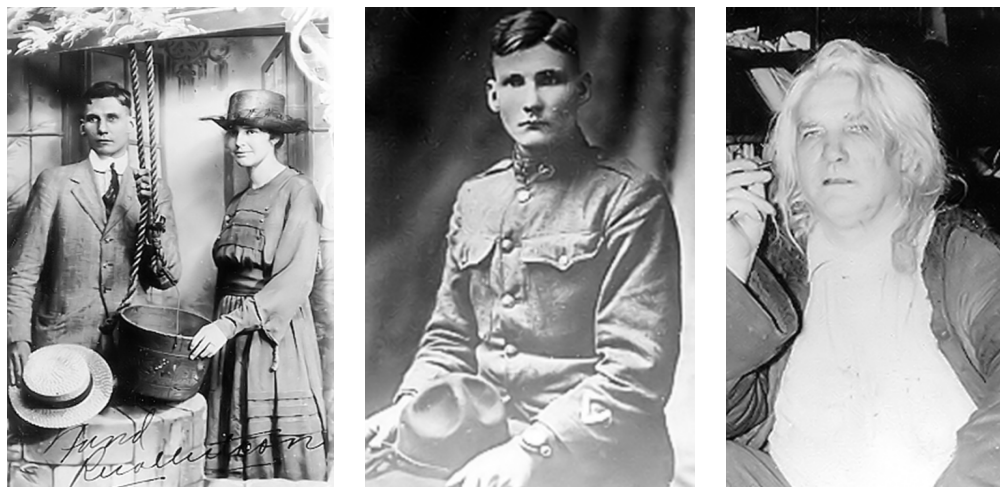


Figure 10.5: LEFT: Ernest and Hazel Hersman. CENTER: Ernest Hersman in uniform for WWI. RIGHT: Ernest Hersman years after his retreat from society.

nd sisters. Hazel Hersman

Written by mom

Pfc. Edward Hersman  
 Co. G. 329th Inf  
 A.P.O. 83rd Division  
~~A.S.N. 35 521321~~ 5  
 Camp Breckenridge Ky.  
 A.S.N. 35521321  
 Camp Breckenridge Ky.

T/5 Ernest R. Hersman  
 A.S.N. 35751954  
 B. Battery  
 E.C.P. A.A.T.C.  
 Camp Davis N.C.

Iris and Lenore like  
 their schools in Clay  
 Co. fine. Hazel,

Figure 10.6: This is a handwritten note made by Hazel Hersman.

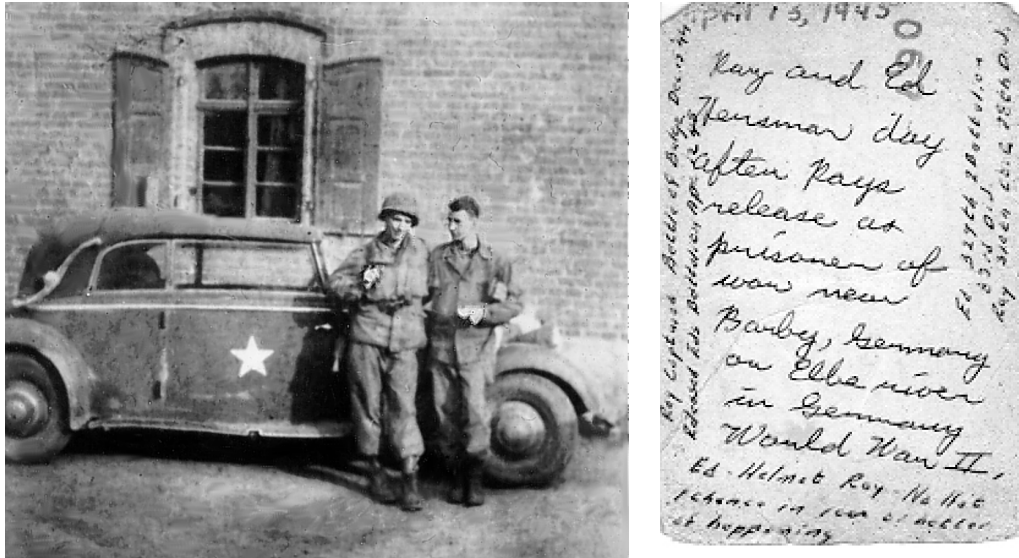


Figure 10.7: LEFT: Ray Hersman (right) was a POW in Nazi Germany during WWII. He was captured by the Nazi's on December 15, 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. By incredible coincidence of fortune, his brother, Ed Hersman (left), was in the Allied forces who liberated Ray's POW group. This picture was taken on April 13, 1945, a day after liberation. RIGHT: The writing on the he back of the photo shown on the left. "April 13, 1945. Ray and Ed Hersman day after Rays release as prisoner of war near Barby, Germany on Elbe river in Germany World War II. Ed - helmet. Ray - No Hat. 1 chance in a 1000 or better of happening." Left margin: "Ray captured Battle of the Bulge, Dec 13, '44. Released Ed 's battalion Apr 12, '45." Right margin: "Ed 329th, 2 battalion 83rd Div, Ray 310th [Regiment] cb.c.[?] 78th Div." (This translation is uncertain).

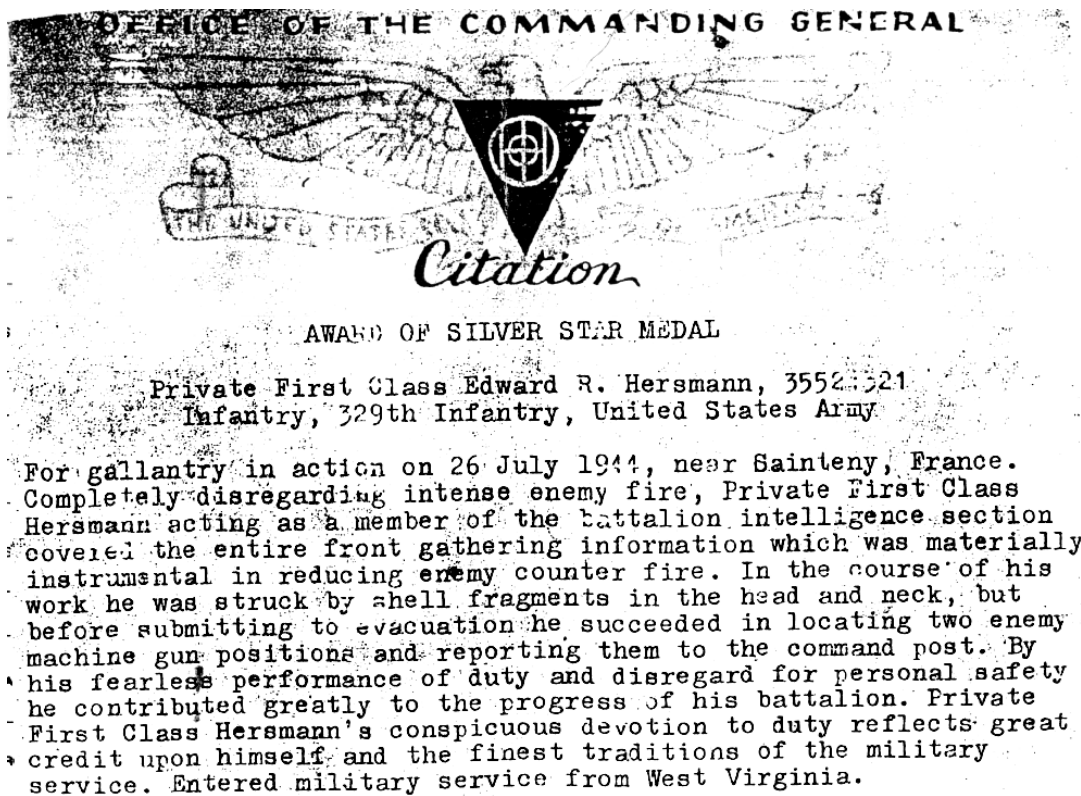


Figure 10.8: Citation for Ed Hersman's Silver Star



Jan. 16, 1945

## CPL. SHEETS, RAY HERSMAN MISSING IN ACTION, MURPHY LT. BARNETT WAR PRISONERS

One former student and three College graduates were reported missing in action or war prisoners the past week.

Cpl. Linn Sheets, brother-in-law of Miss Erma Edwards, financial secretary, was reported "missing in action" since December 16. His wife, the former Miss Oletha Edwards, student here in 1931-32, and three small sons, James Edward, Doris and Clarandine, live at Auburn. Teacher in Cairo High School at the time of his entering the service, Cpl. Sheets had been overseas about five weeks previous to the time he was reported missing.

Also missing in action is T/5 Ray Hersman, son of Mrs. Hazel Hersman, College graduate, of Sand Fork. A War Department telegram, received by Mrs. Hersman Monday, Jan. 11, stated that her son, student here in 1941-42, has been missing in Germany since December 16, 1944. Two letters received by his family from Pvt. James Murphy, son of Mr. and Mrs. Earl Murphy of near Glenville, stated that he is a prisoner of war in Germany. The letters were dated November 22 and December 3. Pvt. Murphy took his basic training at Camp Blanding, Fla. Married and the father of one child, he was coach at Tanner High School at the time he entered the service.

Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Barnett, of Weston, have been notified that their son, Lt. Denver R. Barnett, College graduate, previously reported missing in action on October 17, is a prisoner of war in Germany. A War Department announcement stated that the information had been received through the American Red Cross.

The War Department communication stated that a report of his being missing had been sent when the Flying Fortress of which he was bombardier had been forced down in enemy territory; the ship had fallen behind formation and was lost to sight following a bomb run on a mission over Vienna, Austria. It also stated, that, "in recognition of his meritorious work," Lt. Barnett had been awarded the Air Medal and one Oak Leaf Cluster.

Lt. Barnett's wife, the former Miss Rose Amos, of Burnsville, and small son reside with his parents. At the time of his enlistment January 27, 1943, he was a teacher in the Sutton grade school.

Figure 10.9: The source of this newspaper account of Ray's MIA status is unknown. It was found in the notebook of Justine McHenry. Since she was living in Sand Fork at the time, the clipping might be from the *Glenville Democrat*.

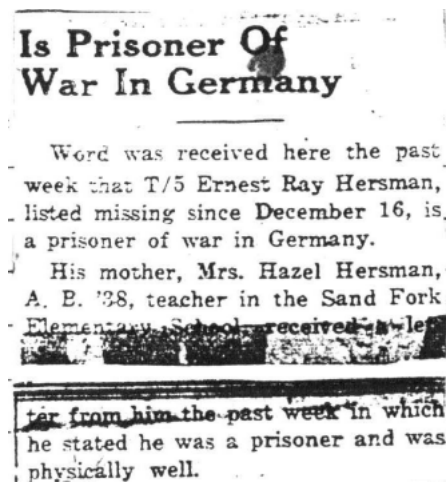


Figure 10.10: The source of this newspaper account of Ray's POW status is unknown. It was found in the notebook of Justine McHenry. Since she was living in Sand Fork at the time, the clipping might be from the *Glenville Democrat*.

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- [4] *Hitler's G.I. Death Camp*, National Geographic Explorer: Season 26, Episode 9 (18 Dec. 2011)  
IMDb: [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2179849/?ref\\_=fn\\_al\\_tt\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2179849/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1)
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- [6] Flint Whitlock, **Given Up For Dead: American GI's in the Nazi Concentration camp at Berga**, Westview Press (2005).

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