

Four Days In Normandy

A grand day for an airborne invasion to be postponed, for 24 hours, yes, June 4 1944 was just that! It was cloudy and rainy, ceilings were low, visibility was negligible, not that these factors made much difference to the paratroopers because when they got the word, "GO", they would do just that—rain or no rain. The trouble lay in the fact that the Air Corps, those pilots in the Army Transport Command, would be unable to definitely establish the D.Z. (Drop Zone) on which we were to land after parachuting from their airplanes—so they had to have clear sailing, and also--they had to return to the air fields from whence they came, whereas we were on our own and in a few: seconds we would have completed our first phase of the attack— that of jumping from the plane and arriving at a point on the ground from which reorganization would take place and our mission started.

Postponement meant another day to complete last minute details, study maps, routes, and our plans once more. It meant one more chance to write home, another movie to attend, and most of all—good chow and another night of sleep—on a cot and under blankets—good thoughts those!

June fifth came as clear as a bell and we knew even before the word was passed out that we were to go this time no matter what the weather; was. We were ready for it—we were all green troops but we—were good green troops and we knew it—we should have known it—we had been told it many, many times.—by our new division commander, Major General Ridgway; by his assistant, Brigadier General Gavin; by General Chapman, former Commandant of the Airborne Command; by General Howell, former Commandant of the Parachute School, and now Commander of the 2nd Parachute Brigade; and by our own senior officers — and so we were good—and we were good and ready to go!

Our planes had been loaded with our equipment bundles the day that we were originally scheduled for our take off, so all that we had to do in regard to the bundles was to have them guarded against possible tampering and to give

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them a last minute check to be certain that recognition lights were still intact and ready; and that the bundles were tied in "Daisy Chain" fashion (they were tied to one another to keep all of the bundles together upon dropping): that the automatic release was still on, enabling the crew chief to release them at the predetermined second, and that the bands of illuminus spaghetti (string like illuminus bands) were still intact.

So the day of the fifth of June passed and at 2000 hours (8:00 PM) we started putting on the equipment which we were to wear on our first combat descent. It consisted of our usual clothing -uniforms-, and boots, plus a jump suit impregnated against gas. It is very uncomfortable and we detested it - but we learned to appreciate it, even though not in the way intended.

Then came our trench knife, strapped to our leg so as to be able to reach it in case we had to cut our way free of our 'chute, or needed to serve a purpose after we landed on the ground and did not want to fire our weapons to avoid shooting our own troops or giving our positions away to the enemy who might be in the vicinity of our landing.

Then we put our "K" and "DH rations in our pockets, along with our map cases (little home made affairs of eisenglass to protect the surface of our maps of France); and we put on our jack-knives, a Gammon grenade, two or three fragmentation grenades, a thermite grenade, our bottle of Halozen tablets to help purify water that we might have to drink, and various and sundry articles for our individual use and comfort. Then came our pistol belt, with magazines of ammunition attached, as well as an entrenching tool, a compass, a first aid packet of the infantry type, which was in addition to the parachutist first aid packet, which we tied to our shoulder strap, and a canteen filled with water. Also we had a musette bag loaded with extra underclothes, socks, rain coat, cleaning material, flash light and other personal items. We also attached an anti-tank mine to our shoulder rings and it hung in front of our

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body. I carried a .45 Colt pistol on my right hip, a .30 caliber U. S Carbine in a "violin" case attached to my right side over my pistol. A gas mask hung under the carbine case and a pair of binoculars hung from my neck.

The parachute came next--after tugging and pulling, and with some help, I finally succeeded in correctly placing my chest straps and the two leg straps in their respective positions. The reserve parachute pack was attached to "V" rings on the main 'chute harness in the front of my body on my chest. I also had a 536 radio over my left shoulder and an extra bag hanging below my musette bag. In it I had extra 536 batteries and company records, and odds and ends for use at the C P (Command Post) after landing and reorganizing.

My heavy steel helmet and liner, with an OD color face and head helmet, knitted by my sister for inclement weather or any other necessary purpose, completed my uniform and load, making me weigh approximately 300 pounds, in all.

Our Jump-Master, Captain Alton Bell, Battalion Executive Officer and our S-3 (Plans and training officer), Captain Hillman C. Dress aided me into the plane -- the "PAGLIACCI", and at 2215 hours ((10:15 PM) all 18 parachutists of that "Stick" were in their seats in the plane. I was number 16 and behind me were our operations sergeant and our draftsman, Sgt. Warren Peak and Sgt. Calvin W. Hall, respectively. We were right up against the cockpit trying to get comfortable in our small seats regardless of the unusual load attached to our persons.

At 2245 hours (10:45 PM) after our pilot and crew had arrived and had warmed the engine up we started to move from our bay onto the runway amidst a roar which made it nearly impossible for us to think, much less talk to one another.

It was just getting dark and all that we could see out of the small windows were a few field lights and the guide lights on the other planes. We

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could make out the hedge rows, water, and roads when we flew over them.

After we had started flying, the men began to smoke and a few talked. I spoke a few words to Sgt. Peak and to Cpl. King S. Burke, one of the Battalion Intelligence Section non-commissioned officers, who was #15 in our stick. Then I tried to settle in a sleep. It was a fitful sleep and hard to continue what with the little bucket seat and the great big load we had to place there. The door through which we were going to leave the plane was wide open, making it a bit cool inside, so I just snuggled down in the seat as far as I could. It really didn't help much,

Soon we were over the marsh lands and then the English Channel showed up. The channel was beautiful with the moon reflecting on it and making it look all silvery and made me think of the moon and its reflection on the Atlantic Seashore at home. But it also looked cold and uninviting.

By this time all cigarettes were out and no lights were showing inside the plane. We were getting into bombing range and one wee light showing might give the whole formation away and possibly disrupt the entire operation.

In a few more minutes we passed between the islands off the French coast (Jersey and Gurnsey Islands) and knew that we were within 20 minutes of our drop zone. Soon the coast of France came along—along with dull pounding of ack ack guns and flack guns. The plane began to pitch, roll, and bump as a toy boat on a turbulent stream, and we were being bumped about quite a bit. No one was saying much—just asking if each other was ok, or, "did you hear that one?"—meaning flack or tracer bullets from the enemy guns below us.

Meanwhile, there had been quite a bit of commotion at the front of our plane. We, in the rear, couldn't quite see or hear enough of it to understand. In fact, I believe that some of us in the rear of the stick did not know anything unusual was going on up front. Later I found out that when we had passed between Jersey and Gurnsey Islands and we had received the 20 minutes

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to drop warning, one private Calhoun, said to our Jump Master, Capt. Bell, "My 'chute has broken open". So, in the brief space of less than 20 minutes Calhoun was relieved of his equipment and 'chute—the rear of which had broken open, and another parachute substituted and all of the equipment replaced so that he was ready to go, and did jump with the rest of us when we got the green light—that means GO!

The four minute warning light came on just a few miles from our DZ (Drop Zone).

Our C-47 was now bouncing around in the air—really bouncing—going up and down and it seemed as if we were bucking ocean waves rather than ether waves. Our Jump Master, Capt Bell let out & yell, "STAND UP AND HOOK UP" — and at once 18 left arms struck at the anchor line cable with their static line snap fastener. It took some of us a bit longer to hook up than it did others because we were so crowded with 18 men in line, and having such loads—attached to us, and also because the plane was resembling a bucking bronco and that cable line just wouldn't stay in place. Finally we were all hooked up. Then we were checked and all reported as all set --"OK".

I was holding onto the cable line for dear life and my hands, my right one on the cable line and my left one on the snap fastener were nearly being wrenched free of their holdings. My right arm was nearly ripped from its socket. It seemed we couldn't hold on much longer, nor could we stand upright much longer.

"LETS GO"! The green light came on—just a thin slit of the bulb was showing so as not to make too much light in the airplane—it having been taped prior to the take-off—same as had been done to the red light bulb.

It took just a few seconds for me to clear the door and once outside just a short time to feel the awful, yet over-welcome, jerk of the opening shock as the parachute billowed out into the night air. Then I looked up

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towards the fast disappearing plane and I saw two 'chutes above me--signifying that the two men behind me in the stick were also airborne and floating towards the ground, and towards me. They too had jumped just as the 15 men ahead of me had--our plane had a perfect record for the Normandy Jump! I hoped that all of our planes did.

I could see the tracer bullets of all colors being shot towards us. I wasn't afraid of the ones that I could see--it was those in between, the invisible ones that had me wondering if they had my name attached to them.

I landed without being hit, but I heard later that the #15 man, Burke had been shot through the wrist as he was holding his risers. I could see tracers going through the canopies of the two men who were above me--the two who jumped after I had left the "PAGLIACCI" and was praying for them to land without being hit. Later I learned that they arrived on the ground ok--as did all of the others except Cpl King Burke. He was taken care of and joined us at a later date,

As I was descending I was trying with all of my strength to turn my-self around so that I wouldn't come into the ground backwards. I just couldn't get turned around--all my efforts did were to make me slip to my back. I saw the planes leaving us amid machine gun bullets galore and I saw many machine gun nests on the ground--and streams of tracers pouring through the air and I decided in a twinkling that I would have to steer clear of them when I did land. I was 250 feet above the ground when I jumped--#16, in an 18 man stick.

Then--SWISH--through about three quarters of an apple tree!!!! I didn't hit the ground--I was left hanging in the apple tree--dangling about one foot off the ground. I got no landing shock due to being caught by the tree -- I thought of, "Only God Can Make A Tree" -Kilmer«, I was under HIS Guidance--I knew and I said, "Thanks". But, I couldn't seem to get myself free of the parachute, struggle as I did. I got my trench knife and started cutting at my

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risers and at my leg straps. I couldn't seem to make much headway. The leg straps and the chest straps were pulled tightly against my body and I even had a hard time to slide my knife under any of them. Another thing that made it hard for me to work my way free was the fact that every other minute someone would run by me on the ground and it was impossible for me to see them to distinguish their identity—so when some one was approaching I had to quit struggling to get myself free. If I didn't do this I thought that I would drop from the pot into the fire. After they passed by I started trying to get free again.

Finally my risers slipped enough to drop me the remaining foot or so to the terra firma. I fell into a thicket of briars and nettles and as I lay sawing away with the trench knife that I had supposed was razor sharp—I was burning all over my hands and face—but that was better than being burned or even seared or scorched by those Jerry machine gun bullets that were being spewed out over the country side and would have come my way in a moment if I had been detected. Why—there was one nest about 100 yards from me—covering my whole front to the North and to the West.

I could hear other men breathing and whispering the pass word and receiving the counter sign and I found out that the men were three other paratroopers—right there in the ditch beside, me—all watching that machine gun spit death to anyone in the way.

We decided to move to the North West in order to get where we figured our unit would be. But because of that machine gun we were forced to go the long way around which took us North and East—and the further we went the more machine guns we ran into, so we had to keep bearing East,

A corporal from the 508th acted as my scout and a private from the same company followed me; then two 307th Engineers brought up our rear. We came to a main road running North and South but didn't dare stay on it so we crossed.

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We found some wires running along the road—the 307th Engineers said they were communication wires so we cut them in many pieces, covered the pieces in ditches so that the German linemen would have some work to do to restore normal communication.

After following hedges North and East for a time we started due North again, During our journey we had seen a C-47 crash in flames some distance from us and I can still hear engines roaring, becoming silent; roaring again, flaming and I can still see it disappear behind yonder hill—Finis—to one of ours---May God Bless.'

We saw other C-47's after they had released Gliders to go their way and we saw Gliders skimming earthward—Good! We thought--things are going as planned and help and supplies are arriving all of the time.

As we moved forward we came across parachute equipment, some loose, some in bundles still unopened, and a few opened with part of the load removed—part still there. From one bundle we took a bazooka and twelve rockets. We exchanged an M-1 rifle which had a snapped stock—a casualty of the jump, for this bazooka.

Over more hedges, always bearing to the North we went—all of a sudden we came upon a trail on which were two tents and two motor cycles. We found, after a close and careful investigation, being ever on the alert for booby traps and hidden alarms, that there was nobody there and that it was the CP (Command Post) of some officer of the German Army. We destroyed the motor cycles immediate use by slashing all tires and turned the contents of the CP into a pile in the center of the tent. We then left, continuing on the trail towards a large stone house further along the trail and across a field.

Across this field and another road we ran into Lt. Harold Richard, "A" Company, 508th Parachute Infantry, and his communications sergeant, Sgt. Hall, We were well acquainted, having served together since the activation of the

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Regiment at Camp Blanding, Florida. It was nice being with two more of our regiment and we were glad to have met at this time.

After a conference we decided to ask directions at the large stone farmhouse mentioned above, which was about fifty yards away. We had about 12 enlisted men and two officers in our party now. We split up and surrounded the house. Lt. Richard, one enlisted man and I pounded on the door of the house. In a few seconds a very excited Frenchman came rushing—or gushing is more like it, out of the door. Several other occupants of the house were looking out of windows on the ground floor as well as from windows on the upper stories of the house. By using our French Guide book and maps we found that we were between PICAUVILLE AND ETIENVILLE. Good. We were about midway between the two places and now had a definite location from which we could plan on future moves to get with our own troops. In the house the up stairs windows were alive with little kiddos, wild eyed at seeing the American uniforms instead of the usual German ones.

I said, "Here comes a car—STOP IT"—Lt. Richard moved out of the door way towards the side of the house and some of the men went to the stone wall at the end of the house—the house doors shut and I went to the road and put my hand up and yelled, "STOP"—but the car came on faster—when the car went by me I ran to the other side of the road and I guess that all of us fired at the car at the same time as a dozen or more shot rang out and I, on the far side of the road, found myself in line of fire from the others in our group. I fell to the road and watched the car as it was hit by many shots, and saw the car crash into the stone wall and possibly the side of the house as the driver lost control of the car as he slouched in the front seat trying to avoid being hit by the bullets that filled the air around the car. The car was full of bullet holes and the windshield was shattered.

The chauffeur, a German Corporal, was thrown from the front seat of the

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car and was trying to hide in a cellar window, or trying to gain entrance into the cellar of the house, but couldn't make it. An officer sitting on the front seat of the car was found later, slumped onto the floor with his head and shoulders hanging out the open front door, dead. The other occupant of the car, who had been riding in the back seat of the Dusenbergs or Mercedes phaeton, was in the middle of the road, crawling towards a Luger pistol that had been knocked from his grasp when the car hit the stone wall and house.

I had crossed the road after the car sped past me as I tried to halt its forward progress, climbed upon a hedge row six or more feet above the road bed, and had perfect view of the immediate situation, including the road, the house, the car, and the personnel—German, French and American^

From my position above the dusty, dirt road I saw the German Corporal trying to escape by crawling into the cellar of the house and I fired my .45 Colt pistol at him—grazing his shoulder and saw him sit down beside the house where our enlisted men attended his slight wound.

I also watched a German officer crawling in the road towards his Luger lying in the road several feet in front of his position. He looked at me as I stood on the hedge above him, and 15 feet to his right, and as he inched closer and closer to his weapon he pleaded to me in German and also saying in English, "DON'T KILL, DON'T KILL". I thought, "I'm not a cold hearted killer, I'm human—but if he gets that Luger—it is either him or me or one or more of my men". So I shot He was hit in the forehead and never knew it. He suffered none. The blood spurted from his forehead about six feet high, and, like water in a fountain when it is shut off, it gradually subsided.

Upon examining the personnel that we had encountered we found that we had killed a Major and a Major General (later learned that he was a Lieutenant General) and had as a captive, a Corporal, whom we made carry two brief cases that were full of official papers that we had found in the car, and our

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intention was to turn the papers in to our headquarters when we re-joined the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

As we left the scene, I tore the General's hat apart, looking for further identification of name or unit to which he was assigned—I found only a name printed in it—the name was "FALLEY" —I thought, "I have a Steve PALLET — in my light machine gun platoon".

We thought that the sooner we left this spot the better it would be, so we headed South West, towards ETIENVILLE, the town in which our second battalion was to engage the Germans. They were to capture it! Later on we found out that it took two divisions, plus all their artillery and Air Corps bombings to finally capture it. Quite a mission for one unorganized battalion of paratroopers, which is considerably less in size than a battalion of regular infantry. Anyway, we headed that way, with the same 508th corporal as scout that I had when I met Lt. Richard, I followed the corporal scout. Then came Lt. Richard, Sgt Hall and the German Corporal, prisoner, Sgt Johnson and the rest of our men. Our rear guard was a good man from the 307th Engineers.

We kept close to hedge rows and avoided several houses before coming to a secondary road and then a small settlement. We went right through the group of houses and turned west into a yard with a large barn beside a driveway that went past the rear of the barn and passed through a fence, or hedge and stone wall, showing a large expanse of field several hundred yards long and wide. My scout and I went to the South of; the barn toward the opening in the hedge row; the others went to the North of the barn and house towards the solid hedge row. I saw no one moving in the large field and hesitated while trying to decide what our next move should be when I looked back and saw most of the men just passing the barn. I yelled at the rear guard Engineer, "Watch our rear—don't let anyone creep up on us—don't violate our rear security". No sooner had I said that than BANG— that same Engineer shot and killed a German

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who was aiming his weapon directly at my scout and or me! Whew—close. Upon investigation we found a 'phone and wires in the barn—which we quickly destroyed.

Now what to do? We thought that anyone in the vicinity surely heard that shot and of course would be more alert for anyone or thing moving in the area. Before us was a draw, an open field two or three hundred yards long and wide and completely visible for possible enemy emplaced on the other side of the field. My scout and I were standing beside the hedge, next to the opening, looking over the situation when I heard a "SNAP-SNAP—and heard the scout say, "Who Shot Me?" My scout turned towards me, looked at me with the most pitiful look on his face that I had ever seen. When he said that to me I realized that I also was out from cover and dove to my right, behind the hedge. As I jumped, and before I could answer him, I heard two more "PINGS" -saw my corporal's bewildered face, saw a stream of blood actually gush from his mouth, and saw him fall straight down on his face, arms outstretched and his heels wide apart -pointing to the heavens! Reaction! Realization! There was the first American that I had actually seen killed—a paratrooper—a corporal from our own 508th—could it be? More rifle fire snapped me back to the reality of the situation that I was facing and I pulled the corporal out of the opening and to the hedge, when I saw just a solid hedge—no opening for me to go through and out of sight of the Germans who were shooting at us from across the draw. I thought, "I'll have to buck the line". The first two bucks did nope damage to me than to the hedge—but the third put me nearly through and I pulled and fought my way to cover on the other side of the hedge. All of this action seemed like it took a lot of time but in reality it was only a few minutes from the time when we first entered the barn yard. We decided to get out of the area in which we had spent the last few hectic minutes, so we ran around the house and barn, past a couple more houses, and really ran down the

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road that we had just passed over, actually running for our lives now. Rifle fire had ceased but voices were following so we knew that we had to keep going as fast as we could and put as much distance between the voices and ourselves. We went North and West to see if we could get into the 3rd Battalion, 508th sector.

At a cross road we met a young Frenchman who told us that the main part of PICAUVILLE was to our right a little further up the road. While at this cross road we decided that our equipment was too bulky and was a hinderance to fast travel which was imperative now due to the nearness of the voices that were pursuing us. We removed our gas masks, figuring that the Germans would not use gas since so many of their own troops were in the area. We took what materials that we needed or wanted from our musette bags and other containers and then we piled all of the items which we were to leave behind in a ditch, or rather in a space between two mounds of dirt beside the road. We piled the items and covered them so that you wouldn't see them unless you were actually looking for such a cache.

Much lighter, we took off but kept being pushed North and East, rather than North and West, by the large number of German machine gun positions that we encountered. It seemed that every time that we got a good start in the direction that we were heading we had to make a detour for the above reason.

The voices were getting closer so we took off to the only patch of woods available that we figured would give us some cover and perhaps throw our chasers off of our track. The sun was just pouring down upon us, making us very hot dusty and thirsty. Also, since it had been a long time since we had eaten anything, we were hungry. Being in such a physical state of discomfort, and being winded from our rapid flight we thought that a few minutes break was in order.

A guard was established and the men not on duty napped. Two or three men

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did not nap, but stayed awake and talked in low tones and kept very still lest our movement be spotted by some German who was just roaming around.

I sat facing our prisoner and the two brief cases. I tried to catnap but my eyes just wouldn't leave the German. I didn't trust him: one quick move and he could have had either an M-1 or a few yards get away. Neither would have done him any good because he would have been shot in quick order, but that would have brought the Germans on us, or at least given our position away—and we didn't want either of those complications. But, to give the prisoner his due—he was exemplary—he just followed along in line, walked, ran, covered up when necessary, and never once made a move that made us suspicious of his intentions,, When we moved—he moved; when we stopped—he stopped. He kept the proper interval between the men next to him and never made a noise, I knew that his shoulder was in pain from the wound that he had received, but he was just like one of us and the only difference was that we were carrying weapons and he was carrying two brief cases full of official papers.

About the time that we really enjoying the break, we heard more voices and some shots right near us--right on the trail we had used to come into these woods. Up we got, and with our line of march in the same order, except for the scout, who was now one private, Jack Quigg, Co. I, 505th Parachute Infantry, from Pennsylvania,,

The woods that we were now in were not dense, in fact rather light, but they were unkept and were filled with brush, briars and some long grass. These facts made it difficult to travel very fast, and to our left we could see an open field which we had to avoid so we would not be seen by the Germans chasing us*Into a ditch on the South side of the area we went. This ditch separated the woods from a field so we took to the ditch. We moved upright when we could, lower when we had to, and crept when it was necessary to keep below the top of the ditch and the top of the field. At times we just lay

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still—hardly daring to breathe for fear one of our enemy might see or hear us. The field was about two feet higher than the bottom of the ditch in most places. When the voices got louder and neared to us we had to stay still. We could hear the bullets snapping as they went over our heads.

The Germans hunted us systematically, taking routes a few yards apart and going from one boundary to the other, and then doubled back a few yards from their original route. They came running from the field to the woods and vice-versa and each time that they came to the ditch they would jump it. But they kept their eyes on the area in which they were to land and by so doing they didn't look into the ditch. We were lucky that they were so careful of their landing place.

The moment that we heard a voice get a bit faint, we moved forward—inch by inch, under long thorns; under fallen trees, between trees and the sides of the ditch—scratched, bleeding, sweating, aching, but never giving up.

At last our pursuers seemed to have gone and we continued to creep and crawl away from the last possible enemy. I thought, "how lucky that they did not have blood hounds or any type of dog with them; we surely would have been found-captured if not killed on the spot. But they didn't We kept going East. That ditch seemed 800 yards long; perhaps it was 300-400- more or less, but it was 800 yards hard, though. Quigg was tired and showed it; breaking that kind of a trail was a real man's job and it was well done.

We all now felt completely justified of having discarded the items that we did several hours ago before we were hunted and pursued so intensely.

With Quigg leading, we moved from the field North and East through the very same woods that we had just been chased through, to the field that we had avoided while being chased. Quigg stopped suddenly, hit the ground, and I waved the rest of our group to get down as quickly as possible—on the field in front of us—about 100-150 yards wide we saw a scene familiar in training^

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exercises but not looked for in actual combat --A chow line!

We stayed low and watched the German Soldiers line up for their noon -day meal. They were in varied state of dress--some had their coats open, some had them buttoned and some had none at all. Some had steel helmets and some didn't. Some had their helmets on and some carried theirs. Some had weapons in their hands, across their backs and some were dragging theirs. One or two were yelling, maybe orders for the others; others were laughing and at least one was singing at the top of his voice. All were jovial to say the least.

And not a one of them were aware that about a dozen American Paratroopers were about 150 yards from them, watching them frolic in the warm noonday sun! Wow! It was a sight to be hold--one to see and not to be seen!

While we were watching the progress of the Chow line we began to think of getting away from it before the participants finished and started strolling across the field--and into the woods that we were hiding in, watching their every move and. wishing that we could partake in their food.

We decided that we would go East and try to get around the field where the chow line was set up and was, I'm sure greatly enjoyed--by the Germans. We moved in an Easterly direction and saw where the two fields that we had been concerned with during the last couple of hours converged. There was a stream between them and a small foot bridge over the stream. We arrived at this point just in time to see a German cross the bridge and move towards the Chow line. He disappeared behind us and then two officers came along the same path. Then went up on to the bridge and stood there, looking into the stream and appeared to be discussing a problem, because every few sentences one or the other would raise his hand and arm and gesture as though emphasizing a point.

After minutes that seemed like hours the two German Officers moved across the bridge and disappeared in the direction of the Chow Line site. We waited for them to get out of sight and hearing and to make sure that there

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was not anybody else coming to the place at which we were making our plans to get out of the area and to get to our respective units.

We surveyed the situation and the area from a point near the bridge. To the right there was a large open field just beyond a road; to the left was a path leading to a road and a field beyond—all just a few yards away. We seemed to be at the junction of several fields, a couple of roads or trails, and a few yards away was a stream flowing South.

Quigg, Lt. Richard, Sgt Hall and myself moved to the stream bed. We wanted to go North and since the stream was partially covered and concealed by trees and brush along its bank we thought it might be a good covered route to move to where we wanted to go. I stepped into the stream and sunk up to my waist at once—and immediately backed out. It would be too hard and slow to use such a route.

We then decided to go by path or road in a Southerly direction and then turn East and resume our parade North. We could see and hear gun crews to our immediate Northwest across the open field which aided us in making our decision.

Just as we started to move in the direction decided upon we had to take cover because a German soldier was crossing the field directly in our route. After a few minutes wait we resumed our forward progress. More ditches, more walking, stooping, crawling, and creeping. We crossed the path on which the German had been on and then we took to a ditch bearing East. In this ditch we only had to crawl at intervals when the left bank got so low that we could be seen from the open field.

After crossing a small open space we once more were safely in a small wooded area and decided that another short break was in order. It was a beautiful grove of pine trees – all tall and majestic—and I thought of Joyce Kilmer and his "Trees" again. The trees produced a wonderful pine odor, were

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tall enough to keep the sun out and let the cool air circulate. It was, as some one said, "a beautiful place to have a picnic".

We thought that it was so nice that we could plan our immediate future while resting on a blanket of pine needles that the beautiful trees has supplied. We put out guards, kept our prisoner in good view, and decided that we would go in an Easterly direction to see if we could get to our own troops before dark.

All was serene for about 30 seconds and all of a sudden German voices, right close, nearly took us out of our minds, and along with the voices were about 25-30 Germans either relieving a gun crew in that vicinity, or on a patrol—possibly looking for us! We got up silently, and very quickly and moved North for a few yards and came to the edge of the woods and looked out upon what ordinarily would have been a nice, wide field, but now it was a real hazard. We tried to cross it by crawling. I started, but only made ten yards in what seemed to be several minutes so I had to turn back, and as I returned to the edge of the woods I looked to the Southeast corner approximately 200 yards distant and saw a sight that we hadn't been able to understand. It was a German standing on a fence and waving to us, beckoning us to come his way. At first a faint hope entered our minds that at last we had reached one of our units.

In sign language I asked our prisoner if that was a German* He said, "Yar" I then asked him if the man was a Solder. Again he said, "Yar." I then asked him if the soldier knew that we were Americans -by using sign language and pointing to the American Flag on our shoulders—Again, "Yar."

Then I asked, " Are there many soldiers and were they coming after us"?. He once again said, "Yar."

This "Yar", was the automatic signal to take off from that lone figure and the fast approaching voices.

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Once again Quigg led off, in an Easterly direction, I was behind him and Lt, Richard was near the end of the column with the prisoner ahead of him.

Quigg and I got so far ahead of the others that we had gone one field East and were on the next field before we waited for the rest to catch up. I then told Lt Richard to go North one field, and then go East at the next field and we would meet him at the road that we could see a couple of fields to the East, We knew that it was a road because we had seen motor cycles passing along it while we were approaching it. Looking back we saw about 25 or 30 German soldiers following us. Full speed straight ahead was now the order.

Quigg and I reached and crossed the road and hid in the hedge and stone wall on the other side. We waited for five minutes, looked back to where we had last seen Lt. Richard, saw no movement, and then we went North along a hedge for about 200 yards and hid in an opening in the hedge, right behind a cow-shed and 100 yards or less, in front of a large set of buildings. Here we covered the entrance and camouflaged ourselves and waited for what was going to happen to us next. We were hoping that the rest of the group that we had spent the last several hours fleeing the Germans with would rush across the road as we had done, and then climb through the hedge and head for us.

Out of the clear came shots-five minutes of shooting in the very area in which our friends were--and then silence.

We discussed it, Quigg and I! Had they been killed? Or captured? Or had they gotten away and reached safety? Who knows? Would we ever find out? It meant that now Quigg and I were on our own. We came to a decision--we would wait right where we were and at mid-night we would take off, going North and West and see what happened between mid-night and light of day.

It was 1900 hours-7:00 P.M. at this time, so a five hour wait was in store for us. I got up to look around a bit from our hiding place. Through an opening in the rear I could plainly see a large house and barn, and to my

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horror, Germans rushing around as though getting ready to chase some small group of Americans. I was watching an opening in the hedge across the field towards the big house when three Germans, fully dressed and camouflaged, stopped in the opening! I froze, leaning on a mud bank with my elbows in a small opening in my hedge, with my field glasses up to my eyes. Froze! yes Froze! Two Germans stooped below their hedge line and one stayed up looking directly at me. I just knew that he was. I was still frozen. Then that one German raised his rifle and aimed it directly at my head. It was just as though we were aiming at one another. We were, too, but his weapon was much more devastating than mine. I was still frozen. He ducked behind the hedge but I held my position, very luckily, for almost at once he raised and again took aim at me. I still froze and he repeated his action a couple more times and I was still frozen—in fact I was nearly paralyzed. Then the three Germans got up and moved off south, PHEW--I sat down—my back was wet. I was unfrozen but plenty nervous. If I had moved before the Germans went away we probably would have been ferreted from our hiding place.

About this time two Germans walked a few yards in front of us, left the cow pen gate open, and proceeded one hundred yards to our front and got into fox holes and immediately began firing: just firing. No particular targets, but just to make noise and harass the Americans in the area.

The yard gate being open, the cows took a holiday and one very nosy bovine began to eat our camouflage and was making it nervous for us. But that was nothing! Suddenly she spotted us—jumped—moed and then looked, shifting her head and body to get the best possible view. We were so afraid that anyone who might be watching would notice this gal's queer actions; but again it seems that we were on the right side and being guided from above. However, after she had left us for half an hour she returned and went through the same routine once more.

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Midnight! We stole through the cow yard, to the road we had previously crossed, and went along the side in a Southwesterly direction, trying to get around a big German strong point to the immediate North of us. Moving West five fields led us to a cross road where a German road block was established. An 88 was in position on the Southeast corner and belched forth every few minutes. Quigg and I crossed the road on all fours and headed South just off so that our foot steps would not echo in the stillness of the night (except when the 86 belched). A sentry, walking his post was sighted as he came towards us—but before he reached us he halted, about faced, and returned from whence he came. We saw him do this several times, thus realizing that he was pulling sentry duty for the 88 crew at the cross roads that we had been so fortunate to pass by unnoticed by the crew just a few minutes before. We climbed into a field so as to give the sentry his part of the road—and ours too. Just as soon as we got into the field we thought all Hell had broken loose—a barrage of 88s—lasting ten minutes whizzed over our heads—how close I'll never know, but we crouched there, hugging the ground and wondering if they knew that we were there or was the barrage for some other reason. Later we decided that it was a half hourly occurrence, with a lesser barrage between regularly ones.

We crawled towards the hedge to our South and as we approached the thick part of the hedge, as it branched off along the side of the road that we had just crossed, we heard, some one cough and clear his throat. Then, later we could hear the hob nails on the road from the German sentry. Minute after minute went by--the coughing continued, the hob nails kept coming— and the 88s kept going off. Occasionally a rifle shot rang out.

Quigg and I were still there in the corner of the field, behind the hedge as daybreak came. It was time, I decided, to find out who, or what was on the other side of the hedge. I told Quigg to crawl and watch the corner

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while I crawled over (through) the hedge and, pistol in hand, cocked and ready to fire, approached the spot where our adversary was --closer and closer and closer I wiggled slowly and noiselessly --and there he was! A half asleep U.S. Paratrooper--one private Russell Noserera who belonged to Headquarters C, 1st Battalion of the 507th Regiment. What a relief!!! I quietly called Quigg and he came quickly and we settled down for the day--and half of the night too.

We camouflaged our hide out and we watched Germans all day long ---in platoon formation. We saw truck loads of troops and bus loads of them pass our hiding place going to their new defensive positions I guessed.

We saw a group of officers, partly dressed, with their bags stuffed with clothing, partly dragging on the road, hurriedly follow a large van up the slope and when it reached the top they climbed aboard and drove off in a Northeasterly direction, towards the way we had come from last night.

We saw Germans set up 88s and mortars, after load after load of shells were piled near the weapons. We saw horse drawn vehicles, so heavily loaded that both officers and enlisted men had to put their shoulders to the horse drawn wagons to be sure that they got to their destination. They used two horse teams, four horse teams, and at least once they used a team with six horses and four men pulling and pushing to get the wagon and its load in the field beside the weapons.

And while we watched all the goings on during the day we dared not breathe out loud, let alone cough, and we moved in slow, slow, slow motion so as not to attract an eye that might happen to be looking in our direction.

The day was long--not because of lack of German movement and activity, but because we were waiting for time to pass and for darkness to set in so that we could move on and continue to try to meet up with our units. While we were waiting, we ate all of our food, which wasn't much, and drank most of our water. Regrets later.

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Midnight again—just what we were waiting for --and it finally arrived. The moon was not up very high, was quite bright, but the skies were a bit cloudy. The latter fact interested us because we couldn't be seen nearly as well if the moon was real bright.

Again, Quigg led off as we left our hide away of the past 20 hours. I followed and Noser brought up the rear.

We started out traveling Northwest but as on previous moves we had to bear towards other directions to avoid enemy gun positions, so our first deviation was to the Northeast. We headed for what we thought was our own Mortars firing, but each time that we got fairly close to where we thought that the firing was coming from, they seemed to have moved. So we just continued moving on. We traveled quite fast - this night—we were anxious to get as near to our own troops as we possibly could in as little time as we could.

At one time we came to a junction of roads and trails and we took a break to get a rest and to think the situation out. In the quiet we could hear Germans all around us--we heard their voices, and we could hear wagons loaded and move out, hearing the Germans give commands to the horses that were pulling the wagons. Some passed just a few feet from us as we hid in the grass beside the road—real tall grass, about three or more feet high.

Daylight was fast becoming a reality and we all knew that we just had to find a good place to hide, and, to get some type of food and water. We had shared our food and water for the last day and a half and had eaten and drank more than we should have. Some of the rations we ate so as not to have the bulk in our pockets to carry around, especially if we had to run away from prospective captors. So—into the daylight we went looking—listening—and hurrying.

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At one place we came onto a ready made trail and on it we found a jump rope carried by paratroopers. This encouraged us and we kept on--finally coming into a road that led into a small village. It was decided that we needed water--but not as the risk of being captured. We also needed food and directions as to where we were at the time. Before we knew it we were in the village--it just popped up as we went up a slope and turned a bend in the small, dusty road.

All the time voices of a patrol were closing on us and we were now in a maze of little streets and could hear the Germans very well. At this point Quigg stepped into a manure shed. He looked out of the window at me and pointed towards three German soldiers setting up a machine gun.

I saw them and when they moved behind a house, I stepped into the shed beside Quigg.

The Germans had not seen anyone of us yet because Quigg and I were in the shed and Nosera was outside and behind the shed. Our hearts were in our throats because as Nosera moved into the shed with us, the Germans chose that time to come from behind the house, and saw Noserera make his move. We knew it because we could see the three Germans pointing to the shed door. They didn't know how many of us were in there but they knew some one was there.

Nosera said, "lets hide under the manure!" I said that we could not because they knew we were in here and would shortly come after us. We'll have to make a break for it. It was agreed that they would follow me, I yelled, "Follow me", and I dashed out of the door; turned left; ran 10 feet down a narrow alley; came to a narrow street running right and left; I turned left and as I turned the corner I saw four or five Germans setting up a machine gun. I ran close to the building, so close that I hit the side, of the building and turned myself around so that I was whirling like a football player as he frees himself from an opponents grasp. I looked right into the

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machine gun muzzle and I saw tracer bullets coming right towards me, I felt the entrenching tool that I had on my belt, a shovel, shot completely off the pistol belt --and I got completely turned around and just picked up my feet and kept laying them down. If those buildings, the one that the machine gun was beside, and the one that I ran along side of had not been of rounding shape I know the bullets would have hit me -- as it was, they were shooting a bit to my right and I was bearing a bit to my left with every stride. I knew that I wasn't safe yet. I ran in to an orchard, headed down the right side for about 20 yards or so and then turned a 90 degree angle to the left and crossed a 40 yard field in nothing flat, dove into a ditch in front of a hedge row and started to crawl in the ditch, going right, and sway from the manure shed where I had left, or should I say, when and where Quigg and Nosera didn't, "Follow Me."

After crawling about 10 yards I stopped and crawled backwards, covering my trail as I moved slowly, camouflaged myself and my trail as much as I could.

After about five minutes of this I stopped moving, and really I guess that I nearly stopped breathing too. I put my knit helmet, that I mentioned before, on at this time to hide my face so it wouldn't be seen because I was certain that it was ghostly white because I felt, for certain, like an empty sheet!

Once in a spot where I thought I could rest and hide from anyone chasing me, I covered my legs with leaves and dead briars, put my left hand in my steel helmet, to help cover some of my face that was not covered by my knit helmet, and grasped my carbine, that I had managed to hold onto during all the time and action I had been through since I first put it into the violin case and strapped it to my body away back in good old England, Nottingham, England and Folkingham Airfield, England--good memories, those!

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I was lying right out straight, thanking God that I was small, and short and that I had made it safely to the ditch that was now protecting me from being seen. Before finally settling where I was now located I checked my pistol and my trench knife to be sure that they were readily available and ready to use in a hurry if needed.

I very nearly had climbed over the dirt hedge beside which I now snuggled, in order to get as much distance between me and the German soldiers that I knew would come looking for me. I would have had to cross another field, a road, climb through a hedge row and settle in the field beyond which I discovered later was thick with German fox holes, using machine guns and mortars in addition to riflemen. I was happy when I found the fact out that I had not been too greedy and tried to get more safety than I had. This fact was one of the several happenings that made me, later, realize that I was not alone in my travels and troubles—That God was really looking out for me.

As I lay there I started to worry and wonder what had happened to Quigg and Noser—but not for long! It was just a short time until I heard voices, yelling excitedly, high pitched, nervous voices—German and American.

The German voices were half in the German language and half in the American or English language. The voices were saying, "Come out—Come out—Eans OOP—Eans OOP—We kill—We kill"* Then I heard one of my companions of the last few hours, one of my paratroopers, yell, "No, No I don't want to die --I don't want to die! Then Brrrrrrrrrrr—Brrrrrrrrrrr—the fast shooting of machine gun pistols that the Germans carried had done their work—No more American voices —no more English words!

I knew what would happen next—I scarcely breathed--I knew—yes— the voices, like a pack of hounds, came into the field and orchard in which I was hidden. I prayed, and I knew what every word I said meant, and I meant every word I said. I prayed—asked forgiveness—asked blessings for my folks and

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dearest friends-human and canine -- Yes, I prayed and really felt like I had seen the last of life on this earth.

They came!!! The Germans first went down the field on the side that I started down before I made my dash across the field and orchard. For two hours and more they shot in every nook and corner, in every house on the border of the orchard. They shot that high velocity machine pistol which sounds like a burp--Brrrrrrrrrpt, rather than like our, "Tommy" gun, with it's slow, nearly single shot sound, or our machine gun with its Ack -Ack-Ack-Ack,

Then the inevitable—they came to the side of the field on which I was hiding. My carbine was rusty already, from the perspiration that had dropped onto the receiver from the end of my nose and chin, I was so still that I think several times that my heart did stop—but I thought surely that the THUD-THUD-THUD that came from it would cause me to be discovered.

They came!! One German Soldier walked through the briars about five feet in front of me and jumped over the dirt hedge row, PHEW!!! He yelled something to his companions--"Nobody here", I guessed and hoped! Then he kept going on across the field, I could hear him running away from my position.

Then those Germans with the shooting irons came along, and because the grass was a couple of feet high, eight or ten feet in front of me and the briars were so thick around me, they stayed that distance from me. But, they shot and shot and shot right over my body—I could feel the breeze of the flying lead and I could feel, and see the dirt as it fell on me as the lead burrowed into the mud bank behind me. Later on I could see the holes where the lead was buried in the hedge row.

Twelve times I counted the German soldiers as they walked up and back in front of my hide out—firing with every other step or - so. I was wondering about the thirteenth time--but it never came. Thirteen was always my lucky number; I remembered that I had worn it on my hockey jersey while in high

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school. Well, they went away--thank GOD--~~they went away~~ and never did come back looking for me again. Some one was still looking out for me!

This was Thursday morning--D+2 - I had entered my hide out about 0600 hours and knew that I had to stay there until darkness anyway--that would be 12 hours more or less.

All afternoon our artillery fell around me--and then our planes, the P-47s and the P-51s did a beautiful job of bombing--but I was too close--right in the middle of it all. Then the German artillery would go off. Also the German 88s and mortars were being shot continuously. I thought that they would never cease. It was a very poor place to be--I knew it but I just couldn't get out, and right at the moment, I couldn't do anything about it. I was waiting for darkness to come and was praying that it would come soon.

However, before dark arrived more cows did. They started to eat the hay in front of me--and I remembered about the other times when a cow came and gave me quite a bit of concern. It wasn't long before some French men and women came and drove the cows home for the night--but the French men and women nearly stepped on me when they tried to get behind the cows to shoo them home.

Dinner and supper time came - and went, but I hadn't eaten--I had nothing. I was waiting patiently for darkness. I thought I would crawl out of my position and cross the hedge row on my right, cross the field, the road on the other side of the field, and be on my way across more fields to the Northeast, hoping to run into the Allied troops advancing from the Beach Heads

About this time the Germans started moving into the fields around me. They brought mortars and 88s, machine guns and machine pistols and rifles. By dark the fields were alive with Germans and fire power. I would have to plan another route of escape. I planned that I would go forward 50 yards, cut left - No!--there's a machine gun! I would go forward 25 yards, turn left--No--there is another machine gun! Turn right--no, another machine gun! I would start

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over—I'd go to the edge of the orchard at my rear --No No! there was an 88 or a mortar; I'd go to my rear and cut out of the orchard and across the field --NO--KO--NO-- always a machine gun or an 88 or some German weapon or a group of soldiers. I began talking to myself--calming myself down--taking stock of myself--getting various view points--but always I would have to start over from where I was.

A new day was dawning--it began to get light. I had not slept because I wanted to get out of my place and out of my predicament. I could not sleep in the day light for fear that some one would see me; I couldn't sleep during the hours of darkness because I was afraid that I might snore and bring attention to my hiding place. I just lay there-- my binoculars, inside my shirt were cutting into my chest; my carbine had numbed my right hand, especially my fourth and little fingers; I had to move and change my position; I was hungry -- I was thirsty--Daylight was here. I had no food--no water--I'd have to wait until night--I tried to relax--I thought of home--of my friends--of my dogs--my travels--my friends that I had met while assigned to various camps and stations in the USA. I swore I'd drink anything anybody offered me, be it buttermilk or vinegar. I shuddered--I hated buttermilk--but I would drink it now if it was in front of me--or behind me! I was hard up but I still had my head, my senses, and my heart. I still had my belief in God --but I was alone--sooo all alone! And it was getting to look like I would be alone for a long time to come. But who knows--I said to myself.

Not for long--because about then -- this being Friday morning--D+3-- the P-47s started dropping eggs -- and the artillery of our troops started popping at the German positions. This continued with the Germans answering nearly round for round all morning--all afternoon and in the evening the Germans moved more 88s and mortars into the area. And--a German with a machine gun and one with a machine pistol moved right beside me--on the other side of the hedge row! I

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could hear them talk-cough-spit-and nearly hear them breathe. But most of all I could hear their weapons keep up the most consistent clatter that I have ever heard. All night long-only our artillery silenced them and I had it doped out that I'd just as soon have them, the Germans, fire because they were just making noises whereas our artillery was landing here and there and all around me! If it hit some of the Germans, it was OK, but it just didn't seem to. Every time that I thought one of the German guns had been hit, it seemed as if two weapons started shooting where there had been just one. I remembered seeing movies of such instances-but this wasn't an instance-it was instant and constant!

I had made up my mind on Friday morning to wait for the Allies to come along. I knew that any time after D+3 that they should make their appearance - so I waited with renewed hope.

It rained Friday at supper time - just a few drops hit my cup when I had tried to catch some water to moisten my lips- but the drops were not large enough to do any good. The leaves were wet a little so I lapped them but it didn't help much either. I decided to wait and not get careless while I was looking for water that wasn't there. I felt certain that help would come before long.

Finally-Dawn--It was Saturday D+4, and I was still in a hot bed of fire - ours and now their shells and mortar rounds were landing in the area also. They had been landing there all day, but it was more severe now, and it seemed as they really meant it now. This meant one thing to me --the Germans were pulling out- and back because the Allies were pushing forward and claiming the area. I prayed some more!

I waited for what I thought was an eternity and then I heard voices. I couldn't make out if they were German or American voices. Then I heard someone say, "Now hear that gun - that's for yar". Then I heard a German Machine gun

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– Brrrrmmmmpppttt, and the voice said "Now that guns AGIN yar." Then I yelled, "Hey, American – Hey Soldier", I knew no German ever said, "That guns AGIN yar". I knew it was an American.

In a moment two privates came over to see me. I asked what Division that they were with and they answered, the 90th. They pushed through the briars and bushes and picked me up, gave me a drink of water and after I brushed myself off, they let go of me – I started to move and my legs were just like rubber – they just wouldn't stand stiff! The soldiers helped me and as soon as I got my strength and could control my legs, which was just a few seconds, I was off under my own control.

I reported to Lt. Lovell, Co I, 357th Infantry, 90th Division.

Then I went to the manure shed to see what had happened there if I could. I found one M-1 rifle which I took with me. That was all the evidence of Americans having been in the vicinity.

I decided to go forward with the 90th Division as they advanced to where I thought my unit was, but was told that there were some Airborne units just a little way back in the direction from which they came.

So I moved out in the direction mentioned and sure enough --I found the Airborne troops of the 82d Division and they informed me where the 3rd Battalion of the 508th Parachute Regiment was located and gave me a jeep ride to a position just a few hundred yards from where I had been hiding for the last few days – and nights.

I reported into my battalion headquarters -to my battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Louis G. Mendez, Jr.

I was happy and thankful and I thanked God for His guidance and help.

Malcolm D Brannen
1st Lt. Inf

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