

JOSEPH M. KISSANE

WW2 MEMOIRS

States, Ireland, England

My draft number was called in March 1942. Because my night college would be completed in May, I was granted a deferment. After six years I had quit Newhouse and Sayre and was a rodman for the Central R.R. of New Jersey. Lots of fun; interesting job. I also worked at night as a waiter for Schraffts. On the Atlantic coast the U bouts were sinking ships. Big pay riding oil tankers. I tried to get hired. Applied at the union and oil companies. Given the run a round.

While waiting for the 23rd Street YMCA wrestlers to work out I visited the next door public library. I found an Army pamphlet which encouraged volunteering for the paratroops. No dirty details, wings, boots, good food, \$50 per month extra pay etc. Can't beat that-was I fooled.

On November 21st I received my induction orders. I went to the railroad in Jersey City, drew my pay and adorned in old work clothes, went to the Induction Center, 44th Street and Lexington Avenue, Manhattan. Passed the physical, was uniformed and shipped to Yaphank. Requested the Paratroops. One day, goofing off in the camp library I ran into Tom Gallagher, a fellow Elmhurst street roller hockey player. He too was joining the paratroops. We were at Yaphank almost 30 days. Gathered in a group of about 12 prospective paratroopers we were sent to Toccoa, Georgia. At the Toccoa train station luncheonette we asked for coffee. The proprietor said no coffee. One hep recruit explained, he noted we were northerners and were not welcome. Such was my introduction to the South.

At Camp Toccoa the 501 was being formed. All movement was double time. Put through the obstacle course in our only dress uniform. Family style feeding. Those seated on the isle grabbed as much as they could. If you were on the inside you starved. Gallagher and I got on the mess detail. No blankets, fights galore. One of our New Yorkers, Charlie Schalda, announced that he would beat up anybody in the barracks. I told Charlie, "Do your fighting at the other end" (the rebel in the bunk under me was holding a knife under his field bag).

Because of the overcrowding and disorder our group was sent to Camp Blanding, Florida where the 508 was being formed. Assigned to the Third Battalion. The Commander, Major Mendez, interviewed us asking why we selected the paratroops and other stupid questions designed to weed out misfits. Again, given a physical. No passes while undergoing basic training.

Next came jump school at Fort Benning, Georgia. The First and Second Battalions had preceded us. Because our basic had been all encompassing, our training was compressed to three weeks including five jumps.

Then came furloughs. Many returned all beat up. Egos enhanced by jump wings led to confrontations with the town bullies often with adverse results. On to all airborne Camp Mackall and organizational training. Several jumps were made loaded down with even heavier gear and assigned to separate duties such as mortar or machine gun platoons. I was appointed sergeant major. Not being enamored with army life I was demoted to T/5 in supply. We endured maneuvers in South Carolina. Constant rain. Regimental Surgeon Thomas sensibly cancelled them, too many troopers became ill. In October, Tennessee maneuvers. Night jumps on rocky ground, many injured. Gallagher broke his ankle, which never healed properly. I suffered a sprained ankle, laid out in a pile of parachutes, ate K rations and read pocket books.

Now deemed ready for overseas duty. Back to Mackall followed by three day passes. Organization Day held 11/4/43. The 508 was one year old. Closed camp and headed for Camp Shanks, N.Y.

Set sail for Northern Ireland on 12/27/43. Assigned as a gunner I had no idea how to shoot at U boats. But it was a good detail. Ate the best food with the seamen. Arrived 1/8/44 at Belfast, a bleak port town. Boarded quaint trains which carried us westward to Cronmore. Every station had Bovril signs. Are all these towns named Bovril? We were quartered in Nissen huts previously occupied by English troops. Very damp climate. The sun rose about 10 AM and set 3:30 PM. Field space was limited so we didn't do extensive training. As armorer artificer I had the job of cleaning 6 light machine guns encased in Cosmoline. Kept warm by the fire but not too close. Washed off the goey stuff with gasoline. Stupidly I

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cleaned them all before trying to reassemble them. Some guns seemed to function minus parts and I ended up with “surplus” parts (oh well, some guns were lost in the Normandy swamps).

The Irish were very friendly. Our pounds went far. For a pittance one could have real eggs, ham, bacon, tea and muffins. Taxicabs were also cheap, at first. Then the prices were gradually increased as they realized these Yanks were rich. I never visited Belfast; just the surrounding towns of Port Steward and Coleraine. The first an amusement resort and the latter a very staid domain. Once out of contrariness I demeaned the King. The pub’s proprietor gave us the gate. Because the Free State was visible across the bay a strict blackout was in force. Leaving a pub nothing could be seen. With a belly full of warm beer Gallagher reinjured his bad ankle.

Next, an advance truck detail bound for England. A few of us were ferried across the Irish Sea to Edinburgh. Quartered by a minister and his wife. They were very solicitous, stifling our desire to hit the pubs in town. Trucking down the coastline the landscape seemed very hilly and drab.

In England 6-man tents had been erected for us at Wollaton Park, a suburb of Nottingham, Robin Hood’s old hangout. It included a castle and deer herd. That first night a few of us early arrivals visited a local pub. The women were enthralled. Their husbands had been sent to far away places years ago. Gallagher always knew which pubs had the beer and gin. The locals were polite and respectful despite our acting like clowns. They would sit quietly nursing a beer while we tossed the pounds around spilling the warm sourish beer on ourselves. English entertainment, lots of laughs. A special importation, Tillie from Birmingham. Middle-aged, no front teeth, emoting cockney songs.

We made some jumps, a few at night which were disorganized disasters. On one the next morning “Pappy” Koziel (KIA Normandy) and I, completely lost, went to a farmhouse seeking food. Pappy pulled out a roll of pounds then proclaimed, “no that’s not the one” and dug from another pocket a bigger wad. Their eyes almost popped out.

Normandy

The landing on 6/6/44 was known as “The Neptune Phase” of Operation Overlord. The 508 was one of three Parachute Infantry Regiments of the 82nd Airborne Division’s Task Force “A” to drop between 0100 and 0315 hour on D-Day. Its mission, to clear and secure a bridgehead west of the Merderet River and to protect the northern flank of VII Corps entry sea born on Utah Beach.

On 5/28/44 the Third Battalion 508 P.I.R. after two dry runs was trucked to Folkingham Airbase in southeastern England. The populace waved to us aware that this was for real. We were enclosed in a guarded and fenced area sleeping on cots in a large hanger with our weapons, ammo and equipment underneath. The C-47s were out on the runway. Nothing to do but check equipment, gab, and gamble, study the sand tables, and write letters home. We were furnished French invasion money and a cloth map. I gave them to Tommy Gallagher when he visited us. Served excellent food by a Quartermaster outfit. Lucky guys, they will see us off. Movies every night, sentimental of course. Lt. Shankey gathered our group around a map and explained that we were to meet at a large house distinguishable by a pond behind it. Little did he realize the entire area was flooded. Activity and tension increased on the fifth. Chaplain Maternowski (KIA) said mass and gave the last rites. British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden walked among us (much like Eisenhower with the 101st). Transported to our respective planes we donned our main and reserve parachutes. My wear consisted of an anti-gas impregnated uniform with an American Flag and 82nd insignia on each shoulder, M1 rifle, 2 bandoleers of 30-mm ammo. In my field bag fragmentation and phosphorous grenades, a land mine, K and D rations, extra socks, and a machine gun firing pin packet filled with Fonseca cigars. On my pistol belt an entrenching tool, canteen, mess gear, and bayonet. A jump knife was attached to my right boot and a first aid packet on the webbing of my helmet. We had to be boosted up the plane where we were unceremoniously scarved with a Mae West.

As the 16th and last man out I was squeezed behind the pilot’s and copilots open cabin. Daylight was fading as we took off about 10:30 PM (English double daylight saving time). Forming up entailed flying around England and parts of Scotland. Typical airborne operation. Meticulously planned to be followed by complete chaos. The drop was widely scattered when engulfed in a heavy cloudbank and receiving flak

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concentrations. As the run over the Channel commenced heading for our DZ we stood up. It was so crowded I leaned over the pilot hunched over the plane's instruments. The crew chief was on my left. He was supposed to be by the open door keeping the lines cleared as we exited. Approaching the Channel Islands ack ack streamed up. What was I doing here? Flying over the Cotentin Peninsula the men began to close in on the door. The first two had the task to push out an equipment bundle and release the others under the plane. As the men started jumping there finally was room for me to turn around and hook up my static line. No S.O.P. formalities. I ran half the length of the plane, which was accelerating and bucking as it lost weight. Our jump time is reported as 0200. Looking down, flares and tracers were spouting in all directions. Close by a machine gun was firing at us. An alarming thought: he's going to be looking for me and not for my well being. I splashed down in about two feet of water in darkness and total disarray. With my jump knife I feverously hacked at the suspension lines and whatnot anticipating an imminent visit by a hostile German. Finally freeing myself, I headed in the direction of the planes flight. Groping in the swamp I had to swim through the deeply flooded paths. Dispensed with the landmine. My rifle of course soaked. Came across a few 101st troopers, one idly smoking a cigarette. I don't need them. Walking along a road I saw a flashlight beam. Lt. Plunkett studying a map. (A dedicated officer he was wounded out a week later). Near by were several G Company men. Evidently many had landed in a group on the extreme northern edge of Utah Beach. We were probably the largest Parachute Company in Normandy with about 70 men. Exhausted, I promptly fell asleep. At daylight we moved out walking along the beach and the parallel road pitted with huge bomb craters. We had jumped with a double strength of team weapons (twelve LMG and six 60 mm mortars). Almost everything was lost in the water. On the ground we had at most 3 LMG's and one mortar.

Out in the Channel a Navy vessel was idling. Flying along the coast a plane exploded in a red ball of fire. Our two pointmen shot up a beach house from which we had received fire. Lacking heavy action rumor circulated that the invasion had failed and we were abandoned. A disturbing thought. Meeting no resistance we probed into Chef Du Pont, the 508 objective. The inhabitants had vacated this dairy town. On a railroad siding a train loaded with rinds of cheese was being rapidly looted. I helped myself and ate for days. Much confusion but little enemy action. I slept under an uprooted tree. After a few days we became organized operating out of a Battalion supply dump. Each Company Supply Sergeant and armorer artificer worked together under the Battalion Supply Sergeant, Bill Howe. I was acting Supply Sergeant for G Company.

German planes flew over at night but were a minor threat. Gradually we moved across the Peninsula. Almost a week at one location. Dead American soldiers were hastily removed from sight. German cadavers were left to rot and be looted. Gradually their color changed from pasty gray to purple while stinking the area. Our Lieutenant, Shankey, was captured and killed on D-Day while being trucked to the German rear. The word was that an American plane strafed the convoy killing about 20 men. His replacement was a commissioned old army enlisted man. In the states he made good use of a pamphlet "How to write love letters". The other officers demeaned him as unschooled and crude. We liked him; suffering our horseplay. He was itching to get some action. One time we hid his tommygun. I donned a German helmet and ran on the far side of a hedgerow. Others said "Look at the Heinie!" He went ape scrambling for his gun. He took it good naturally. Shrapnel had injured a cow. To put it out of its misery Denver D. fired a single .45 cal shot. The animal just stared at him. He put the gun on automatic and blasted the cow. It slowly fell and rolled over. Not being relocated we endured the expanding innards and accompanying stench. The powers that be didn't take kindly to our kidding.

Towards the end of the campaign while riding a jeep we came upon General Gavin walking the road with his aide, a captain. Perplexed we stopped and offered a ride. He sat on one front fender; the captain on the other. Both faced the passing forestry with rifles at the ready. Often wondered if this was to inspire us. There wasn't a German in miles.

On July 10th we were trucked to Utah Beach. Many prisoners in barbed wire enclosures, very docile. Probably glad to be out of it eating good GI chow. Finally we boarded L.S.T.'s and returned to England.

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After Normandy

Returning to Nottingham about 7/14/44 the citizenry gave us a tremendous reception. Teary-eyed Tom Gallagher greeted us overjoyed that we had survived. Word was that a black quartermaster outfit was in the area “entertaining” the local girls. Riled up rebels stormed into town.

At a regimental memorial service the names of the KIA’s were tolled. Some Companies were decimated. Wisely, this function was never repeated.

Furloughs in order, many went to London. Some returned long overdue in chains. A group of us hit Blackpool, England’s Coney Island. Had a great time running wild. When the pubs called “time” we’d stock up on beer. The M.P.’s stayed clear of us.

We in supply were queried about our lieutenant. All said he was okay. A rebel from regimental replaced me. This was probably the machination of the rebel regimental supply sergeant. Back in Mackall I had enthroned Lena Horne’s picture on his bunk.

Put in for the Pathfinders. Spent about two weeks at an airfield and made a few night jumps. Some wild times going to town. Hardly anybody stood formation, too hung over. Because of the disastrous Sicily and Normandy night jumps future operations would be initiated in daylight. Consequently Pathfinders would not be needed to spot the DZ’s. We were reassigned to our respective units.

I was now a T/5 yardbird sine portfolio. Lieutenant Wilde (later Captain) took over as Company Commander. One lieutenant replacement, a Pennsylvania Dutchman, had us all doing close order drill, ugh!

Late in July Bob Shearer and I were detailed for ten days to an armorer artificer school conducted by retired English sergeants. Very enlightening but wasted on me. Traveling from Nottingham to Stoke-on-Trent one became aware of how bleak life in England was.

In early September we were rushed to the airfield for a dawn jump in front of Patton who was surging toward Tournai, Belgium. That afternoon while loading a plane with landmines Bob and two others were killed. A bundle exploded. The next morning at dawn from my cot in the hanger I saw daylight and realized that the operation was aborted. No regrets back to Wollaton Park.

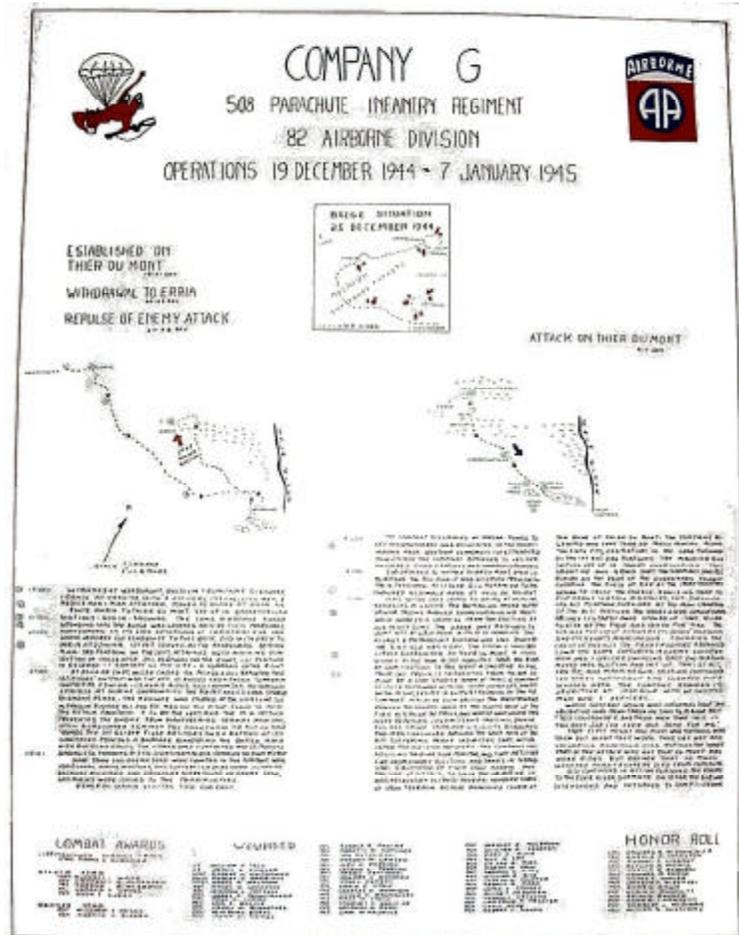
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Invasion of Holland

Operation Market Garden

The Big Picture



Airborne troops were dropped on 9/17/44, a Sunday afternoon up through Holland from Eindhoven (the 101st) to Nijmegen (82nd) and lastly Arnhem (British 1st Airborne). The Market objective was to capture and hold the intervening bridges. Up this carpet the Garden phrase would be the British 30 Corps job to pass through these cities breaching the Rhine River. If successful, it was anticipated that the open land eastward would be rapidly crossed and Germany overcome before year-end.

On 9/14 the Third Battalion, 508 PIR, 82 A/B DIV was trucked to the airfield. This time not much fanfare. I ignored the sand tables. After the Normandy confusion why bother, trust to luck. In the Communications Section with no assigned function my place was fifth or sixth man in the lead plane. This was an improvement over Normandy as the last man out. Weight conscious I grabbed a carbine, lighter and easier to carry than the M1 rifle. Our C-47 Air Corps personnel - the pilot was a

lieutenant colonel (Krebs) and the copilot a major (Cannon), also a captain and two enlisted men. The hapless passengers included Wilde, as jumptester, followed by Mendez, his dogropper, and the rest of us. S.O.P. as usual, rush to the runway then wait alongside the C-47 for hours. Cannon kidded with us. The pilot sat in the cockpit sweating it out. The weather was perfect. I later learned that our plane was shot down (obviously after we jumped). The copilot subsequently became a Senator from Nevada.

Flying over Holland - many flooded areas. People on their rooftops waving to us. Some flak. But most of the way protective English Spitfires swooped down on enemy guns. Landed in good shape, picked up an M1 on the DZ. At a bordering farmhouse another trooper snatched a holstered Pearl-Handled 22 pistol. Must have been owned by a German officer who post haste departed. Marching toward Nijmegen some one conjectured that the road bordered on Germany. Appropriately everyone had to step on the right side of the road. In Germany on 9/17/44

That evening we settled down on high ground south of the city. During the night explosives reverberated. It was reported that the enemy was destroying ammo dumps. In the morning several

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Dutchmen wearing orange armbands appeared and volunteering their services as guides. One was disowned as a traitor, and the others chased him away. Their offer was gratefully accepted. Although the highway led directly to the bridge, side roads near the bridge meandered apropos this medieval city. One guide joined our First Platoon. His father saw our planes coming. In high freedom spirits he donned a Dutch uniform and paraded around his backyard. He was shot dead. Who knows who. Later at Thorensche Molen I saw "Gas" get hit in the legs. A tall skinny teenager, he was four years behind in eating. If one had the misfortune to be repeatedly behind him on the chow line you starved. After the war he was enrolled in England's military institution, Sandhurst. He became an officer in the Dutch army and served in the East Indies.

As we deployed towards the bridge the populace crowded the streets cheering us while proffering Heineken beer, sandwiches, and fruits. Overgenerous, considering their shortages. However, as enemy opposition began to develop we were on our own except for the few guides. The Third Platoon having preceded us, the rest of the company advanced down the winding streets toward the river. Replacement David Levin was occupying himself trying to kill Germans. He disappeared down a side street. In an attempt to retrieve him I followed. Rounding a corner I was confronted by a German aiming his rifle at me. We both fired. I backed around the corner. Gathered a couple of troopers including Bob Kolterman and proposed going down the nearby riverbank and coming up behind. Sighted by the Germans across the river they opened on us with 20 mm's. We scrambled up the bank. Many years later I reviewed the site and was amazed at our fearful agility.

Returned to the right flank of the company. Standing in a doorway was a bewildered woman shouldering an infant. I ordered her down a cellar. The next minute a round came in and blasted the side off a building across the narrow street. The Germans were organizing and attacking in force through the backyards. We were told to withdraw.

Defensive positions were set up in Berg En Dal, a suburb south of Nijmegen. The Third Platoon was detached and sent to link up with our forces in Beek further south. Since I was doing nothing but scrounging for food, Wilde told me to take a few men and try to make contact with the Third Platoon. Three volunteers and we were off. Nightfall was setting in. As we approached the main road Levin and another replacement (Bayne) wanted to accompany us. Six men were far too many for a reconnaissance patrol. I told Levin "You go behind the houses on the left side of the road and we will meet at the end of the street." As we proceeded through backyards on the right side the Germans could be heard digging holes in front of the houses. Reaching the far end we waited for Levin. When no contact was made we returned to the C.P. to find him hysterical. He had accosted two men, queried them and was fired upon. Bayne fell. The four of us left and resumed the patrol past the backyards. Further on as we ascended a small hill a machine gun opened up on us. The tracers seemed to part my hair. Belcher, the lead man, miraculously was not hit. I rolled down the hill dropping my rifle. Unarmed, I realized that to return through this enemy infested area I'd need a weapon. Scrambling out into the open under a shining moon I grabbed my rifle and scurried back to a path. With all the commotion, the Germans aware of the layout and disposition of their troops realized we must be Americans. They proceeded to barrage the area with mortar fire. With no helmet, I dug my head into the roadbed. When things quieted I slithered back to the company. The next morning I went down the road and found Bayne's body in a hole. Took one of his dog tags and put the other in his mouth. There was a small hole in the back of his neck but his face was blown off.

Still in Berg En Dal while on a meandering search for food I came upon a convent. The nuns were overjoyed. Some spoke English and supplied me with sandwiches. They curiously observed my dirty uniform and wanted to examine my helmet. I had glued some risqué photos on the liner so I politely demurred. Approaching another elegant home I came upon about 5 people sitting at a table on the lawn. All they had to eat was some mashed potatoes. I didn't have the nerve to accept any food. They were gracious but anxious; not sure of my intentions. Another day roaming on the flats I came upon a bombed out church furnished with cots for the sick. Further on I approached a ditch where the bodies of three I Company men laid; probably the remnants of an ambushed patrol. Their boots had been confiscated. A day or so later that Company attacked in force but was repulsed.

On 9/23/44 the Third Battalion attacked Thorensche Molen with G Company in the anchor position. Three tanks from the Sherwood Rangers supported us. Starting out with exhortations of "spread out".

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Most huddled behind the tanks. For a spectator it must have been an impressive sight. The tanks spurting lead, tracers firing up the stacked corn stalks, wild animals fleeing across the fields. A Dutch farmer and his wife walking along the approach to the dike tried to appear unconcerned. At the dike the tankers machine-gunned the dug in Germans burying them in their holes. On the point Jeffers was busy shooting and bayoneting. A hand grenade was dropped into a hole. The German jumped out seemingly in good shape. The enemy put the old men out front and counter attacked with paratroopers. We in turn received so much fire that the attack was stalled.

A prisoner was lying on the ground. Looting him I took his watch. He pointed toward his pocket. Thinking he was asking for his watch I gave him a kick and a curse. When the watch ran down I realized it was key operated and he wanted to give me the key. Another trooper and I were sitting by the dike. A prisoner walked by hands clasped on his head heading for the rear. My fellow trooper raised his rifle to shoot him. I said why not let him go he's happy. He lowered his rifle. Life was cheap.

The siege continued for two days. In the afternoon during a lull Tribulowski, Como, Lamoureux and I were lying in a ditch, half-asleep from fatigue. Periodically a round would land nearby. I decided to find the source. Crawling back along the dike for about 50 feet I climbed a small tree. At a nearby dike I observed an English weapons carrier. Thinking that was the German's target I returned to our position and came upon the dead First Sergeant and Communications Sergeant. I took Trib's pistol and Tommy gun. Unfortunately he had a bad case of combat exhaustion and was slated for evacuation. Many years later at a reunion I was informed that a buddy of mine in the 81 Mortar platoon was firing with improper increments. We were the inadvertent recipients. The operations sergeant was wounded out. Nobody else around I inherited his job. I never did much operating but took over the Company's journal from LT. Sunday in December.

The attack continued. Wilde laid on the ground smoking cigarettes. Through his radio operator he called back to our 3rd Platoon to come forward and help. It was a disheartening sight to see the men turn back from the hostile fire. One English tank was disabled. The crew sat alongside in a ditch brewing tea. They loved American cigarettes. A B.A.R. man on the dike poured fire on the Germans and good old Sergeant Sirovica kept urging his men forward. We were hit by fire on our left. The position was untenable and the order was finally given to pull back. Three or four wounded men were lying around. Among them, Ludemann who was big and looked like he was dying. I picked up Belcher, shot in the chest and dripping blood through his overcoat, and carried him back as far as I could. Our medics cared for him.

Kolterman and I in our hole took turns on guard. One hour off and one hour on. No operating pocket watch, a long cold night. Everyone awake at dawn when we anticipate an attack. No further action, a 504 Company relieved us.

We were in reserve and moving about the area south of the river. Occasionally a German observation plane would fly over but was quickly chased by Spitfires. One evening in reserve we dug in alongside an English artillery piece. They sporadically fired some rounds. Eventually the Germans pinpointed them and blasted the area. Kolterman and I had a small hole but as the shelling continued down we went. Kolterman's comical remarks relieved the tension. Morning revealed the gun and its operators obliterated. A few of our men also were missing. Levin assigned himself to the baggage detail. Unfortunately he was killed in a jump plane accident in the Spring of 1945.

The Nijmegen Bridge having been take by the 504 and 505 regiments the 508 was trucked to Bemmel north of the river. A static situation developed with a wide no man's land separating the foes. Occasionally artillery fire would be exchanged but fear of exposing one's position limited the action. During this period I went out on about four two-man patrols. We hunched low crawling along the ditches avoiding the rotting dead cows. At times the Germans would send up flares. The proper action was to freeze but precaution prescribed dropping to the ground. One eerie time way out on our front I heard sounds like raindrops hitting canvas. Then realization came. The English far in the rear were sending heavy machine gun fire high into the air. Time to beat a hasty retreat. Returning to our lines was often the most hazardous segment. We whispered the often obsolete password to alert our outposts. The safest method was to sound off "G Company" and use slang.

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Once our C.P. was in a garage. A few of us were sitting around idly scratching. I was cleaning my tommy gun and pistol preparing for a night patrol. Rounds were coming in. Wilde said, "I think they have spotted us, let's clear out". We repaired to our holes. Shortly after a round slammed into the roof and blew to pieces some tar cans. My pistol was demolished, as was the stock of the tommy gun. Detachable, it was still serviceable. One trooper stayed dozing in the hut. He received several leg wounds and was evacuated.

An unusual sight was two of the enemy with a stretcher and white flag searching between the lines for their casualties. No firing, very quiet, but many hostile observers. While changing positions moving at night we were advised to be alert because we might be passing through German lines. My gun was on fire position. Arriving at our destination while unshouldering it I inadvertently pressed the trigger letting off a few rounds against the wall. I checked the other side, nobody hurt. Thank God.

Later we moved to a schoolhouse in Nijmegen. All the water pipes were burst. Supplied with 5-gallon cans of nonalcoholic beer, forget it. During this respite we were given a small advance on our pay to spend; in a bombed out city? This was the first money we had received since August in Wollaton Park.

During the campaign G Company had received only a few replacements. Consequently we were inoperable as an actionable unit. Finally relieved we marched over 20 miles to the rear unhappily discarding loot. At night we set up pup tents and shivered the dark hours away.

Here and There

Sergeant Stanley Stevens was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions attacking the bridge. He was ambushed and killed on 9/21/44

Robert Vesey, an Air Force mechanic, came to visit his friend, Merl Beach. We were preparing to go to the airport. He wanted to see some action. Come with us. His first jump was Holland and he was KIA shortly thereafter. Beach was KIA in Korea.

Military disciplinarians would have been shocked to observe PFC Swint. (Ozark Ike) standing over a foxhole berating its cowering occupant, a lieutenant.

Once our supply line was cut off. Too bad. Our C and K rations were supplemented from overrun German dumps. Some were passable including Dutch cigars. Since this was an English operation we were supplied with their rations, packaged as 14 in one (for 14 men). No coffee but powdered tea. The Treacle pudding was delicious. Also received a rum ration, a thick black liquor, very strong.

On another occasion we had a dead replacement on hand. Ordered to move out and cut off. The only option was to bury him. A few of us dug a hole. From the nearby chateau a priest came over, said a prayer and he was laid to rest.

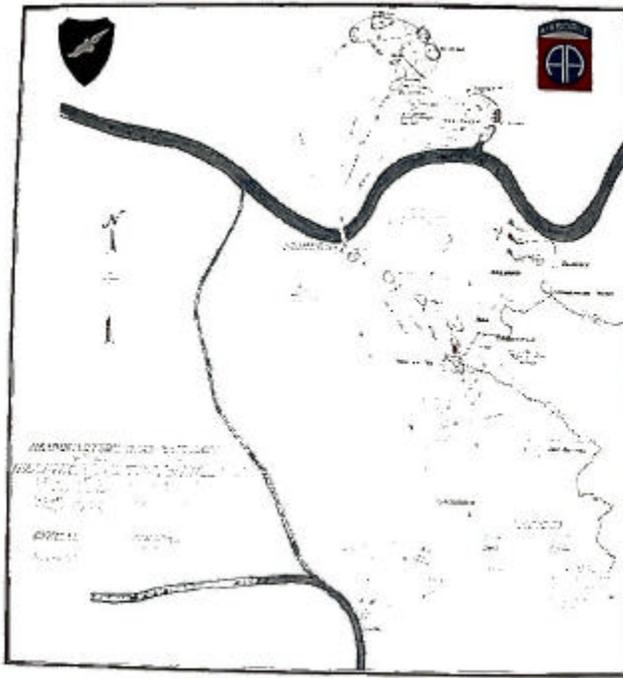
Wilde told me he put me in for the Bronze Star. Never Awarded. My relation with Battalion Headquarters was not the best.

In Sissone we received the balance of our back pay. Going on Guard Duty I left it in my fatigue shirt pocket. Upon returning the pay was AWOL. Hard to come by, easy go.

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Prelude to the Bulge Operation



The 508 Parachute Infantry regiment was attached to the 82nd Airborne Division. It consisted of 3 Battalions and a headquarters company, medical, and service units.

The Third Battalion had 3 rifle companies, G, H, and I, 81-mm mortar and light machine gun platoons, an S 2 section and a medical detachment.

Initially the G Company table of organization was 119 enlisted men and 8 officers broken down into 3 platoons and a headquarters section. Team weapons were six light machine guns, three 60-mm mortars, bazookas, and Browning automatic rifles.

In Holland our First and Communications Sergeants had been killed and the Operations Sergeant wounded out by a wayward 81-mm mortar round. Later learned that it was

“friendly fire”. By default I became Operations Sergeant. Took over maintaining the company journal. This was the extent of my leadership.

The Holland Campaign (AKA Rhineland) ended November 11, 1944. We tramped over 20 miles to a railroad siding. Then on to Camp Sissone, formerly French barracks near Reims. When occupied by the Germans the walls were emblazed “Glory in Death for the Fatherland”. Food was terrible-so many troops on the line.

12/17 - Sunday Evening: My buddy, Tommy Gallagher and I went into town for food and drink. Around midnight everyone was ordered back to camp. I fell into my bunk.

All the lights were turned on. Company Commander Wilde announced that the Germans are attacking and we are ordered to Belgium. The hospitals were cleared out and men returned we hadn't seen since Normandy.

Back in Action

12/18 - That morning red faced Gallagher came to see me off. Gave him money and other valuables. He had broken his ankle on a night jump. It never healed properly and he was assigned to Regimental Service Company. We were loaded onto open trucks and departed about 1 PM.

12/19 - Early the next morning we arrived, cold and miserable at Werbomont, Belgium on the north rim of the “Bulge”. Status report: 9 Officers, 126 enlisted men, 3 medics and one Dutch volunteer.

Wilde says, “Ask that Colonel where's the war's at.” He said “right here, dismount.” We were issued overshoes and marched to Oufny.

I later learned that General Gavin had led the 82nd Division truck convoy followed by the 101st Airborne which turned south to Bastogne. It was immediately engaged.

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12/21 - The 508 debouched southeast. Marching again at night G Company arrived at Thier Du Mont, high ground overlooking Salm Chateau. We were set up on the top of the hill. At night in the distant south the lights from German vehicles could be observed surging westward through Houffalise just north of Bastogne

A bedraggled Major stumbled upon us sitting around a fire. He demanded, "Who's in Charge?" "The Captain." "Where is he?" "Chopping wood for our fire." Nonplussed, he shuffled off fleeing westward.

On another occasion a local farmer was roaming south and east along our front. Wilde said to me " Kissane, you know French, find out what's his game."

Proffering my schoolboy French I proceeded in halting words to question him. He unleashed a torrent of gibberish. I went back to Wilde and weaseled. "He doesn't understand me." I was vehemently blasphemed.

The enemy was also streaming westward on our left. Montgomery ordered the 82nd to withdraw lest it is cutoff.

12/25 - Some 508 Companies were fighting rearguard actions. That evening G Company pulled back to Erria, a small crossroads town. Residents were ordered to the rear using carts or sleds. An old man was left to die in one of the houses.

12/26 - Set up around the town in defensive positions. Occasional incoming artillery, source unknown. Celebrated Christmas, rum ration, cold inedible turkey dinners.

Groping for food in a cellar, I fell into a floor level well. Soaked up to my waist. Good, I'll lay by the fireplace and dry out.

Waking up I looked up at a big German standing over me, his bleeding hand dripping into his helmet. He'd lost a few fingers. Two Germans caught probing our lines seeking a way through. They were escorted back to Battalion. (I hope they got there).

About midnight the First Battalion, 19th Panzer Regiment, hit us. The house was on fire-much confusion. I joined First Platoon in the field behind the C.P. The enemy was probing on our left. The Second and Third Platoon and a Battalion machine gun section directed fire to the left. (Jim Convy was with the machine gun section).

The Germans were calling out their squad members' names trying to get coordination. We were firing blind just at the voices.

Running low on ammo, I went back to our dump. A German plane flew over spraying the ground-no damage. Brought back machine gun ammo. Too cold to put in M1 clips. No Tracer ammo used. A Lieutenant was trying to fire a 60 mm mortar. No luck-the firing pin was either iced over or broken.

The attack was contained.

Counterattack-Lt. Pollette (a real hero, killed a week later) brandishing his M1 led E Company in the charge. At 0400 hour the town was cleared.

12/27 - At dawn - cleanup - over 100 dead enemy in the Company area. A Trooper with a Tommy gun was putting the dying Germans out of their misery. He started to shoot one then hesitated. I passed by. He opened fire missing my leg by an inch. Cursed him.

As I stacked some rifles one went off - too much. I repaired to the cow barn-body heat at least.

JOSEPH M. KISSANE

WW2 MEMOIRS

It was reported that mustard gas grenades were found on some enemy. The Company immediately was issued gas masks and Concertina wire spread across our front. Amazing how efficient the military command can be.

12/28 - A U.S. Army Photo depicts Gen. Gavin visiting the battle scene, rifle in hand.

Trucks quietly drove into the center of the town and hauled away the frozen SS cadavers, mostly teenagers too small for their uniforms.

Receiving artillery fire believed to be our short rounds.

The Big Picture Central Europe Campaign

(The fourth for the 508)

1/3 - Offensive to connect with Patton and close the Bulge.

1/5 - G Company to retake positions previously held atop Thier Du Mont. Moved to wooded area at Les Avenaterre's. From there relocated to another forest area. Very cold, snowing. Six men together each rolled in his blanket. Received 23 replacements. Rude awakening-from stateside luxury to bitter weather and an ominous baptism of fire in store for them.

1/6 - Company left rear assembly area by foot in the afternoon. Arrived at the east slope of Heid de Heirlot.

1/7 - Captain Wilde was called to Battalion at 0030 hour. Company alerted to attack at 0345. General plan 508 to attack Thier Du Mont with 4 tank destroyers which were delayed. Passed through Arbrefontaine and Menil smoking from shelling by our heavy guns.

On high ground 200 yards from the line of departure Battalion S2 section scouts captured two Germans. Claimed they were lost. It was suggested "Shoot one, and the other's memory will be refreshed. Unthinkable for our West Point Battalion Commander Wilde volunteered G Company to lead the attack.

Started out off to our left a person was observed crawling along a tree line. Three of us fired. No further movement. Later ascertained that this could have been a 325 glider Infantryman. Received 88 fire-It knocked the head off one of our men. A few steps and he went down. Out of the fog, smoke, noise, and snow. A buttoned up Tiger Tank roared past the line of attack. Hindsight deems it was more disconcerted then we were.

Two medics were treating the First Platoon leader, leg off.

Regrouped, still receiving heavy fire.

A German officer and a few of his men came out of dugouts on Thier Del Preux hands held high. One of our very hungry sergeants snatched the officer's watch, much to Nazi consternation. We approached Thier Du Mont believing the worst was over.

Climbing the hill receiving 88 fire Sergeant Serovica yelled, "Forward or we'll all be killed." (He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his gallantry.)

At the top of the hill an 88 fired twice point blank, each round knocked down about 6 men. The trooper immediately in front of me flipped over his machine gun and fired.

JOSEPH M. KISSANE

WW2 MEMOIRS

Wilde pointed at the gun yelling, "Hit it". Another trooper ran up with a bazooka and got off a round, which skidded along the ground towards the 88. This combination of fire wiped out the 88 and we completed the charge passing the burned out gun and it's crew.

We reached our objectives with 62 men and 3 officers at 1400 hours.

That night with no blankets we lay in the snow freezing. I sweated through long johns, wool shirts, sweaters and overcoat. The perspiration turned to ice. We were visited by Protestant Chaplain Elder, a very sincere person. My pal Don Jensen, from the Battalion S2 section came looking for me.

A day or so later a newspaper reporter interviewed Wilde at the scene.

1/11 - Entrucked to rest area at Chevron

1/21 - Transported to Deidenberg

1/25 - The 508 is in the XVIII Corps. Consisting of the 1st, 30th, 82nd Airborne and 84 Divisions. The 82nd is to operate as regular infantry troops-objective: Berlin.

1/29 - At 0700 hours moved out. Order rescinded. Again moved at 1500 hours. Took up positions on hill overlooking Holzheim (C Company First Sergeant Funk, the most decorated WWII paratrooper earned the Congressional Medal of Honor for his capture of this town).

1/30 - Approach march to our objective-Lanzerath- the next town. Plan was to attack at dawn. Order received to jump off at 1340 hour. Over 600 yards of open snow covered ground. No cover. Men tired.

At 1530 hour Lanzerath was cleared, 10 prisoners.

Went into position at northeast part of town.

1/31 - 0700 hour assembled at road junction. Received artillery and machine gun fire from outskirts of town. Passing over our heads it was hitting the burgomaster's house appropriated by regimental headquarters staff. Some casualties-too bad.

Many evacuated-frostbite and trench foot.

2/1 - Issued shoepacs, white capes, and mittens.

Status report: 35 enlisted men, 3 officers, and 3 medics.

2/4 - One officer and 5 enlisted men join company.

2/9 - Boarded trucks for Brandenburg. Arrived at 1300 hours. Raining, Platoons quartered in cellars of bombed out houses.

2/10 - Moved out at 0800 hour. Raining. Many dead horses. Arrived at Mausbach overlooking the Ruhr Valley.

2/11 - First good night sleep in days. Issued 10 in 1 and PX rations, bedrolls brought up. 16 reinforcements received.

2/12 - Hot chow- cleaning weapons and ourselves. 2 replacements added to roster.

2/18 - Trucked to Lindenbush

2/19 - Waiting for train to take us to base camp at Sissone.

Turned in company jeep, crew served weapons and excess grenades and ammo.

2/20 - Left Lindenbush by truck for Aachen RR Station. Boarded freight trains. 20 men to a car.

2/21 - Arrived at St. Erme. Entrucked for Sissone

JOSEPH M. KISSANE

WW2 MEMOIRS

4/4 - Detached from 82nd Airborne. Moved to airfield at Dreux near Chartres and Paris.

5/7 - Alerted for jump to liberate prisoner of war camps.

5/8 - VE Day

6/10 - Arrived Frankfurt AM Main. Eisenhower's honor guard. Parades