

TWO SHORT STORIES

By D. Zane Schlemmer

1 - The Unburied Dead

Not all the dead were buried during the winter of '44-45. The frozen bodies of animals, and even men--those men belonging to the army of the other side -- were left unburied until the spring thaw. One particular unburied German often disturbs my memory.

Three demolitionists -- Howard Brooks, George Brand and I -- were assigned to a bridge over a railroad, near the German town of Losheim (see map next page). This was an advance outpost between the American and German lines. Our troops had fought their way to this point, set up the outpost, and then pulled back to a more strategic defensive position. Our mission was to blow up the bridge, if and when German tanks or other enemy vehicles approached.

Quite a few frozen bodies of German soldiers lay near our position. One body was in the middle of the road between the bridge and a nearby house we were using. We had to be on watch day and night, so we took turns, among the three of us, two hours at the bridge and four hours off around the clock. When we were off duty at the bridge, we would go to the house where we would eat, sleep and try to keep warm. We kept stumbling over the body of the German soldier in the road, especially at night. After falling over the corpse one night, I decided the body needed to be moved.

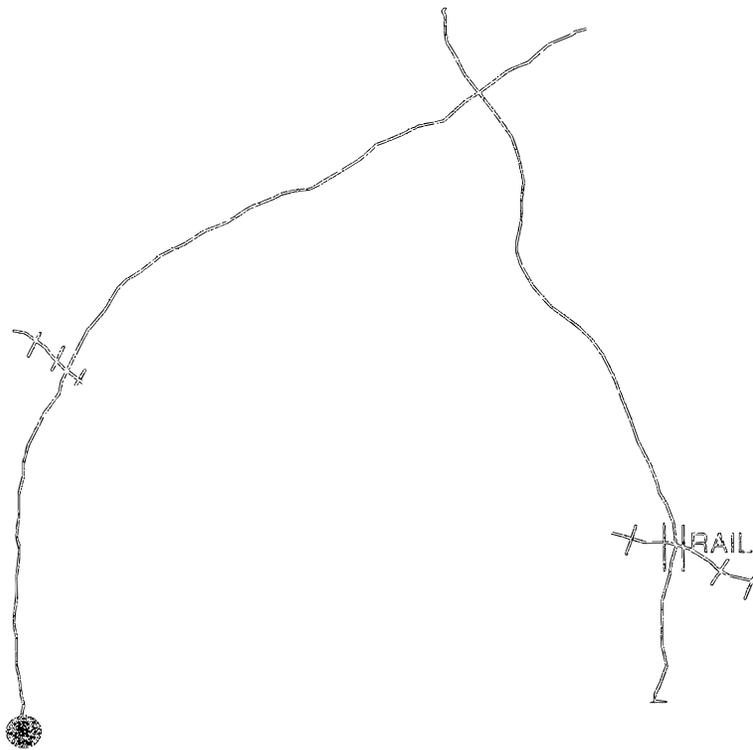
The next morning I rolled it (I know now to call a dead body "it," but then I thought of it as "him"). I rolled him out of the road as one would roll a log. We had been warned in training about looting enemy dead, because the Germans sometimes booby-trapped bodies. I figured, however, that this body would have already exploded if it had been booby trapped. In spite of the risk, I took out his wallet for a look. In the wallet were photos--a beautiful young woman, a blonde like (my wife) Mary. I wondered, "Is she his sweetheart or wife?" I imagined that she was his wife, and that maybe she had a wee baby, perhaps born since he had been away at the front. Like me, he could have been the father of a child he had never seen. Then there was an older couple among his snapshots. "Could they be his parents?" I mused. I pictured them at home following the war on the radio and in the newspapers, worrying about the safety of their soldier son. They would soon receive a message from their government, WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON _____ IS MISSING IN ACTION ON THE WESTERN FRONT. I carefully replaced the photos and the wallet on the body and silently prayed that someday the soldier's family would receive the personal effects of their fallen loved one.

2 - Adolph

Near the railroad overpass where Brooks, Brand and I were posted, I found my cold weather sleeping partner. I was a sergeant in the 81mm Mortar Platoon of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and usually served as a forward observer for the mortar crews. I advanced with forward elements of the 2nd Battalion, staying on the lookout for a suitable OP (Observation Post). About 1/2 kilometer from our bridge, I came across a deep

railroad cut with lots of dead Germans who had been ambushed by our troops. I also found a long haired white German dog running around disoriented. When I offered the dog K Rations, the dog calmed down and became my friend. I named him "Adolph." Adolph stayed with the mortar platoon during the day. George Fairman and Irv Shanley fed and cared for Adolph while I was at my OP. I had found a hunters' lookout tower for my OP, from which I had a good view of the forward terrain, including the dragon's teeth of the Siegfried Line. At night I came back to the Mortar Platoon area and slept with Adolph. Adolph was a good heater for cold nights.

When returning to my platoon area one evening, I met an irate officer. The officer explained to me that he was squatting over a slit trench (latrine) and had taken his toilet paper from his helmet (a good dry place for storing toilet paper), and laid it nearby ready to use when needed. Adolph, in the meantime, stole the officer's precious toilet paper and ran off with it. To pay for Adolph's mischief, I re-supplied the officer from my own helmet.



LANZERATH

About where Adolph was found

ROAD OVERPASS

● LOSHEIM