

## Chapter 5: New Year's Eve 1944-5

Task Force Hudelson was part of the plan to hold the area from Bitche south to Falkenstein. This area was on the boundary of operations to the east of Task Force Hudelson and west of the Sixth Corps, and also on the left boundary of the Forty-Fifth Division. On our immediate left in the Fifteenth Corps area were our old friends, the One-Hundredth Division, still commanded by General Brooks.

The movement toward and into the Maginot Line, facing the Siegfried Line, was being carried out with a force that had to hold the area with a prayer. As you will remember, in World War II the Germans had launched a very severe counter-attack in the Ardennes section, just northwest of our current position. It was a very effective counter-attack, and it required that proper attention be paid to it by the higher command. So, as a consequence, forces were moved from the southeast of the battle line over toward the northwest, thus weakening the positions in Alsace. The intelligence that the Germans might put on a strong attack in Alsace was pretty good, and as a matter of fact, the intelligence reports, as they proved out, were very, very accurate indeed. There was no question that the divisions and the American Army fighting in the extended positions of Strasbourg, up the Rhine River, into the area were exposed to a major threat as far as the damage to their forces and possible destruction by a pincer movement by the Germans out of the Black Forest. Most of us knew this, and therefore we were walking on thin ice.

It was remarkably quiet in the area along that front, from about the fifth of December to New Year's Eve, 1944-5. It was at this time, during this period, that one recognized the value of combat experience and the ability of the staff of a corps or division to disseminate the required information to their forward troops, as well as knowing how to do it, effectively doing it, and warning and keeping posted those commanders who were sitting on the hot spots on the front. We received very little information from Sixth Corps headquarters, now under General Brooks. During that whole time we were on the Siegfried Line, awaiting that famous New Year's Eve, we did not see any member of the Sixth Corps staff in our area. We were in a very exposed area, in the hilly mountains and forests in the middle of winter.

An evidence of my criticism of their lack of planning or their careless planning was that on one day—it was around December 25—one of my staff came in and said, "Do you know the engineers are laying a minefield behind us?"

And I said, "You must be joking. We've heard nothing of any minefields being laid, but we would like to have some in front of

us."

We went out to see them, and they had their orders sure enough, to lay these minefields right behind us, without even giving us the plan of the minefield. If that had been done without our knowledge or with our having to come upon them, it could have been a fantastically bad error. We could not change their orders, but we did get the plan of the minefield, in case we would have to fight a delaying action, which we ultimately did. The criticism pointed out here is one that is valid. But it is also an evidence, and again, I emphasize of the lack of experience of the corps commanders and division commanders to insure that the units with which they were serving or that they were commanding be advised of every detail, well-planned, well in advance, and brought into the complete picture, which, in this case, Sixth Corps headquarters did not do. This was a far cry from General Truscott's operation or General Jeffrey Keyes' operations.

On our immediate right was part of the Hudelson Task Force, which was holding a line with a prayer, as we were, and we had arranged for contact patrols, laterally and constantly, because there was not much doubt in our mind that we were going to receive an attack. We believed the attack probably would have as its main objective the taking of Saverne Gap, along with the destruction of the American forces, which could have been trapped. No effort of magnitude in the Second World War could go completely smoothly, but as I have mentioned to you before in this writing, it doesn't take long to look at a unit and find out what kind of unit it is. One look at their equipment, one look at their attitude, one look at the look in their eyes, and you won't be far from your first judgment.

In this particular period, there were numerous green units, and, as I said before, there is absolutely no substitute for combat experience. One has to get it at times, and you can be sure that the first time you get it, you're not going to act so well under fire. But as you progress, get experience, and under the proper command liaison, you pick up to where you're a stalwart unit, providing the command has the heart. I repeat, if Truscott still had been commanding the Sixth Corps, he would have been up front with us, planning carefully, asking careful questions, explaining what he thought and what might happen. This is one of the characteristics of a good leader, and under the new commanding elements of the Sixth Corps, we had none of that.

Now a little human interest incident, which took place at about 11:00 a.m., December 25, 1944, Christmas Day. I was asked by General Brooks to come up for a little Christmas drink. This was only about two miles back, and I went because I admired Gen. Brooks, and I personally liked him very much. During the course of a drink of bourbon, he had a new artillery commander, in the

little hut where we were sitting, and his name was General Jack Murphy, whom I had known as Col. Murphy at Fort Knox at-the Armored Force School and had liked him very much.

When we had our hors d'oeuvres on that Christmas Day, Murphy said with a laugh, "I must have ulcers. I just can't eat anything. I hardly can get this drink down."

So Gen. Brooks looked at me, and I looked at him, and he said, "Charlie, why don't you tell him what's the matter with him."

I said, "General, I'm not his rank. I can't tell him that. You'd better tell him."

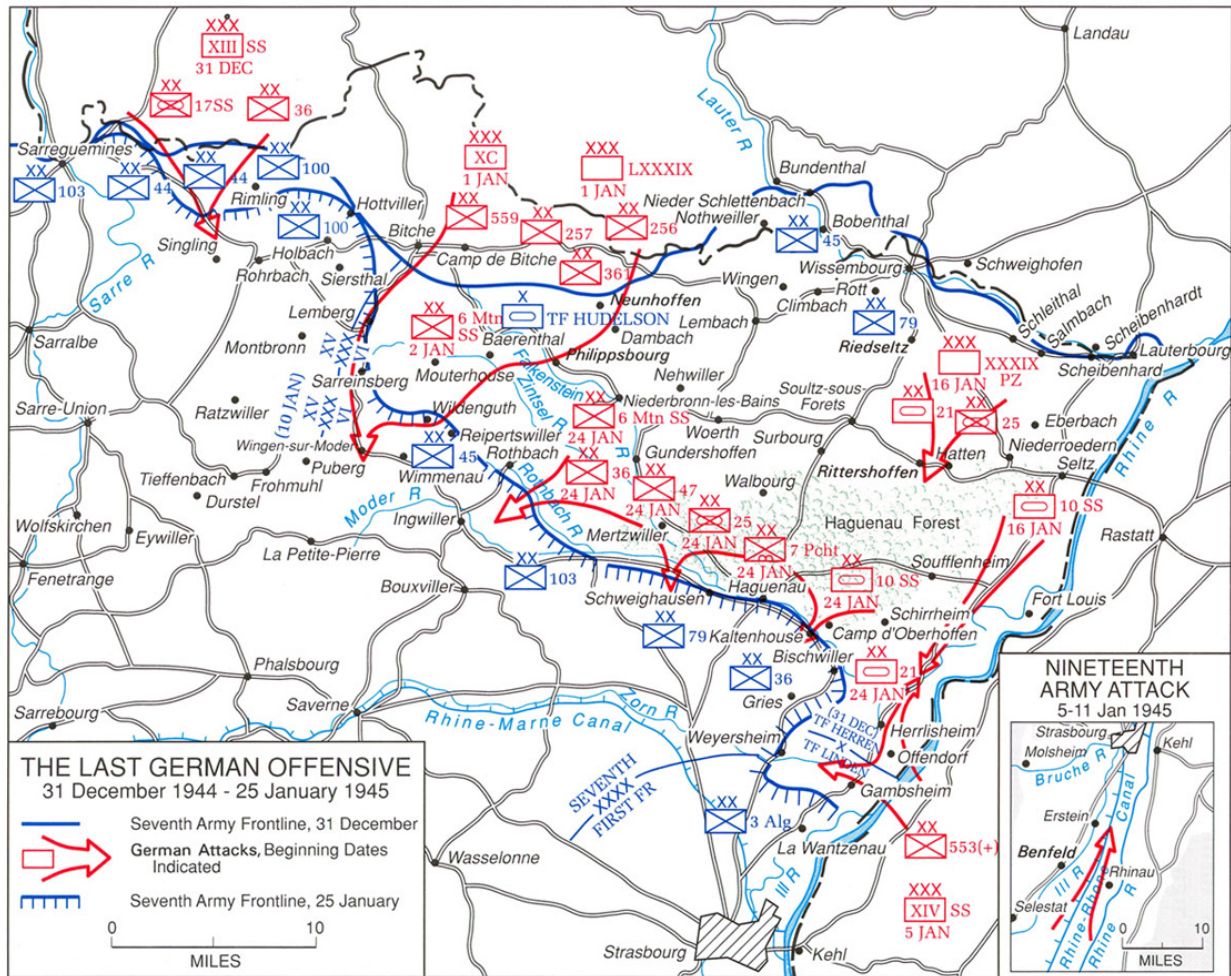
He said, "No, you tell him."

I said, "It's going to be very embarrassing."

Pinky said, "Go ahead and tell him."

I General Murphy, you're going through the same thing all of us are going through. You're so scared that your stomach won't accept any food. And that's the honest truth."

General Brooks started to laugh, and I couldn't help but to laugh, because I think all of us, upon our first, real baptism of severe combat, don't feel like eating much. At any rate, at the Christmas Day gathering, I might say that our hors d'oeuvres were some hardtack and some K-ration cheese. Please don't get the idea that we had very fancy hors d'oeuvres. As a matter of fact, they were hard to swallow.



MAP 34

At this little meeting, General Brooks said, "What do you think?"

I said, "Frankly, General, we know there is something going on; you must have known it up here, because we are being checked every night by patrol and we are being checked by (what we called) "Bed Time Charlie" (which was a German airplane flying completely without lights, but with an infra-red camera taking pictures). They're not doing this for nothing."

"I would think that somewhere along the line we are going to get hit, and get hit hard, and we are holding this with a prayer. I'm covering what a division would have to cover in depth."

He said, "I know it, and that is what worries me. How is Task Force Hudelson?"

I had to respond by saying, "They are completely inexperienced. I can guarantee you that if we have to pull back, I will advise you of it, because you know the understanding is that if we have to pull back, we do it by fighting a delaying

action, giving everybody a chance to get back to a consolidated position. I'm sure that you would do the same for me."

Then I said, "I do not have the confidence, again, in Hudelson's Task Force, because they do not have the experience. If they get hit hard, they're just liable to take off, and we'll be out there in the breeze all by ourselves."

New Year's Eve, '44-5, in that particular area, I would like to describe to you. It was a bright, moonlit night with snow on the ground, and the forests were beautiful. The moon on the snow, with the machines of war strung along our line, provided quite a contrast.

I thought to myself, "Let's see, the first New Year's Eve, I was in a ship going through the Straits of Gibraltar, (under attack). The second New Year's Eve, I was on the Plains of Morocco, on the way to Marrakech, eating C-rations. This New Year's Eve, I am in what could be a beautiful setting, except for the extravagances of war sitting right at our shoulder."

While we sensed an impending attack—and after experience, you get that kind of a feeling—we did not know what the big picture was, as far as the capabilities of the enemy were concerned. We did know that the particular point of the line where we were was the thinnest by far from the front extending from the Ardennes all the way down to the (Colmar) pocket. We were holding, as I said, with a prayer and a fervent wish that we would not get what could be a savage attack.

I remember we were in the little town of Mouterhouse, which as almost directly south of Bitche. We were in a very small little inn, as my headquarters, right in the middle of the thing, and the inn contained, I suppose, three or four rooms, and we could operate in there with blackout protection. To celebrate this particular New Year's Eve, there was a friendly game of poker to pass the time. The game had started about 10 or 10:30. No real money actually changed hands during these games. It was purely an exercise in passing time while you were waiting.

I shall never forget that exactly at midnight, I had just picked up my hand, and I had two aces and some other small cards, when the first shell came in. It wasn't long before the second shell came in. At that time I quietly got up and put my steel helmet on.

I will never forget Major Brown saying to the rest of them, "If the Old Man is putting on his steel helmet, something is coming, and I'd suggest we all put them on and get out of here because something is going to hit real soon."

And it sure did. That New Year's Eve, the Germans launched a very strong offensive, and their main effort was right through the middle of the weakest of the line, which was ourselves and Task Force Hudelson.

As I said, we had no reserve; we were strung thinly along

the whole line, and what we had kept in our reserve were our self-propelled artillery to move to and on targets of opportunity as they might appear or as we might need them. Because of the thinness of the line, we had built up a series of strong points, each hopefully and supposedly covering the other so that any attacking force would get flanking fire into it. This would give the chance to have one strong point leap-frog and another point in a delaying action, which we thought we would probably have to do. At this point, I hope you remember that we had the pleasant thought that minefields had been laid behind us, and the Germans were attacking in force on our front. It was a very uncomfortable feeling.

At this point, the operations officer said—and this was at about two in the morning on January 1, 1945— “We have been unable to maintain contact with Task Force Hudelson on our right. We are in contact with the One Hundredth Division on our left, and the liaison is working smoothly. But no patrol is coming out of Task Force Hudelson to the meeting point.”

We immediately tried to contact Task Force Hudelson, but to no avail. In the meantime, the main effort of the attack was gaining momentum. To explain to you in detail this particular engagement is almost impossible, but the savagery with which the Germans were attacking led us to believe—and I still believe this is right—that some of the SS Troopers who were in the attacking group were all hopped up and, as a matter of fact, were shooting our wounded.

We held, and it was like one of the old moving pictures—Civil War days—when bodies were piled up in front of us, our machine gun barrels were melting, our tanks were sniping with 75 mm, and 76 mm, and the Germans had 88s in the forest. I was you would call a real good, old-fashioned Donny Brook. We were trying desperately to take prisoners—take them alive and unbounded—so that we could identify them and therefore identify what other units were coming to the line and get the information back to higher headquarters as fast as possible. If you can get identification, you can build up a pretty good order of battle of the enemy. Unfortunately, word spread along the line that there were SS troops in the main attack—you could almost call it a “shock attack”—and that they were all hopped up and were shooting our prisoners. This didn't take any official messages; it just passed by word of mouth, and all the soldiers knew it.

This made it very difficult to get any Germans alive that night. I'm not going to go into this much further, but the American soldier can get savage too. At this point, Operations reported that instead of meeting the Hudelson Task Force patrols coming to the appointed area, we now had German armor patrols patrolling us, and there was no evidence of Task Force Hudelson headquarters at all, except that they were not in the position

they had bean in at midnight, New Year's Eve.

This is another horrible example of untrained, undisciplined troops. One of the inexcusable sins of a unit on your right or left is for that unit to pull out without advising you he had to retreat. This is what they did, and my feelings are still very bitter on it. We were in close contact with the One Hundredth Division, by now a seasoned unit, and their staff was functioning properly. We had excellent, liaison with them, and it became obvious that we were going to be cut off completely if we did not go into the delaying action plan. Gen. Brooks agreed, and we started to fight a delaying action. But before I leave that, I must mention that the casualties of the Germans were great. Ours were bad, but nowhere near the fantastic piling up of Germans—mounds of human dead on the snowy slopes of that forest.

We quite naturally had some of our troops cut off, and one was a platoon of Troop A, commanded by Lt. Christian Gauss. Chris Gauss was an officer of great heart, but older than he should have been as a combat lieutenant. He was, however, a strong character and even with the limited experience which he had, he got most of that platoon out of a mess that night. Like so many actions in combat, it was Gauss who did it himself by his personal courage and coolness.

When we had gotten back to our first delaying position through the minefields and had started to move the men back leap-frog by leap-frog. I picked an officer who, in my opinion, was one fine officers I served with. His name was Capt. Zecca.

I said, "Zecca, we know that the headquarters of Task Force Hudelson has just vanished into thin air. I want you to go with me—just you and I—and we will take a jeep and hope that we can work up to where they were, and see whet we can find. We have to know what goes on up there. There's no way anybody can do it but myself, and I want you to go with me. Will you go?"

He said, "Yes, Sir."

We took off and drove in the wee hours of the morning up little uncharted roads until we got to where Task Force Hudelson had been. In the meantime, we heard the movement of German armor, and we wanted to evade them. As we looked into the window of the little hut we saw an American soldier, with the field phone and it was a very sorry sight. He had been slaughtered.

At that point, there was no question that part of Task Force Hudelson had given way, and God knows where they were. I don't know to this day where they went. So you can read into my remarks an unpleasant surprise as well as well as an unpleasant feeling.

At that point I had been overseas since September, 1942, and a good deal of the time had been spent in combat. If you are overseas that long, you normally are given a thirty-day period of rest and recuperation stateside. I received my orders on-

Christmas Day to proceed to a departure point where I would be sent home for thirty days of R-and-R. I think you can imagine how I felt when I had the orders in my pocket during this very difficult New Year's Eve, especially when the chances were somewhat more than even that I would not make it. The chances were the same for anyone else, but it gave me a funny feeling to have the orders in my pocket to go home and see my family and to know that I was in a real vicious position.

We finally were relieved by the Eighty-Third Division and the One Hundred and Fourth Division, the two divisions that took up the area which we were holding with a minor unit. I reported to the Sixth Corp, and I told them I was leaving. Major Samsel was in command, and I hoped that no one would be put in command except Mjr. Samsel, as this unit had a long record of combat. All of us could have left with promotions, but we wanted to stay with the unit and fight it all the way to the end. I was promised by Gen. Brooks that he would not change the command, and he did not. I was asked to brief some of the units who might be called upon to enter into the counter-attack or to be reinforcements for the areas, and I did brief them. But I must say that with one of the armored divisions I briefed, I was absolutely disgusted with the morale, the condition of the equipment, the appearance of the men and even the appearance of the officers. It was a division which I am not going to mention by number [14th Armored-ed.], but I said to Samsel, "God knows, I hope that we never get mixed up with them, because they're not going to stay." It was only about two days later that they were ambushed by German armor, and I think they lost thirty tanks within three hours, all through lack of intelligence and lack of knowledge of how to handle themselves under surprising circumstances.

One or two incidents-before I leave that famous New Year's Eve.

Our headquarters was the last unit to move out of Mouterhouse. If you remember, I had said that we were leap-frogging one another back, and we wanted to be sure that communications were working, especially communications-from our forward observers who were with us to the self-propelled artillery which we had back a mile. We had to be sure we had communications so we could effectively destroy by artillery some of the forces which were breaking through.

The incident to which I was referring a moment ago happened as I walked out of the little inn and was about to get into my half-track. There was a tank about fifty yards away and since it was at night, he had turned his lights on. As I was getting into the half-track, the owner of the inn, a woman of about sixty or sixty-five, was within ten yards of me and had a shotgun right on my back. When she was about to pull the trigger, the tank



commander alerted me by bellowing, "Look out, Colonel!"

I saw and took the necessary steps to prevent my being shot in the back by this German woman who really must have hated us. I suppose that as she was German and had seen her countrymen half-slaughtered that night, she was half berserk. I never heard anything more about it, so I assume that she did not survive. One of the unfortunate things of war.

Before I go onto the trip home and events which took place after that, I want to refer again to the principles involved in the training of men and the making of their capabilities to withstand the savagery.

There is an official documentation of the story just told in Volume Two of the Official Report of Operation, the Seventh US Army. This volume has quite a bit about that famous New Year's Eve. I am going to quote some of the official reports.

From page 570: "As the New Year began, the enemy Two Hundred Fifty-Sixth and Three Hundred Sixty-First Volks (Grenadier) moved southeast in a two-prong drive from Bitche without mortar or artillery preparation. The Western Column constituted the main effort. The constant pressure was maintained in the east and strong enemy infiltrations occurred there. Although the terrain was rugged, Task Force Hudelson's lines were 'paper thin.' In the center, the Ninety-Fourth Cavalry Squadron [to which the 117th Squadron was attached] was attacked shortly midnight, but the enemy withheld its strength until 0530 hours. Troops of the Reconnaissance Squadron then attempted to establish along the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal Road. However, they found the Mouterhouse-Baerenthal Road already cut by the enemy. The American lines had been overwhelmed. The enemy was everywhere. There remained only the expedient of forming small groups to effect an escape by flight."

The One Hundred Seventeenth Cavalry was not overwhelmed. They could have been, and the discovery that the Hudelson group had pulled out to our southeast was the only thing that prevented us from being annihilated. That is when, as I have said, we fought a leap-frogging delaying action back.

From page 571: "On the left flank of the Hudelson Task Force, the bulk of the One Hundred Seventeenth Cavalry had been hit hard and virtually surrounded at Mouterhouse. The situation here became obscured. Task force and corps commanders had communications with reconnaissance troops which were maintained only with the greatest difficulty."

This is the point where Hudelson's headquarters left.

"The enemy had overrun their forward positions north of Mouterhouse in the early stages of the offensive."

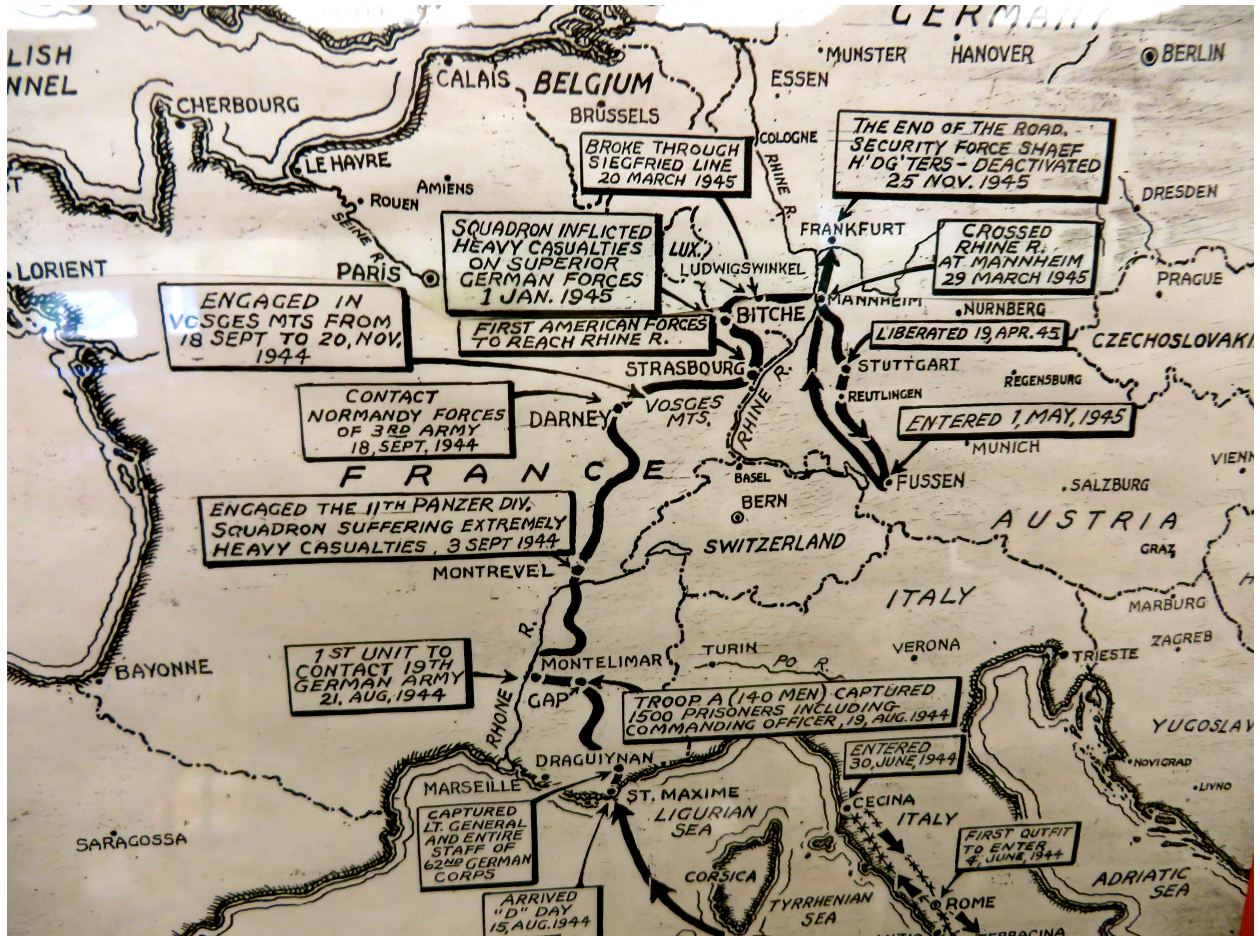
That was at midnight, January 1, 1944-5.

"Withdrawal from a second defensive line under heavy enemy pressure was accomplished during January. The Squadron Command

Post which had been in Mouterhouse was reestablished in (Winyan), and by the end of the day, the One Hundred and Seventeenth Cavalry had drawn back to final defensive positions which were maintained. On the morning of January 2, the One Hundred Seventy-Ninth Infantry was brought up and was disposed along the line already held."

I have just identified through the Operations Book of the Seventh Army that the SS Troops which participated in the New Year's Eve attack and which were so inhuman were the Sixth SS Mountain Division. The order of battle of the German posture just prior of January 1, 1945 is contained in the attached Seventh Army, G-2 estimate of the situation. There will be other documentary types of maps and charts contained in this particular operation and will be inserted at the construction of this manuscript.

As I said before, this manuscript will be documented throughout, and I hope we can contain some of the human elements.



### Miscellaneous Incidents

#1 North Africa: A friend of mine, [Lt.] Col. [Charles]

Hoy, was the commanding officer of the Reconnaissance Battalion of the First American Armored Division. This Division took a very severe lacing by Field Marshall Rommel, commanding general of the Afrika Corp. The historical result of Field Marshall Rommel's heavy attack at Kasserine Pass is well-known, and I will not go into that in detail. However, the fact of the matter was that the American Army took a drubbing there, and Rommel exploited—as he was capable of doing—the force of his own armor very successfully.

Inspecting and visiting the combat area at the time was Major Maurice Rose. Gen. Rose was going to be an armored division commander in operations which would come after North Africa, and he and some other generals were over there, getting oriented on actual combat. He happened to be in the area at the time of Kasserine Pass.

The evening after this severe defeat, in which the First Armored Division was badly mauled. Col. Hoy was sitting in a little hut, near Kasserine or Sbeitla, when Gen. Rose stopped in the hut. I believe that the reader can imagine the somewhat despondent attitude of the soldiers when they have taken a severe licking. The atmosphere permeated the entire hut and the group of officers that was there.

When Gen. Rose saw Charlie Hoy, whom, I might add, had graduated from West Point, Rose said to Hoy, "Charlie, I'm glad to see you. I haven't seen you since you were a little boy."

I believe that Col. Hoy gave a great answer in response to this greeting by Gen. Rose. He said, "Gen. Rose, I wish to Christ tonight that I was a little girl."

#2 Paris: It was arranged for me to come home by air from Paris, and indeed I was happy. You must remember that in 1945, air transportation was not as sophisticated as it is today, nor could planes be flown in all kinds of weather. We had to wait until our scheduled military airplane was all set to go. We would be notified, get to the airport, and get on. For this reason, I was delayed in Paris about eight or nine days, which days were spent having dental work done which was needed badly, or by just resting. However, there were a couple of incidents which I think were worthy of note.

The dog Sambo and I had gone down to Le Havre on a special train which carried about seven or eight hundred personnel—most of whom had been wounded—to the embarkation point, which in this case was Le Havre. When I arrived, I had a message from the Navy to call SHAEF headquarters in Paris, which I did. The connection was very poor indeed, so that it was a little difficult to get a clear-cut conversation from me or to me over the wire. However, during the course of this conversation, I had said that Sambo—and I'm sure that I inserted the words "a dog"—was with me. I finally

got the word that my quarters would be all set at the Crillon Hotel and that I should go there directly upon arrival in Paris.

When I got to Paris and the Crillon Hotel, lo and behold, I had a suite. The desk clerks told me, "You have a lovely suite."

I said, "Why do I have a suite?"

They said, "There ere two of you."

I said, "There is only one of me."

They said, "We have instructions that there are to be to of you."

Well, the story was that they had taken my naming Sambo the dog as another officer, so they gave him a room too. I think this was the first time that a dog has even been given a suite.

They had some very fine entertainers in Paris for the American forces and my favorites were Katherine Cornell and Brian O'Hearn.

They were putting on a very fine play by the name of "The Barretts of Wimpole Street", which was a delightful show, in the show. There was a little dog called Fluff, who weighed certainly no more than three or four pounds.

Miss Cornell was in the hotel, as was Brian O'Hearn. I suppose that she was very frightened one morning when down the corridor on the main floor, Sambo and I were going out for our walk as she was coming in from her walk with the little dog Fluff. At that point, Sambo weighed about one hundred pounds, and Fluff, as I said, was about four or five pounds—very small indeed. Sambo had a great time playing with Fluff, but he kept bowling him over with his paw. Of course, Miss Cornell—I don't blame her—was somewhat apprehensive, and picked the little dog up and scooted.

That same evening, I attended the play, which was given right around the corner from the Crillon, near the US Embassy, in the old Rothschild mansion. It was delightful. When I returned back to the hotel after having thoroughly enjoyed the play, I went up and got Sambo and took him out for a walk. I must say that Sambo was a well-mannered, obedient dog, and I never had a leash on him the whole time I was in Paris. Coming in from the walk, I got into the elevator and was joined by Brian O'Hearn, who obviously just returned from the performance.

We got into a conversation through the dog, and he said, "That's the most beautiful dog I've ever seen. I've always wanted one like it. Would you mind telling me where you got him? Would you like to come up to my quarters and have a drink?"

I said, "I'd rather take the dog to my quarters. Why don't, you come and have a drink in my quarters?" And we did.

Brian O'Hearn was a gentleman all the way through and a very, very pleasant person. I did have to apologize to him for having a suite, one room of which supposedly was housing a dog, but I explained it, I hope with some humor, and we got along

famously.

He fell in love with this animal, and said, "Look, if you would sell him to me, I would pay anything you want for him."

I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. O'Hearn, you don't sell the animal you love, so I'm sorry I can't do it. However, if you have occasion to go to Alsace-Lorraine, in any part of it, preferably Strasbourg, which we captured, you'll find other dogs just like this, and you can be sure that they are very carefully bred. He was going to do it, and I don't know to this day whether he did."

#3 The Trip Home: Around the 5th of January, 1945, I arrived at the town of Thaon, France, where the personnel going back to the United States gathered. All of us were on what they called the "point system" that is, we, had a point for every month overseas, for so many decorations, and so on. We built points and then we were selected to go home for thirty days of R and R on that basis. I arrived at Thaon absolutely dead tired, practically no sleep for a week. If you remember, the week of which I speak was that famous New Year's Eve, and the German offensive into Alsace-Lorraine. I was absolutely dead tired, and all I wanted to do was to go someplace and sleep. My equipment was only what I had in the little carry-all bag, and I was still armed, steel helmet and the works. The major commanding the depot insisted that he wanted to talk to me.

I said, "Major, I can't keep awake. I'm sorry. I've just had it."

He said, Sir, you've been ordered to be the C.O. of the troops going home on the train to Le Havre."

"Anything you say; I just can't keep awake."

He showed me to my room, and I just fell into the bed and went to sleep. I felt I had been asleep only a few moments when a knock came on the door. Our talkative major came in to ask me some silly questions about the routine administration of a train rice.

I'm afraid I was rather short with him and suggested that he use his own discretion and leave me alone. I got to sleep again and sure enough my little friend, the major, sparked himself into my room, this time without knocking, but just shaking my shoulder. I woke up, saw him, and I tell you that I was ready to throttle him.

"What now?"

He said, "There's a matter of mess on the train."

I hope the readers will understand that while I wasn't nasty, that was as far as that little friendly, talkative major got with that conversation. He found himself out in the hall real fast.

I got to sleep again, and on the door came a quiet knock. I guess the knocking, had been going on for some time, and finally I yelled in what you might call brutal voice, "Come in, you idiot!"

The door opened and there was a very attractive army nurse, a lieutenant. As a matter of fact, I had my gun belt next to my cot and I had picked it up. I was going to throw it if it had been the major again. Of course, this poor nurse was so embarrassed she didn't know what to do. She was frightened practically to tears.

I said, "I'm sorry. I'm tired. What can I do for you?"

She said, "Sir, my name is Lt. Coleman, Sue Coleman. I was with one of the first contingent of nurses of the country that went to Iceland. I've been over here for a long while. I am due to be married back in Texas, and the only way I can get there is to go to Le Havre on this train, then get that boat. The only person who can give me permission to go is you, because I'll be the only female on the train."

I felt very sorry for Coleman and could understand exactly what was on her mind and how very heartbroken she would be if she didn't make the connection.

I said, "Lt. Coleman, you get that major in here . . . No, don't get him in here, but you tell him I'm giving him a direct order to see that you are placed on that train for Le Havre."

That was the end of that point. We boarded the train that evening, and the major had arranged for—as a matter of fact, he had given—Lt. Coleman my own compartment and had moved me in with some of the other officers, which was fine. So Lt. Coleman was aboard the train.

The French railroads are a good railroad system, but sometimes there are not all the comforts that we thought we had. I remember in the wee hours of the following morning—I'd say around three or four—the train was stopped, and I thought they couldn't possibly be stopped at Le Havre because we couldn't get there in that time.

I said to one of the officers, "'Where are we?"

He said, "I don't know, Sir."

I said, "Let's go out and look." So, we got out and looked. We were in a very large railroad yard. I said, "Well, this must be Paris, judging from the size of the yard."

Sure enough, we verified it. We asked one of the Frenchmen around. I said, "What town are we in?"

He said, "Paris."

What in the name of heaven we were ever doing in Paris,

I'll never know. I finally said to the French railroad train officer, "Don't you move this train until I go up and see the railroad train officer at the depot. Then I'll come back and tell you what we're going to do, because we certainly do not belong in Paris."

I went up to the RTO office and talked to the senior officer there. I said, "This is number blank, blank, blank. What are we doing in Paris?"

He looked at me in utter astonishment and said, "That train, number blank, blank, blank has been missing all night. We thought we'd lost you."

"You haven't lost me. It's right down here. We're supposed to be on the way to Le Havre."

He said, "I'll take care of this right away," and he sure got us out of there in a hurry. This type of affair can go on in the best of armies.

We arrived in Le Havre in the middle morning that day, and, as you can imagine, Le Havre had been heavily bombarded by the naval guns and by the air. They had named the various reception camps there the names of popular cigarettes. I remember we were at "Lucky Strike". There was a "Chesterfield" and there was a "Camel." All was very badly damaged. It was the middle of the winter, and it was a cold, uncomfortable place to be, but not as uncomfortable as the front.

My roommate was a medical officer, a neurosurgeon, and we would all congregate in my quarters because it was a large room. The surgeon would fall asleep. The poor fellow had been operating ten or twelve hours a day on head wounds, back wounds and this type of operation. Lt. Coleman told me this, she being a nurse.

Lt. Coleman would be in the room with all of us, and when this medical officer fell asleep, he would, in his sleep, use the worst language that you could possibly hear in any language in any gutter, in any world. It was very embarrassing.

However, Lt. Coleman had been a nurse on the operating team, and she said, "Please. I hear it all the time. Think nothing of it, He hears all this conversation by the men who are very badly hurt, and subconsciously he picks it up and when he's asleep it just come out, Please don't call it to his attention, because the man absolutely is too tired for life at the moment. It would be unkind to let him know that he has used this type of language." I assure you we followed her advice.

The last I heard of Lt. Coleman, she came and said the boat was going to leave in a couple of weeks, and could I help her home by air. I again called up SHAEF and explained the circumstances of this nurse trying to get home to be married, and hoped they would let some of that big Army Heart take hold and get her out of there. What happened was a demonstration of the Army—and that the military forces do have a heart.

Two hours later they called me and said, "You get Lt. Coleman over to the Navy Headquarters. They'll have a car—it might have to be a jeep—but hopefully, a car. Send her right up here immediately to get her on the airplane that she can go on."

Well, the end of that story is that she made it and was happily married in Texas on schedule.