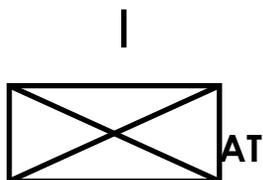




290



MESSAGE

CENTER

SPRING-SUMMER EDITION

Sick Call:

Our best wishes for his return to good health go out to John Denegre. I (RC) learned of his recent hospitalization from the January BB and wrote him a "get well" letter early in February. I haven't heard anything further since then, and concluded that no news must be good news. However, if any of you have the opportunity, and you haven't already done so, you might let him know that we're concerned. His home address is on our address/phone list at the end of this issue.

A Prospectus: AntiTank History 101:

Bob McElroy has completed an impressive set of memoirs! And now, responding to urgings from several of us (including his wife, Tommie), he's agreed to share them with you, our M/C readership. They cover: First, the period of his induction into the army in 1941, his training and subsequent service as an EM with an anti-aircraft artillery unit in the South Pacific from early 1942 until November 1943. Second, his acceptance into OCS, return to the States to attend OCS, commissioning as a 2nd Lt. in AA Artillery in May 1944, and subsequent training as an Infantry officer completed three months later. And Third, by September 1944 his assignment to AT Company as its 2nd Platoon Leader at Camp Breckinridge (he missed those fun days of "maneuvers" in Louisiana).

Before proceeding further and so that it won't get lost in the text, I think it important to note that Bob has taken particular pains to cite Don Rice and Paul Graves as two especially competent sergeants in his command. Men, in and for whom, he obviously had the greatest trust and respect. Speaking as an outside observer, I can honestly agree with him. Both gentlemen, and of course, others like them, were well liked and thought of, even outside their own platoon. (I wasn't a member of the 2nd. My first home in the 75th was the 1st Platoon. Sometime during that summer ('44), I escaped from Wilbur Isaacs and during Walter Brown's tour as CO, joined HQ Platoon to understudy John Webster, the recon Sergeant who preceded Russ Hedberg in that job. Finally, in Europe I joined Ed Stewart's Communications section.)

We've lost track of Don, but I believe Paul continues to be part of our readership. Both should be proud of this recognition

by an officer who himself was well respected within the Company for his soldiering competence and performance.

As your editor, I intend to do my best to extract the essence of the 16 typed pages (about 15,000 words) Bob has employed to describe his experiences during the year he spent with AT Company. What I intend to do is extract those incidents that reflect the type of narrative Bob came to be fond of relating during small-group memory sessions but had never written down. And while being selective, I want to try and avoid omitting anything that would appeal to the majority of you. I hope you will collectively excuse me should I fail in that effort. The narrative that follows is written as put down by Bob in the first person, but will not always directly quote his words (I have to have a *little* latitude!Ed.)

To the UK: 3 November - 9 December 1944

We arrived aboard the USAT (SS) Brazil, docking at Swansea, Wales in a harbor equipped with locks, an arrangement made necessary by the extreme tidal range. Visible evidence of air raid damage to some buildings existed near dockside, our first direct exposure to war damage. Trains took us to the seaside, "holiday" town of Porthcawl, not too many miles from Swansea. Company officers were billeted in an old fashioned inn with stone walls over a foot thick. EM were quartered in Quonset® huts at the edge of town. The Company was issued new equipment, including trucks, guns, and kitchen gear. Later, we traveled to a British firing range to test fire our new 57mm anti-tank guns. But generally, there was a minimum of training, and everybody was given the opportunity to go to London on a three-day pass.

To Europe: 9 December 1944 - The regiment left Porthcawl for Southampton, England by train and motor convoy. Those who left by train crossed the Channel to France aboard two British ships, the Monrovia and the Invicta. The motor convoy arrived after dark at Southampton, staying overnight at a nearby British military camp. During the previous night as we were traveling to the camp, I saw perhaps a hundred blue flashes to the northeast. British soldiers told me they were exploding V1 or V2 bombs.

10 December - Early in the afternoon we finished loading our vehicles and guns aboard a U.S. Coast Guard LST and after sunset, sailed for France. On the 12th, the motor convoy landed at Rouen, France. We received a very warm welcome from the rest of the company when we arrived at the company's assembly area, a sloping, muddy field on a hillside near Yvetot.

19 December - The regiment left the assembly area by train and motor convoy, headed for Belgium, with all of us traveling in our own company vehicles. On the way we encountered mile after

mile of burned out and wrecked German vehicles roadside in the vicinity of Mons. It must have been the site of a slaughterhouse.

20 December - We arrived in Charleroi, Belgium where we were billeted overnight in some Belgian Army barracks within the city. We left the next day, heading for Hasselt, closer to the front.

22 December - We left Hasselt before midnight and began a miserable ride in a cold rain storm, traveling as ordered with the tops down on all vehicles and getting soaking wet. The regiment moved in three parallel columns to provide flank protection for the main column, a precautionary measure dictated by the fluidity of the front. I believe that the 2nd Platoon was a part of the right flank column. Sometime during the night, during one of our many stops, the driver of the Cannon Company truck we were following must have fallen asleep. Until then, for the most part the column had been moving at a slow pace. But suddenly, we were going very fast and the driver of the truck ahead kept turning his headlights on and off, probably looking for the truck he was supposed to have been following. Then, as we crossed the Meuse River at Huy, Belgium I became aware that the 2nd and 3rd squads were no longer with us. I pulled the 1st Squad out of the column to search for them. I had no maps nor did I know where we were headed. At an MP traffic control point, no one would or could give me any information about the column's route. I had the 1st squad pull off the road, telling them not to move until I returned from searching up and down the road south of the river, looking for the missing squads and our column. During the search, we were stopped at one point by a paratrooper who demanded to see my officer's ID card. He had his M-1 pointed right at me. My radio man, Pvt. Grimm, audaciously threatened the paratrooper with something like, "There're three of us...we could blow you away". I felt like telling the trooper to do me a favor and blow Grimm away, because about then, the trooper suggested we look behind us...We did, and saw three more troopers standing nearby, all with their weapons trained on us. I gave Grimm hell and told him to keep his big mouth shut. I finally convinced the trooper that we were legitimate, after which, he told me that their mission was to seek and find some enemy infiltrators in American uniforms reported to be in the area. Later that same day, Sgt. Rice learned that MPs had indeed found and executed three or four of the enemy in American uniforms not too far from where we had been challenged. We were now close enough to the front to hear the distant rumble of artillery fire.

Shortly after sunrise, I spotted a column of trucks from the 898th FA Bn, a part of the 290th RCT. One of the battery commanders let me and my 1st squad insert ourselves into their column. As we progressed that morning, whenever the column would make one of its frequent stops, Belgians would run up to our vehicles to offer us

hot coffee and thick slices of homemade bread. The sight of a long column of troops moving toward the front must have boosted their morale. Up until then, most of their news hadn't been very good.

It was just before noon that we came upon Captain Gillen standing beside the road watching for us. Both the 2nd and 3rd squads had arrived much earlier but no one had been able to tell him what had become of us during the march.

24 December - In mid afternoon I was called to our company CP in Ny to receive orders. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions had been ordered to attack an objective around midnight. My orders were to move to the east of Soy on the Soy-Hotton road to defend the regimental left flank against possible attack by enemy armored forces. My platoon was attached to the 2nd Battalion. As we left the CP on the way to the Soy-Hotton road, we were startled to see about fifty dead Germans just off to the right of the road. Soon after we got onto the Soy-Hotton road on the way to our assigned position, the regimental commander [Carl Duffner] stopped us to ask if I understood my orders. When I told him that I did, he repeated the same question at least two more times before allowing us to proceed. The situation was unreal: *He had never asked me what those orders were.* When we reached our assigned position just before sunset, we discovered that a towed-gun Tank Destroyer Platoon and a Sherman tank had been assigned to the same road junction. They welcomed us. [This was the eve of the now-familiar battle for Le Roumiere we described on pp. 2-4 of the October 1997 M/C and which was detailed during the history sessions held at 1997's KC reunion...Ed.] From where I was, on a high hill, I could observe everything that took place on the battlefield that Christmas morning. 3rd Bn, reinforced by Company F, was counterattacking, having been forced off the hill during the initial encounter the night before. This time, the American attack was preceded by a TOT (time on target) artillery barrage, during which every field artillery battery within range timed their fire to arrive on the objective at the same instant. It was an awesome thing to witness, as the entire hill disappeared from sight in smoke and flame. After the battle, Florent Lambert, a Belgian citizen now well known to the 75th, counted 170 American KIAs on the hill. He counted 155 German KIA at its top and many more enemy dead in nearby areas. The total enemy KIA count in this action was close to 800. Their WIA may have been as high as 2400.

2 January 1945 - The 290th RCT was transferred from attachment to the 83rd ID to the 84th. AT's 2nd Platoon joined a roadblock held by one under-strength rifle squad. There was nothing but enemy in front of us. However, thanks to our own company kitchen, we had

an abundance of Christmas turkey, which we shared with the riflemen on the roadblock with us.

3 January 1945 - A counter offensive began. The 84th ID, supported by light tanks attacked right through our roadblock. As the tanks would return to pick up more ammunition, they dropped off their wounded. PFC Emberry, our medic, put on a fabulous demonstration of how good a medic he was. He had nearly half the 2nd Platoon caring for those wounded men under his direction.

4 January 1945 - This day, S/Sgt. Graves and I fought our own personal war with the enemy. I had been instructed to check a bridge to find out if it looked strong enough to support tanks. I have always wondered why the 1st Bn wasn't called upon to check the bridge at Forge a la Piez, since it was closer to their position. We tried to get to the bridge through a sector supposedly held by them, but we never saw anyone from the battalion anywhere in the town. We headed down a road that led in the direction of the bridge, but soon decided that something was wrong because there were no traces in the snow to indicate that anyone had been in the area. Then, when we came across abandoned personal enemy equipment lightly covered by snow, we decided to turn back and make a new approach through an area held by an adjacent regiment. It was about a six mile ride to reach a road that led to the bridge from the east. Passing the front line positions of the battalion nearest to the bridge, Sgt. Graves and I left our jeep driver and radioman parked as close to the bridge as we dared to drive. The snow on the road was packed down real hard as if a lot of vehicular traffic had been over it. Having walked about 200 yards further, out of the corner of my eye I caught a movement in the brush on the left side of the road. When I turned my head I found myself looking down the barrel of an enemy rifle pointed at me from a foxhole no more than 15 feet away. As I was warning Graves and dropping down on the road, the enemy fired but missed me. When I arose to get another look, the German fired at me again. I called to Graves to throw a grenade, but uncharacteristically, neither of us had one. Then the German rose up in his foxhole to throw one of his grenades at us. Graves fired at him as he threw it and hit its handle. It fell short and exploded about 10 feet from us. When it went off, both of us were lying flat on the road without any cover, but neither of us were hurt by the explosion. We decided to leave the standoff, so as I fired at him to make the German keep his head down, Graves slowly retreated about 20 yards. Then, following my instructions he began firing so I could likewise retire. We alternately fired and retired in this way until it was safe to stand up and walk back to the jeep.

Back at the jeep, neither the driver nor the radioman had been able to decide whether to get out of there or go to our aid. They had waited for us to return. Very soon, a lieutenant colonel came up to us and wanted to know what had happened. I explained why we were there and what we had encountered. He told us that his battalion was going to attack across that road the next day. I responded that I had not been given any such information. The road curved in such a way that we could see behind the brush where the enemy foxholes were. While the colonel and I were talking, the jeep driver spotted a German crawling behind the brush, apparently unaware that we could see him. Graves and I immediately opened fire upon him. The first round from Graves' M-1 was a tracer that I saw bounce off the enemy soldier. Graves had fired all eight rounds and was reloading when I fired my carbine and saw the German go down. A moment later another German jumped out and dragged his buddy back into the brush, too fast for us to catch him with more fire. We returned to regiment and I explained to the colonel why it was that we were unable to reconnoiter the bridge.

10 January - The 290th RCT was detached from the 84th ID and returned to 75th ID control. The relief came about, as the regimental officers were assembled to receive an attack order. Having given that order, Col. Duffner asked if there any questions. Lt. Col. Russell Harris, 2nd Bn CO, announced that he would refuse to attack. Duffner dismissed all but the three battalion commanders. All three battalions were in a very bad way and in no condition to sustain an attack. That night, AT Company moved to Basse-Bodeux, as the regiment went into division reserve. I can still feel the cold and picture the snow covered roads and thick pine forests we rode through that night. It was the first relief for the 290th RCT since its commitment to combat on 24 December. Shortly after we arrived at our destination, the men's feet were examined by medics. Four men from the 2nd Platoon were sent to the hospital for severe trench foot and never returned. Amongst those four was my original jeep driver, whose name, regrettably, I'm no longer able to recall. I also lost one man because he suffered from occasional attacks of blindness. His name was Frank Ryan, married with two children. He pleaded with me not to send him to the hospital. He was sent home. The regiment received 400 replacements during this three-day rest period.

17 January - The 75th Div, including 290th RCT was detached from VII Corps and attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps, where it would remain until we left Belgium. About mid-morning, the 2nd Platoon entered Vielsalm. I can remember seeing 291st Regiment troops bringing in several POWs as we drove down the street looking for a

house to shelter us from the bitter cold. One of the town's streets was piled five feet high for a half mile or so with American artillery ammunition, left behind when the enemy captured the town but apparently left undisturbed while in their hands. 2nd Battalion must have been in reserve, because we were able to stay there for a few days instead of in foxholes in the woods. The 1st Platoon, attached to 1st Bn, was involved in the attacks on the towns of Burtonville, Ville-du-Bois, and Petit Their.

In the Ruhr Pocket about 7 April - It was one day about this time, when we were pushing the enemy night and day without letup, that AT Company was ordered to find the attacking battalions after regimental headquarters had lost all contact with them. Having set out to find 2nd Bn, my driver, PFC Owen Sellers, and I were literally fumbling around in the dark when an invisible sentry challenged us. I answered with the password "Tin". He said that it was incorrect but admitted he knew me and I could advance. I had been told that the sign and countersign were "Tin Can". He said the correct ones were "Thin Man". When I asked the sentry if he knew where the 2nd Bn CP was, he told me I had found it. Right behind the large bush that hid the sentry was the "lost" CP. When I explained my mission to Lt. Col. Harris, he replied that as far as regiment was concerned, I had not found him. He told me that he and the other battalion commanders had agreed not to report to regiment until the next morning because their troops had to be rested after pushing the enemy constantly for several days without letup. Then Col. Harris told me that if I thought I had found him, I would have to remain there until the following morning. I stayed with the battalion until nearly dawn before returning to report that my search had been in vain.

Closing Comments from Your CO and Co-Editor, Rudy Gillen:

Thank you!! Thank you, Bob McElroy!

Now our Message Center is doing what we, the editors have always wanted to do: Get our readers to describe in "letters-to-the-editors", their experiences while serving in the AntiTank Company. Those described by Bob were superb and right on target. Reading them brought home to me several things that I'd seen and done 'way back then, things I hadn't even thought of for many, many years. Good job, Lieutenant Robert McElroy...And thanks for the memories.

Through the determined, sustained efforts of Al Roxburgh (CN-289) and also through the 75th Division's *Bulgbusters* newsletter, all 75th's survivors have been urged to document the histories of those companies to which they belonged...and to do so before their fading memories can become unrecallable. Your editors have long pondered

the question as to how best to implement the task...how to get all of you to join in and contribute...but we were largely unsuccessful in finding a practical answer. Now, triggered by Bob's effort, we think we have a plan. It will depend upon correspondence between the M/C and our mailing list to activate your memories and prompt individual responses. Can we do it? We're going to try our very best from here!

In the Fall issue of the M/C we will be providing details for implementing the plan. I'll tell you one thing - I'm really enthused about this new direction we're taking. I hope that you will be too, and further, that you'll find within yourselves the incentive to help enrich the lives of your comrades by sharing with them some of your memories and experiences in the AT Company.

RC

Rudy

-

Ray (RC) Smith

Rudy Gillen

NEWS FLASH: Jean Blake:

I (RC) want to mention that Charlie Blake's widow, Jean, is once again receiving our M/C issues. She wrote me early this month (March) to say she had moved to Cincinnati in July 1997 to be near her oldest son and family. Her new address is as listed on page 8. We're glad we found you again, Jean.

AT-290 KIA/MIA and Taps

<u>KIA</u>		
Francis T. DeVault	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Near Burtonville, Belgium
William P. Hulsey	3rd Plt	
W.A. Isaacs	1st Plt Sergeant	In Korea
Carl Sieg	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire - Xmas Ny Belgium
Lino Silvani	2nd Plt	M Co, 39th Inf Aug '44 Ste Lo, France

WIA (may not have returned to AT-290)

Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Easter 1945 - Land mine
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Shrapnel, left arm - evac
Niklos Uremovich	1st Plt 1st Sqd	Friendly fire, Xmas '44
Donald Yack	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	Colmar - Feb. '45

Post-War Deceased

Bill B. Black	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	18 Jun 1998 in WV, of an aneurism
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Charles Blake	3rd Plt Ldr	1995 (reported BB Jan 96)
Robert C. Coldwell	3rd Plt	1986
Paul W. Costinett	AT CO, pre-Europe	1987 Los Angeles, CA
Woodrow W. Fisher	AT Exec Officer	1960
Lawrence H. Groover	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	Oct 1984 - Smyrna, GA
Charles Grose	AT Recon Officer	
Russell Hedberg	Hdq Plt Recon Sgt	
John Heiterer	AT Company Clerk	12 Jul 1994
Justice Horton	3rd Plt driver	1995
Frank T. Kysar	4th Plt	1992
Joe Lassiter	unknown	1977
Michael Malinak	1st Plt 1st Sqd	
Fred Marsh	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1967
Alexander Moir	1st Plt 1st Sqd	1 Oct 1984-Cleveland, OH
Edward K. Norfleet	1st Plt 3rd Sqd	13 Aug 1989-Venita, OK
Orland H. Parsons	Hdq Plt 1st Sgt	12 Oct 1997-Cincinnati, OH
Lee A. Premazzi	Hdq Plt driver	6 Jan 1997-Portland, OR
Ben G. Premo	4th Plt 1st Sqd	
Dalton D. Raze	1st Plt Ldr	28 Dec 1997-Springfield, VA
Carol C. Smith	S/Sgt to 2nd Lt	1960
Edward S. Stewart	Hdq Plt Comm Sgt	1991
Willard S. Strawn	4th Plt 2nd Sqd	ca. 1988
James B. Vosters	4th Plt Ldr	3 Feb 1997-Miami FL
John P. Webster	Hq Plt Sgt-Lt,S3	1970

<u>NAME</u>	<u>TELEPHONE</u>	<u>STREET</u>	<u>CITY</u>	<u>ST</u>	<u>ZIP</u>
<u>EASTERN TIME ZONE</u>					
Berry, Gordon	616 363 6074	1225 3 Mile Road NE	Grand Rapids	MI	49505
Bondaruk, George	203 378 0689	25 Franklin Avenue	Stratford	CT	06497
Brown, George A.	508 477 1144	Box 1439	Mashpee	MA	02649
Daniels, Rudy [or "Rubbie"]	404 872 8054	619 Park Drive NE	Atlanta	GA	30306
Denegre, John (?)	203 795 4843	283 Merry Circle	Orange	CT	06477
Dionne, Norman R.(?)	603-524-2867	260 Court Street	Laconia	NH	03246
Gase Jr., Virgil C. (Seattie)	513 858 1254	998 Hicks Blvd	Fairfield	OH	45014-2853
Gillen, Lawrence R. [Rudy]	410 228 5373	6035 Corners Wharf Road	Cambridge	MD	21613-3246
Graves, Paul C. (Betty)	606 987 3754	19 E. 19th St	Paris	KY	40362
Groves, William F.		1208 N Finlandia Ct	Muncie	IN	47304-9093
Guhl, Paul J. (Betty)	860 536 1626	45 Sequin Drive	Noank	CT	06340
Ingles, Ernest (Ruth Brown)	517 437 4704	1341 Hudson Road	Hillsdale	MI	49242-9345
Jarrell, Melvin/"Bill" (Buelah)	302 629 3062	Route 1, Box 318	Seaford	DE	19973
McElroy, Robert F. (Tommie)	516 669 8251	163 Van Buren Street	W. Babylon	NY	11704-3410
Pildner, John A. (Lynetta M.)	440 998 2721	1806 E. 36th Street	Ashtabula	OH	44004-5804
Sheridan, William J. (Peggy)	203 458 9733	5 Paddock Lane	Guilford	CT	06437
Smith, Robert M. (Caroline)	941 351 1369	1750 Palm Springs Street	Sarasota	FL	34234-4119
Sutton, Robert L.	812 522 4454	614 North Park	Seymour	IN	47274
Uremovich, Niklos	513 753 5887	34 Woodruff Lane	Amelia	OH	45102

CENTRAL TIME ZONE

Anderson, LeRoy V. (Anja)	210 829 5212	1 Chagford CT	San Antonio	TX 78218
Boyle, William B. (Ruth)		P.O. Box 35	Hartsville	IN 47244-0035
Claypool, Edward L.	903 785 1197	125 23rd Street	Paris	TX 75460
Daehler, Ralph H. (Sylvia)	319 652 3737	700 Pershing Road	Masquoketa	IA 52060
Dole, Robert	913 483 4274	1035 N. Maple Street	Russell	KS 67665
Fary, Raymond E. (Irene)	219 836 7974	8254 Madison Avenue	Munster	IN 46321-1627
Files, Ira (Flossie)	501 352 7515	Rt. 1, Box 56	Ivan	AR 71748
Kolarczyk, Frank M.	219 397 2778	3731 Elm Street	East Chicago	IN 46312-2225
Lauland, Jr., John	504 341 4428	617 Avenue G	Westwego	LA 70094
Rezach, Howard (Janet)	920 684 6148	1314 S. 16th Street	Manitowoc	WI 54220-5612
Rogers, William J. (Connie)	618 457 2211	1203 W. Hill Street	Carbondale	IL 62901
Smith, Raymond C. (Molly)	651 429 1051	2365 Lakeridge Drive	White Bear Lake	MN 55110-7412

MOUNTAIN TIME ZONE

Nichols, William C. (Martí)	307 634 4575	1124 Cactus Hill Road	Cheyenne	WY 82001-6121
Yack, Donald M.	801 353 4432	Box 241	Neola	UT 84053

PACIFIC TIME ZONE

Johns, George Randall	503 236 2274	3728 SE 35th PL	Portland	OR 97202
Wallace, Lovell R. (Cle)	805 649 2224	130 Sunset Avenue	Oakview	CA 93022

FRIENDS

Black, Velma (Bill's widow)	913 478 9425	8031 SW 23rd Terrace	Topeka	KS 66614-4820
Blake, Jean G.(Charles' widow)		15 Falling Brook	Cincinnati	OH 45241-3243
Coldwell, Mary (Robert)	316 331 3928	508 N. 8th - Apt 1	Independence	KS 67301
Ellis, Paul B. (Rosemary) K/290	803 547 4913	104 Hilton Head Court	Fort Mill	SC 29715-9758
Hutchingson, W. Paul (Ed Stewart)		4153 Loire Dr	Kenner	LA 70065-1747
Kirk, William (Peg)	410 228 7377	110 Choptank Avenue	Cambridge	MD 21613
Louder, Howard M.(Tuckey) HQ/290	814 943 5774	503 E. Wopsononock Ave.	Altoona	PA 16601-4023
Moir, Janet (Scotty's widow)	216 582 1059	162 Kimrose Lane	Broadview Hts	OH 44147
Moir II, Alex (Scotty's son)	703 709 9814	13104 New Parkland DR	Herndon	VA 22071
Parsons, Nina (Orland's widow)	513 741 2882	9622 Crosley Farm #35, 5/1-10/15	Cincinnati	OH 45251
Raze, Grace (Dal's widow)	703 569 4996	5621 Bellington Avenue	Springfield	VA 22151
Roxburgh, Alfred S.(Jessie)CN/289	916 485 4226	2719 Laurel Drive	Sacramento	CA 95864-4950
Swift, Edward L. (Ann) A/290	606 744 6594	103 Hampton Avenue	Winchester	KY 40391
Vosters, Jane (Jim's widow)	305 378 4588	1116 E Ridge Village Drive	Miami	FL 33157