

## THE LAST DAY

by George Smith Jr.

On April 6, 1945 we had been engaged in combat to clean up the "Ruhr Pocket". This was called the Rhineland Campaign. We were pushed just about to the limit to (keel) the Germans on the move and disorganized.

Our platoon leader, Sgt. Moody, informed us we would be jumping off before daylight. The object was to cross over a high railroad grade and enter an open field. We would be fully exposed to enemy fire at this point. Then continue on for about 1/4 mile on an uphill grade. There, we would enter a wooded area. This is where the enemy was expected to be dug in.

I shivered in my bed roll all night and worried about the outcome. It was still dark when we assembled. This was going to be a "marching fire operation". When we entered the danger area we marched abreast. All of us carried a lot of ammunition, a cartridge belt and two bandoliers. I carried extra "ammo" because I was assistant "BAR" man (Baring Automatic Rifle).

As we neared the edge of the woods, I admonished the men to stay in an even skirmish line. I really had no business doing this as I was not a noncommissioned officer. The few that lagged behind would not help our mission, but endanger it. I may have alerted the "Krauts". We hit the edge of the woods, entered and after about 50 feet in, all hell broke loose. We had reached their position.

The enemy threw a concussion grenade and opened fire at the same time. We returned fire instantly. Our Garand Rifles were semi automatic which allowed a heavy barrage of bullets almost instantly. Some screaming out by the Germans then complete silence. Everybody hit the ground. I remember one German ran screaming hysterically. I took a bead on him, but pulled off when I pulled the trigger. Shooting a terrified man didn't seem right. Everyone lay silent except for about two of our men who said they were hit. The terrible fear that had gripped me had gone.

To me, the enemy position seemed to be a foxhole behind a huge old tree about 4 feet in diameter. My reasoning was that we would soon be killed by high explosives of some kind. My plan was to walk up to this tree, peer around and take out any enemy that was left. I got within about 15 to 20 feet from the tree when a burst of flame came out from a hole under the tree. The bullet knocked me down and I shouted "the son of a bitch shot me". There was very little pain. The bullet had entered above my left elbow and probably ricocheted off the bone. It was later removed about 6" or 8" above the entry site.

I was still very functional. I crawled back behind a Knoll and found that my M1 was jammed. I had hold of the muzzle with both hands, put my foot against the bolt and it would not open. The BAR man had taken a bullet across his fore arm. He said take the BAR. I crawled back to him, got his BAR and went back to the little Knoll.

I shouted in German "come out with the hands high and I will not shoot you". Then complete silence. I kept a bead on the hole and waited perhaps two minutes. I then fired into the peep hole at the base of the huge tree, then jumped up and sent many rounds into the hollow tree. I continued to the opposite side and fired many rounds into that general area. I was satisfied the German position was eliminated.

I did not look for dead bodies. I stood up and hollered other men's names to see if they were O.K. They were O.K. A fellow by the last name of Sloan came over to me and dressed my wound. My good friend Warren J. Kenny, our medic, was taking care of other casualties. Most of the men stayed on the ground figuring they still might get shot. They apparently had frozen with fear.

The men later wrote up my action and I was awarded the Silver Star. Three of us walked back down the hill together. A soldier by the last name of Neurot had a cut on the forehead from the concussion grenade. Years later Arthur Small, a close friend who was a participant in this battle, informed me another unit in our company "L" took over and found 3 dead Germans in the hole under the tree. He also said this was the last battle for our unit. Assignments after April 7, 1945 were accomplished without resistance.

In a nutshell, we had at least 4 wounded, none seriously, and they lost 3 dead defending their country. A small incident in a gigantic war that involved many millions of people.