

REG CARLSON'S WAR STORIES

My stories can be classified into two categories:

#1 Events that happened while I was on the front lines, and

#2 Events that happened other than the front line.

This paper tells only of events that happened in group one.

I was on line three times.

The first time was for about five or six weeks. The second time was for five days. The last time was for two days and took place in the Po Valley in northern Italy. I have never put the story of this third experience in writing until now. The enclosed papers describe all three stories.

Several months ago I decided to send out copies of these stories to my children and my brothers. Because of my Parkinson's condition, I mixed up the record of who had what. As near as I can tell, some of you have no copy of anything.

To correct this matter, I improved my record-keeping and have put all my war stories in writing, and mailed a complete set to all my children and brothers. If anybody else wants a copy, they can see me.

Following this introduction there is a copy of the award of the Bronze Star medal. The next four pages tell of the happenings during my first time when I was ON LINE. The next twelve pages tell of a lot of events during my second time on line, followed by one page that tells about our Po Valley activities.

It's been 50 years since these events took place, yet it seems as though it was only a few days ago.

HEADQUARTERS 91st INFANTRY DIVISION
UNITED STATES ARMY
A.P.O. 91

18 July 1945

AG 200.6

SUBJECT: Award of the Bronze Star Medal.

TO: Technician Fifth Grade Alvin R. Carlson, 59567410, Infantry, United States Army.

Under the provisions of Army Regulation 600-45, as amended, you are awarded the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious service in combat.

CITATION:

"Alvin R. Carlson, (59567410), Technician Fifth Grade, Infantry, United States Army. For meritorious service in combat from 15 January 1945, to 2 May 1945, in North Italy. On 13 April 1945, the rifle platoon in which Technician Fifth Grade Carlson was a member, was one of the leading platoons in the assault resulting in the breakthrough into the Po Valley. During this attack, the fire from all types of enemy weapons was intense, and resistance was fanatical. When two men were wounded, Technician Fifth Grade Carlson exposed himself to the intense enemy fire by administering first aid to the wounded men. He further exposed himself until he could evacuate them to a safe position from which they could later be evacuated by a light rescue car. At all times, Technician Fifth Grade Carlson has displayed a high degree of combat skill, and his aggressiveness has proven to be an incentive to the men in his platoon. Technician Fifth Grade Carlson exemplifies the type of courage and initiative that are characteristic of the high traditions of the Infantry and the Army of the United States. Entered military service from Los Angeles, California."

(signed)

R. E. S. WILLIAMSON
Brigadier General, U. S. Army
Commanding

Dangerous War Experiences in Italy, 1945 - Reginald Carlson

These experiences took place in the Apennine mountains between Florence and Bologna. If you drive north from Florence toward Bologna about three-fourths of the way and then make a right turn on little side roads for about one to three miles, you will be where I was. I was on the front lines twice in this area.

The first time was for about five weeks. It became a "battle of nerves." We had about 40 men in each platoon in K Company. There were four platoons. We soon learned that about one man per week in each platoon would be killed or injured. We never knew who it would be "to get hit next," or how it would happen.

The second time I was on the front lines in this area, we attacked Germans. Our K Company was one of the leading companies. This means that when the attack started, we went first, and went both night and day. This time I was on the front lines for exactly one week. We attacked Friday night, April 13, 1945. The next Thursday we were relieved by fresh troops. In that one week we lost about half of K Company, who were either killed or wounded. With this information as background, I will now give the details of the "close calls" I had.

During those first five weeks I had four close calls. During this time, newspapers reported that there was little or no activity on the front lines in this area.

I think it might help you get a feeling of these four close calls if I give some detailed background of our activities at that time. Our duties during these five weeks were two in nature, and we were to alternate them each day, or rather each night.

Our main duty was to be "out in the holes" one night, and the next night to "run the gauntlet" to bring up mail, food, and supplies from a supply station about 1/4 mile to the rear. "Out in the holes" meant to tuck a telephone line inside your jacket and crawl out toward the Germans and stay there all night. We were to give the first warning if the Germans attacked. It was bitter cold. We took about an hour to dress for the night. We took off our shoes and put on waterproof galoshes. We lined the bottom of the galoshes with two or three pieces of cardboard and put on five or six pairs of stockings. We wore several shirts and sweaters. The last piece of clothing was our regular jacket, but just before this we put on a pair of "combat pants." We had one pair of combat pants for each two men.

My Experiences in the PO VALLEY

About a week after we left Mt. Arnigo we got on some trucks and drove into Bologna. On the outskirts of town we saw a house with a sign out front that said this was the house where Marconi lived and conducted his experiments of wireless telegraph. We stopped at this house for lunch. They had fixed up the front room with displays of some of his work's. It was very pleasant and interesting.

After lunch we drove the town out to a park where we camped for the night. The next morning we gathered around an officer who said he would tell us of how things were in Bologna. In essence the war was over. Every day whole groups of Germans were surrendering.

Our duty was going to be to help them surrender. From here on out we would divide up into groups and ride on the outside of tanks that had arrived at the park. In the event that we met any Germans who did not care to surrender, we would have the support of the tanks to assist we infantrymen. So we got aboard the tanks and started north.

For the first few days, the only Germans we saw were large groups who had already turned themselves in and were marching south. Then one afternoon our fortune changed and we ran into some of the enemy who wanted to shoot a little more. It all began when we came to a fork in the road. There were no signs advising us which way to turn. If there had been signs they would have said "take the left fork. There is a town full of Germans who want to turn over everything... If you take the right fork you will be met by a few Germans who do not want to give in yet."

Our tank commander did not know which fork to take so he took the RIGHT one leading right into the Germans who were waiting for us. We had gone only few miles until we started being shot at. It was at this time that we wanted to be in the Tank Corps. There was a lot of open spaces and the tanks quickly spread apart so as to make less of a target.

We also learned that the tank people did not want us to get on any tank until the tank men had figured out what their plan of action was going to be. We sat on top of the tanks for almost 15 minutes. There was a culvert along the side of the road that would give us lots of safety. The tank men chided us for being afraid "under fire." Meanwhile the Germans were improving their accuracy in shooting at us.

In another 15 minutes, the tank men had their plan ready. Off to the right of us about a mile on across a large field there was 5 or 6 houses. In these houses there must be some of the enemy that is directing the firing. We will attack by driving as fast as possible into the middle of the houses. We were cautioned to hang on tight. If anyone fell off the tank men would come back and get you, but not until all of the Germans had been routed.

HERE WE GO... We got safely to the houses, and it turned out they were empty. After studying the situation, the tank men decided we should stay where we were for the night. Our ride across the field did some good. The shooting stopped.

That is until the Germans shot one shell, and only one, this shell hit a tank. The tank immediately caught fire. No one was hurt, but the tank and everything in it burned. My buddy, John J. Newman of St. Louis, MO., decided to clean his rifle. He discovered the firing pin was missing. Had there been any Germans in the house he and I cleared, we would have had a problem.

During the night, gasoline trucks got us ready to go back to that fork in the road. We slept in the culvert. A couple of miles down the left fork we found a town full of Germans who were waiting to surrender to us. THIS WAS THE END OF THE SHOOTING WAR FOR ME.

On the night we were out in the holes, we wore the combat pants. On the night we ran the gauntlet, we wore our regular shoes and clothing. The combat pants were an oversized coverall (just like farmers wear), with front bib and shoulder straps up the back. It was made with heavy cotton and lined inside with a material that was just like an Army blanket. I have stood all night in a hole with an inch or two of water in it and the water has frozen and formed a crust of ice and my feet were comfortable all night. For military support for us, we had some mortars located a block or two behind us. We memorized a set of numbers and what they meant. When we wanted the mortars to fire away, we would whisper a number into the telephone. For example, the number twelve might mean that we wanted mortar fire 100 feet in front of us and 30 feet to the right. So much for the background of out in the holes.

Now for "Run the Gauntlet." This meant for a group of us to walk from the front to a supply station about 1/4 mile to the rear. During our walk the Germans would shoot flares up into the sky to illuminate the path. The objective was to catch us out in the open and throw a barrage of artillery at us. The flares were attached to parachutes and slowly floated to earth. We were told that the most effective defense against the flares was to immediately hold still and not move until the flare had gone out. It was easy on the way to the supply station to "freeze" in whatever position you were walking in, but on the way back it was sometimes awkward to freeze while carrying cases of hand grenades or bullets. The German mortars made a whooshing sound just before the parachute opened and the flare lit up the sky. As I remember, we had a few seconds warning to get into as comfortable a freeze position as possible. Each flare would only take 30 seconds to reach the ground, but at the moment, it seemed like 30 minutes. And just to liven things up a bit, the Germans would sometimes send up several flares one after another and the sky would be lit up for several minutes. We soon learned these flares were more psychological than dangerous. We always had at least one flare while walking along the path, but only about one artillery shell out of three round trips and never a barrage. Once in a while, a flare would light up while it was in front of you and you could see what it might look like to a German. Because the flare was slowly falling to earth, the light was moving down and every shadow was in motion. To see us, the Germans would have to see our shadow in an opposite motion.

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This experience of walking the gauntlet was interesting. All of the supplies at our supply station had been carried by mules from a larger supply station farther to the rear. The mule drivers were civilian Italians. They all wore a large Tyrolean hat with a long feather on the hat. They seemed to have no fear of the front lines.

So much for background. Here now are the details of my four close calls.

Close Call #1... I was the target. My first close call happened on my first night out in the holes. The Germans tried to blow us up with artillery shells. It really was three close calls that night. There were three separate barrages aimed at us. The first barrage came at about 10:30; the second about midnight; and the third about 3:00 in the morning.

It was frightening. With the first one I realized that I was the target (or rather my partner and I). We always had two men together out in the holes. There must have been about twenty shells in each barrage. Pieces of dirt and rocks fell on us.

The noise of the shells exploding was enough to make you nervous. Except for being scared to death, we were not hurt.

Close Call #2... It was not my turn in the holes that night. About one week later, on the night when it was my turn to run the gauntlet, the Germans crawled up to my hole and started throwing hand grenades at the two men in the hole. They screamed for help in the telephone, but the grenades exploded injuring both men seriously. Five or six men went to bring the wounded men to safety.

The next day our Captain decided this hole was too close to the Germans and he gave instructions to move it back about 150 feet. When it got dark, the sergeant crawled out with us and picked out a nice hole that was about 25 feet in front of what was remaining of a tree. There were only two or three branches still on the tree.

It made you nervous just looking at it.

I was in this new hole about one week and was then assigned to a different hole. The day after the two men had been injured, I was given the combat pants that one soldier had been wearing, with me on an every other night basis. There were 5 or 6 bloody holes in it. I put the pants out in the warm sun for a couple of hours till the blood was dry. I then scraped off the blood and wore those pants out in the holes that night.

Close Call #3... another platoon was selected. Someone decided that a "test run" needed to be made by one of our four platoons to determine the combat readiness of the Germans. The plan was to send one whole platoon including the lieutenant that commanded the platoon. They were to run over the top of the hill we were occupying. They were supposed to run to a fixed spot, early in the morning, and then run back.

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My platoon was not selected to make this test. The morning selected came and the platoon members ran over the hill. Within about two minutes everyone of them was dead (except for one solitary man). He had been wounded and as he fell to earth he could see that everyone else was either dead or wounded. This one solitary soldier "played dead" all day long.

When it got dark, he crawled back to our lines and told us what had happened. Two days later we were asked to volunteer to go get the lieutenant's body back. I do not know if anyone volunteered. If my platoon had been selected to make that "test," I would not be giving you this report.

Close Call #4... The Spirit saved me... One evening, I was by myself in the remains of what must have been a two-story house. I was getting dressed for a night in the holes. After I was dressed and ready to go, my partner felt inclined to wait a moment. I waited about 3 or 4 minutes.

In a moment, a few artillery shells burst about 6 feet directly in front of the door I would have come out of. The "door" was an army blanket fastened across the opening to the room. The blanket had 4 or 5 holes in it. These holes would have been in me had I gone out when I usually did after dressing for the night. I felt inclined to wait some more...

I waited and another artillery barrage came in. I then realized how nasty the Germans were. Had the first barrage wounded someone, the second barrage came just about the time when the medics would be helping whoever had been hit by the first barrage.

After this second barrage, I felt it was O.K. to leave. I did so and went and got my partner for the night and went out to our hole.

EPILOGUE A month or so later, when I was on top of Mt. Arnigo, I came across about forty dead Germans whose bodies were arranged in a large circle. In the center of the circle, the German rifles were neatly stacked. I asked "what happened here?"

The soldier I asked said that one of them had made a false move. I wondered if someone was "trading" these forty German soldiers for the platoon of Americans that had been killed a month or so earlier.

Where did all the holes come from? About one in ten holes had been dug by someone before us. The other nine had been made naturally by an exploding shell. The holes came in two sizes depending upon the size of the shell... LARGE, about six feet across and three feet deep... SMALL, about three feet across and eighteen inches deep. These amounts are for "normal soil." The reason I did not get killed was because the dirt on top of Mt. Arnigo was almost solid clay.

See page 10Mt, Arnigo Wed April 1.

Mt. Arnigo
APRIL 1945

The Battle for Mt. Arnigo, or how we lost about one-half of K Company (Reginald's Co.) 160 men to 80 at Arnigo, Italy.

Mt. Arnigo is part of the Apennine Mountains. There is a highway running north and south between Florence (on the ARNO River) and the city of Bologna (home town of Guglielmo Marconi, 1874-1937, inventor of the wireless telegraph). Mt. Arnigo is about 8 miles south of Bologna and 2 miles east of the road between Bologna and Florence.

1. Sun night, April 8th, 1945... Rode in trucks with their headlights OFF for the last few miles, then we walked about one-half mile and stopped for the night.

2. Morning April 9th... We could see that we were on a plateau. About two blocks in front of us there was a cliff leading down into a valley. From the bottom of the valley there was a huge mountain shaped like a flattened ice cream cone. The "cone" was upside down. The "front" line was called the cliff edge. Germans were in the valley and all over Mt. Arnigo. In our battalion there were three companies... K Co., L Co., and M Co. We were told that our three companies were going to play "King of the Mountain" and take it away from the Germans. The battle plan was then explained to us. Our sergeant drew a map in the dirt. (see map on next page) When it got dark on Tuesday K Co. (my Co.) was going to go down the cliff and capture the town. L Co. and M Co. were going to stay on the plateau. The next night the engineers were going to come up to where we were and repair the bridge that had been destroyed. The next night our tanks would come up to the bridge and cross it. L Co. and M Co. would come down and meet the tanks and together go up Mt. Arnigo. We were told that the town at the bottom of the cliff consisted of a three-story hotel in the center of the town, with two or three houses on the left of the hotel and two or three houses on the right side of the hotel. My platoon (about 40 soldiers) was to capture the hotel and any buildings nearby. Another one of our platoons was to go along the road to the left and the other platoon to the right to prevent any Germans from getting into the town after we had captured it. We were told this did not always go as planned and there was the possibility that some of us might be captured by the Germans. We were asked to destroy any addresses we might have with us. The Germans sometimes contacted addresses of people they found on your possession with stories to make them worry. We were also reminded that sometimes some of us did not care about battles and they shot a bullet in their foot rather than go along with the company. We were told that everyone would be needed and that if anyone shot themselves in the foot they would be court-martialed.

3. Tues afternoon April 10th... We were told something had "gone wrong" and we would stay on the plateau another night.

4. On both the 11th and 12th we were told the battle was off.

5. On Fri April 13th about nine, we received word that the President of the US, Franklin Roosevelt, had died. I was amazed to see the gloom that came over the faces of all present. The battle was not called off... As soon as it began getting dark, we started down the cliff. Before I got to the bottom three fellows shot themselves in the foot. This took six medics to help them. It was dark by the time we reached the bottom of the cliff. We found ourselves on what appeared to be a portion of the dirt road. We were walking single file. Then the fellow in front of me turned around and said as quietly as possible... "turn around, something's gone wrong." For a minute we had a traffic jam. In a few minutes, the fellow in front of me said "It's OK. Let's go again." After we had moved only about fifty feet, the fellow in front of me stopped and motioned for me to stop and to get down on the ground, resting flat on my stomach. In a few moments we were all on the ground, waiting for the next move.

* the town consisted of a hotel and a few houses on either side of the hotel.

Mt. Arnigo P2

5. Friday night cont'd There was a fireworks display that was outstanding. In an instant, an area about 135 feet x 135 feet was full of exploding shells. I saw red-hot fragments of shells twirling through the air. The ground we were resting on was shaking like an earthquake. There was a slight breeze that night and soon the breeze was full of burnt powder odor. After about five minutes of exploding shells, the barrage stopped. All of the lights went out at the same moment. It was in an atmosphere of timing. The fellow in front of me got up and started walking. He walked to the river and walked into the water. After walking a short block, I saw our lieutenant holding his finger to his mouth to be very quiet and pointing up to the side of the river. We saw that we were at the hotel as made of rocks. The top two floors had been into a gigantic pile of rocks resting atop a room that had a window and a door area opening onto the river. This river was about 18 feet wide and the water was about 7 inches deep. Our lieutenant took one man and climbed up the bank and disappeared into the room. It was quiet everywhere. The only noise we heard was the gurgling of the water. After about 5 minutes the two men came out of the room and came down the water again. They told us they had rubbed their hand over all of the wall and floor feet over all the floor they reported it was safe for all of us to go into that room.

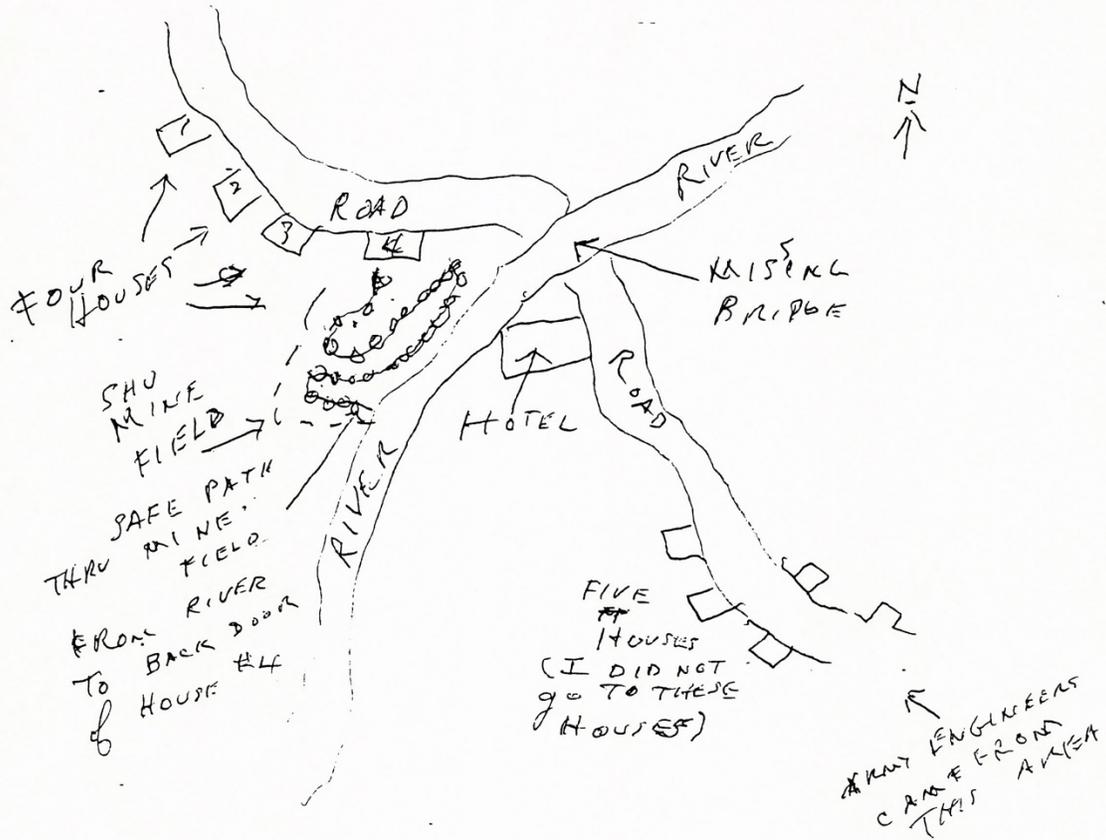
Once inside we could see three houses on the other side of the river. The lieutenant told two men to cross the river and walk towards the first house. He said: "We'll cover you from here." The men had walked about 30 feet towards the house when they stepped on a shu mine. They both began screaming with pain. Men were sent to get them into the room with us. They were given a shot of pain killer. This took about 20 minutes to begin to take effect. The lieutenant said, "I can't tell how serious your wounds are because I can't see. I then told the lieutenant that I know we are not permitted to have flashlights, but I have made one out of a small empty match box. To make certain I never accidentally turned on any light, the batteries in a separate pocket were from the flashlight itself. If he would like to see how bad are the wounds we could get him and the two men in a corner of the room and hold some blankets over them. I could put the match box together and pass it to him. He agreed. After examining them (and not a trace of light showed). He told the fellow who was screaming the loudest that his wounds were minor compared to the other soldier. He ordered the loudest fellow to get in the river with the other for him to help him to an aid station.

It was three or four blocks down the river. They got into the river and we never saw either of them again. The lieutenant said let's try the road. It appears to go to the front side of the houses. The lieutenant and three or four men (I was one of them) then went around to the front of the other side and walked along the road. We found the men of the platoon who were to watch for Germans on the west side had gone directly to their assignment, had captured five or six Germans. That was an eerie experience. They had taken off their helmets and were standing very, very quietly with their hands resting on top of their heads.

Our lieutenant conferred with the officer of the other platoon and decided to have one of these Germans take us back to where our two men had stepped on a mine and then lead us in through the mine field and into each of the three houses. The German spelling for these nasty mines was Shu. When you stepped on one, it would sometimes blow your foot off right now along with your ankle and all you would have is a little bit your leg bone exposed.

If your leg was still on, your foot would be as red jelly. The medics would cut off your shoe, wrap up the red jelly and take you away. Our two fellows who got hurt at first must have had a third condition. I was assigned to take 3 (the American and one German) and go back and walk through that mine field. Back we went and on a few moments had determined that there were no extra Germans hiding in the houses or in area. By now it was beginning to get light. Some of our men had made contact with our platoon on the other side of town. There were no Germans and all was well. We went to our hotel and went to sleep.

* shu = German word for shoe.



Mt. Arnigo P4

6. Saturday night April 14th. As soon as it got dark, the Army Engineers began their part of the plan (to build a bridge across the river). They came along the road riding a bulldozer and pulling a load of conduit pipes. My platoon was assigned to protect the engineers while they built the bridge. The bulldozer was very noisy and the Germans began shooting artillery as soon as they heard the bulldozer. The engineers stopped until the shooting stopped. The engineers got to our hotel about 9:30 PM. They unloaded the conduit into the river lengthwise and then with the bulldozer began pushing dirt on top of conduit. The Germans kept shooting all night. When the shooting got too close, the engineers would stop for a little while. About 2:00 AM we had a meeting with the engineers. The engineers said they had the assignment of getting the bridge completed Saturday night, and that they still had about two hours to go to complete the bridge. They wanted to be far away before the first light of morning came. The head engineer proposed that they start the bulldozer and no matter how many shells were shot, they would not turn off the bulldozer. We agreed. The bridge was completed about 4:00 AM. The Germans continued to shoot us but no one was hurt. Finally we heard the pleasant sound of the bulldozer going away along the road. We went back to our hotel and went to sleep.

7. Sunday night April 15th. As soon as it got dark, the battle for Mt Arnigo began. Some of our tanks came along the road, crossed the river using the bridge that had been built the night before, and started up the mountain. At the same time, all of M company and L company, who had been waiting on top of the cliff, came down and started up Mt. Arnigo. It soon became apparent that the Germans had no intention of letting anyone go up Mt. Arnigo. The Germans knew exactly where their troops were and where they were not. They raked the area where they were not with exploding shells all night long. This included our hotel. Our hotel was the safest spot all night long. It was tragic to see the members of L and M companies. All night long groups of them would run into our hotel to get a little respite from the exploding shells. When a voice called out a message such as "All members of third platoon... let's go" I noticed that not all of the third platoon went. Fifteen or twenty minutes later these third platoon members would slip out the door into the night. Finally, morning came and the shooting stopped.

Mt Arnigo P5

8. Monday morning April 16th A temporary TRUCE was put into effect for the medical corps to gather our wounded. We saw two medics carrying a stretcher. Each medic had a pole tied to the upper part of his body. And in between the poles was a white flag with a large red cross. One set of medics came near our door. They called attention to the bullet holes in their flag. Some Germans observed the truce by not shooting the medics, but they made them nervous by shooting at the flag they carried. About nine-thirty that morning we saw a wounded German crawling. He saw us and cried out COMARAD, COMARAD. We motioned for him to be quiet and to come to us. He did this. When he was safely inside our one-room hotel we could see his problem. He had stepped on a German shu mine and one of his feet and ankle were missing. We gave him a shot of morphine, and he was soon asleep. Later on some of our medics came our way and they carried him away. A little later another wounded German saw us and cried out COMARAD, COMARAD. We signaled as we had earlier, but for some unknown reason he stayed where he was and would not stop crying out. After a half hour of this, we became nervous. We had no official communication with anyone for about 24 hours and knowing how nasty the Germans could be, we imagined all kinds of things. I was standing by the window at the moment and without thinking I said to our Lt: "That German won't come in and won't be quiet, shall we shoot him." The Lt said "yes". I took off the safety to my rifle and aimed it at the German. Just as I was about to pull the trigger a strong message came to my mind... The message "do not shoot this man, it is not right"... I began to say this to the Lt, when the fellow to my right said, "well I will". Meanwhile, the German could see us aiming our rifles at him and began crawling behind a large rock. The bullet was fired just at the moment the German disappeared behind the rock. We never knew whether the German was shot or not, but he did not cry out anymore and that was what we wanted.

Around noon, all of the wounded had been picked up and business got back to normal. One of our runners came by with a message from our Captain of our company. We were to go about 300 yards south along the river and would be met by the Captain about 30 minutes from then. In about thirty minutes, the Captain showed up. He said L & M companies had both been destroyed. There was not enough men left in either company to be a fighting force.

Mt. Arnigo P6

Because we were still a fighting force, we were going to take their place. As soon as it got dark, we were going to walk up Mt Arnigo as far as L & M Company got and the next morning continue up the mountain. He wanted us to study the mountain to remember all we could because at night things looked different than they did in daylight. He showed us an area where some tanks had been and it was safe from mines. After we had looked at the mountain we could go back to our places where we had been and wait for it to get dark. On our way back to the hotel, we came across some of our men who explained we had a problem. There was a sniper up on Mt Arnigo. We had sent some men to get him, but meanwhile we had a problem. Thus far, the sniper had never shot anyone outside of a space about 15 feet wide. The only way to get across this space was to make a dash for it one at a time. When it came my turn, I made it and then stopped to look myself over. I found a crease along the heel of my shoe on my right foot. The crease appeared to have been made by a bullet. I said my prayers of thankfulness and went back to our hotel. I also thought of our hotel. When we first heard of the battle plan every one felt sorry for us because of our assignment. We were in the middle of the trouble. As it turned out, we had the best place in the whole area.

9. Monday night, April 16th. When it got dark, we started walking slowly up Mt Arnigo. All was quiet and no shells were shot at us, and there were no Germans in our path. When we had gone a distance about equal to the length of three football fields we stopped. In whispered tones we were told, "this is as far as any members of L and M had got"... "as quietly as you can, dig a small hole and divide up in two's. Take turns sleeping, always have one of the two of you awake." The rest of the night was peaceful... no shooting.

10. Tuesday morning April 17th. This was a beautiful morning... everything was still quiet. We ate breakfast (K rations) and were given the plan of action. We were going to walk slowly up the hill. We felt we were being watched by the Germans, so it was up to them to start shooting. We could see no Germans. At one point there was a little ravine and we had to go single file. I was the third man in the line. The fourth man was the soldier who had shot at the wounded German the day before. Just as I was stepping out of the ravine there was an explosion in back of me. Number four man had stepped on a shu mine. Three of us had stepped over the spot where the shu mine was buried and had not stepped on it. The number four man still had his foot on it but it was all like red runny jello. The medics cut off his shoe and tied a large bandage around his foot and carried him away.

Mt. Arnigo P7

Tuesday morning (cont'd) We never saw him again. On the next ravine we were careful to step exactly where the man in front of us stepped, and we got over politely saying such things as "you go first, sir" as we stepped aside a little. But no one wanted to be ahead so we just followed along. We grew more tense as we went slowly up... And then the shooting started. The Germans threw everything in the book at us. Some of our men began to be hit and fell to the ground. Here I need to digress for a moment to tell you of an experience I had at Camp Haan (near Riverside, Calif.) in the summer of 1943. It seems that one of the Army regulations says that all soldiers must take Basic Training. I had missed this experience because I had been taken directly from the induction center to work in finance office at Camp Haan. It was discovered that 8 or 9 of us had missed this basic training. To correct this matter a training sergeant was obtained from a training cadre. We stayed at our bunks for half a day for the next two weeks while the sergeant read the soldiers handbook to us. This handbook is very similar to the Boy Scout manual. I remember a paragraph on "How to cross an open field when the enemy is shooting at you." It said, "never try to make a run for it in a straight line... instead do something to divert the enemy from getting a bead on you, such as stopping quickly and running a few steps in a different direction etc etc." This is the end of the digression. Now to continue with the story. At the very moment when the shooting started an unseen influence (my guardian angel) took over and told me what to do. It seemed that I was back in Camp Haan and the Sgt was talking to me. He said such things as... "now fall down to the left and roll over once... now go forward 4 or 5 steps, then stand still for a moment... now run 5 or 6 steps a little to the right etc etc." I followed the instructions exactly. The shooting lasted about five minutes, then stopped as abruptly as it had started. We immediately started to dig a hole for protection. At this moment our Lt. sensed our fear and jokingly took from his jacket a copy of the Stars & Stripes newspaper and said "let me read to you fellows a story." He had just started to read, when his right arm dropped down. A German bullet had gone through his arm. He had received what we called a 1 million dollar wound... serious enough to be sent back to the States, but not serious enough to impair your living style. We said goodbye as the medics helped him down the hill. We soon learned why all the shooting had stopped... we had overrun the German soldiers position. From two holes directly in front of me, five Germans climbed out with their hands high in the air.

Mt Arnigo P8

Tuesday morning April 17 cont'd Myself and another fellow were assigned to take these prisoners down the hill and turn them over to the officer who receives prisoners. Before we started down the hill we took a moment to look around to see if there might be a better path other than the one we took in coming up the mountain. We noticed that we were about 100 feet from the very top of Mt Arnigo and off to our left side there was a large valley with several tank tracks in it. We decided to go get into a tank tread because it would not have any shu mines in it. I went first, followed by the five Germans who held their hands on top of their heads. We had only walked about 300 feet when we saw some German artillery shells exploding in the lower part of the valley. The explosions were following a pattern that went across the valley left to right with a shell exploding about every two hundred feet from each other. Then the explosions went up about two hundred feet and then another row of explosions. We estimated where we would have to be to avoid getting ourselves hurt. By the time the explosions were getting close we estimated very closely where we would have to be to avoid getting hurt. Fortunately for us, the fellows who were doing the shooting did not change their pattern and the closest shell exploded about 300 feet from us. We continued down the mountain and found the person who received our prisoners. We were instructed to go over to some caves and ask for an officer whose name was told us. We found the caves and the officer, who asked us to stand by for an hour or so, that he might have an assignment for us.

Tuesday afternoon April 17th

About two o'clock I was informed that I was needed to guide a group of Signal Corps men up the mountain to K Company's Captain. Up to now the only means of communication was by walkie-talkies. They had to speak in code because the Germans also had walkie-talkies. I remembered what happened to be near the Captain when we were about halfway up Mt Arnigo and heard him say "This is Little Red Riding Hood. I am at Grandmother's house and anxious to proceed." I was told to go introduce myself to the Signal Corps men and let them know I was going to be their guide when it got dark. There was about 16 of them. They were spending the afternoon in the cave they were now in and would depart from there. I went outside to study the mountain and visualized what it might look like when it was dark. The more I looked at that mountain, the more I did not want to go up. I thought of different things I could do to injure myself. There was lots of shrapnel available, so I decided to pound some shrapnel into my leg. The shrapnel would need to be hot because all exploding shells are very hot. I picked up some cold shrapnel to try it out. Then I put my gloves on and waited for a shell to come in. I did not have to wait more...

Mt. Arnigo P9

Tuesday afternoon April 17th cont'd

...than 15 minutes and a shell would explode that would be no farther away than 300 feet. I did not have a hammer to pound the shrapnel through my pants and into my leg so I had to use a rock. I picked up a piece of hot shrapnel and started pounding with the rock. I discovered this was going to be difficult. Even if I had a hammer, it was going to take an awful lot of force to pound the shrapnel into my leg. After almost one hour I had tried pounding four pieces of shrapnel into my leg to no avail. One of the Signal Corps men called to me to get inside the cave with them or I might get hurt. I did not tell him that by now I was hoping I would hurt. After another hour I gave up. All I had accomplished was creating two sore legs and all the shells that came in missed me. So I gave up and went inside the cave and waited for it to get dark.

Tuesday night April 17th

We left the security of the cave and started up Mt Arnigo. After about ten minutes travel, I knew I was lost. As quietly as possible I told them back track. Then we started again. This time I located the correct gully and we were on our way. As we walked the men unwound the telephone line that was connected to the telephone system that was in the cave we had departed from. We came to the spot where #4 man had stepped on a shu mine. Those who were following me were careful where they stepped. Soon we emerged from the gullies and were out on a flat plain that sloped upwards. I stopped for a minute because I imagined a mine field galore. What should I do? I disliked the idea of stepping on a mine. After a bit, I decided to tap an area in front of me with the butt of my rifle and as I did so held the rifle at a sloping angle away from me. So again we went forward as I slowly tapped out one "safe spot" after another. After about 6 or 7 minutes of this slow travel a voice out of the dark said, "Halt, who goes there?" I answered, "a wire party, we are on our way to K company." The voice said "One of you advance alone and be recognized." I went forward and learned I was heading for the center of a large mine field. A safe path through the mine field had been discovered. It was marked with a rope tied to stakes that had been pounded into the ground. These soldiers had the assignment to show the path to all who came by that night. After we exited the mine field, it was just a short time until we found our Captain. The Signal Corps fellows connected the telephone to the wire and started back down and I went and found my platoon.

Mt. Arnigo P10

Wednesday morning April 18th

I saw that we were on top of Mt Arnigo. About every ten to fifteen feet a hole had been dug large enough to hold two men, one was a rifleman and the other was a machine gunner who stood behind a water-cooled machine gun. I was assigned to one of these holes as a rifleman. About 9:00 AM I decided to have some breakfast (a K ration). In each box (similar to a box of Cracker Jack) there was always a few cigarettes. I was sitting on the bottom of the hole to eat. The hole was about four feet deep. I asked the machine gunner if he wanted the cigarettes. He nodded yes and leaned down to take them from my hand. At the exact moment when his hand touched the cigarettes a German shell landed about six inches in front of the machine gun and exploded. I was stunned and remember seeing the machine gunner flying out of the hole. He was replaced by the machine gun that went up in the air and fell down into the hole with the barrel pointing at me. The tripod legs of the machine gun kept the machine gun from falling on me. The machine gun was full of holes and water was dripping out of them. My first reaction was that I was dead. I remembered a talk in a sacrament meeting where the speaker gave his opinion that the spirit world was very much like this world. I thought "that fellow was right. This world looks just like the one I left." Ten or more minutes went by and the shock of the explosion began to wear off. I said to myself, "this is not the spirit world... surely they would not have blown up machine gun pointing at me." I decided that I was still in the world I knew and that I had been wounded but could not yet feel pain. I had seen many men wounded and for about twenty minutes they did not hurt. To locate my "wound" I slowly moved my hand over my body and then held my hand in front of me looking for blood. No blood. It was a miracle. If we had been standing, the upper part of our body would have had about ten holes in it, we would have been dead. When a shell landed that close to you, there would not be time to "duck down." If the shell had landed about 18 inches farther out it would have landed inside our hole and then both the machine gunner and I would have had our bodies blown to pieces. As it turned out we both were not injured.

Wednesday afternoon April 18th

Our Captain was using his binoculars to locate any of the enemy. He spoke to me and another rifleman, and called our attention to what appeared as an opening of a large cave. He said every so often someone seems to "go in or out" of the cave. Pointing to a tree about 100 feet in "no man's land", he said "crawl out as far as that tree and each of you shoot a couple clips of bullets at the opening." About 20 or 30 feet out we came across a ditch...

Mt. Arnigo P11

...that was about three feet deep and went in the direction of the tree we wanted. We got in the ditch (about 1 1/2 feet wide). About 20 feet away, the ditch turned and we could not see beyond the turn until we got to the turn. As soon as we made the turn we saw two dead Germans lying in the ditch. There was a fly on the nose of one of them. We were now faced with a magnetic decision... 1) crawl across the bodies of these men, or 2) stand up where we could be seen. We chose to crawl across the bodies. We got to the area of the tree and fired a bullet. ...now another problem. The ground was very very dry and each time we fired a bullet a cloud of dust arose. We could not think of any thing to stop the dust so we just went ahead and shot at the cave entrance. We did not see anyone run in or out of the cave. On the way back, we crawled over the two Germans.

It may interest you to know this was the only time I fired my rifle while on the front lines.

Wednesday night was peaceful and quiet. Just a few shells came in.

Thursday morning, April 19th

This was a sunny and quiet morning. I decided it would be safe to warm the can of meat that was in the K ration. To do this I stood the box on end and lit it. As the box burned lower, you would follow down. When you reached the ground all the box was gone and that was the end of heating from that box of rations. I was about half way down when about 7 or 8 Germans came walking over the hill. They wanted to surrender. One of them could speak a little English, and said he had been to Chicago. Just before they came over the hill, I was happy that no smoke was made as the box burned. The moment I saw them I dropped the ration and reached for my rifle. I can't remember whether I ever ate that morning or not.

Thursday afternoon, April 19th

We were relieved with fresh troops and walked off Mt. Arnigo. We were taken to a safe place about four miles away, and our cooks were there and fixed a hot supper. They had kept all the mess kits for us when we had gone on line because they knew they would not be cooking for us until we came back. That was a sobering event. Everyone had located his mess kit and was eating and there was about half of the mess kits still sitting waiting for their owners who never came back from the mountain.

Mt. Arnigo P12

This part of the story took place about 1965. I was attending a Bank of America officers dinner meeting and I got to talking war stories with the branch manager who was sitting next to me. He also had been in Italy. He was in the Signal Corps. The more we talked, the more it seemed that he had been one of those Signal Corps men who followed me up the mountain that night. And after a little while we were certain of it. He had been with me that night. He then asked if I had heard about what happened on the way down. They were following the line to guide them. They had gone about half way down when the last man in the line stepped on a tank mine and was killed instantly.

THE END