

Letter from Guyowen H. Howard, 317th/B, to his wife

From letter dated 3 June 1945

I have got to find a map before continuing on my combat time. I am kind of lost after that 83rd day. I remembered up until that date.

As you know we could not make any notes as we went along. Everything is from the head. But I guess maybe I have it now. We were just a couple of days before Thanksgiving--83rd day when we left this little town after getting some more reinforcements.

We hit the road and passed through a couple of small towns then we came to a town by the name of Maneyville. Most of the town was wrecked by German shelling, that is what we didn't wreck shelling them out of the place. We passed through that town and about three miles to the East on a long ridge we left [the] road and went around a farm house, a large place. It was sure lucky we left the road when we did as the Jerrys shelled the devil out of it about 200 yards ahead of where we went off it. We pull around the farm house and came back on the road about 400 yards East. Before we hit the road we dug fox holes, but by the time we were through digging, the order came to move on. There were 1000's of troops moving on each side of us through open fields and timber land. It was cold and raining.

It was good to be moving. We had been traveling due East but now we were changing to a Northeasterly direction. About three miles in front of us and looking straight over a fair sized village, you could see a large mass of hospital buildings--German buildings. To the rear was a city by the name of Faulquemont about 15 miles southwest of St. Avold.

Coming along a ridge road for some distance we came down a steep hill to a town not on the map but a fair size town. For some reason we had to turn back and circle to our right. We keep circling right until way after dark and dug in finally to the West of the same village. It was pitch dark and raining. The mud was knee deep and cold. The boys were all crabbing. I didn't blame them too much. The water was running in the holes as fast as one could dig and bail. Our feet were blistered and sore. We were tired. But we dug and swore as we did it.

Finally about 10 PM we got the word to move into town. One squad had to stay from each platoon and every 4 hours we changed guards. We got the second watch. So we went into town and slept in a barn on a stack of straw. We had nothing to cover with but the straw itself, but it felt good. After about three hours I woke the boys up and headed out to relieve the other boys. It was about a mile walk. It was a long 4 hours guard. The wind blew and it rained and snowed the same time. The ground was so wet we had to stand. You couldn't see your hand in front of you.

When 4 AM rolled around, no one came to relieve us, so I took the boys and came in. I got hell for it but it's easy to give a guy hell for not staying out when you are inside

where it's warm. Besides the local guard at the barn was supposed to wake up the third relief so nothing more was ever said. A squad went out and watched all day as we couldn't afford to be running around in the open in broad daylight. That night my squad went back out, eight hours we pulled that night. We had a barn fire going while we were inside the barn right on the ground floor and it sure felt nice. Some of the civilians didn't like this open fire inside their barns, but we overruled their objections and told them to go to Germany.

On the afternoon of the second day, we pulled out and went back to Maneyville for Thanksgiving Dinner. I was weak with the G. I. s and as soon as we found a place to stay, I laid down on the floor and went to sleep. The other men cleaned up the room and built a fire. I let my assist. squad leader worry about posting guard and rested until morning; except for running back and forth to the backyard every hour or two. We had a good Thanksgiving dinner but I didn't eat much of it.

The next day I felt O. K. and on that day we moved out again going east and now we had begun to hit some large pill boxes of the Margonet [Maginot] line. At this point the tanks were ahead of us. We passed through the city of Faulquemont and headed northeast in the middle of the afternoon we hit an anti-tank ditch. Once again we took up the lead. We the infantry who gets very little if any credit for what we do. This was the first time our new boys had hit any direct fire. We moved down a long draw. A shell landed close by and one of the boys got hit. The other men started to group around. I broke that up fast and sent them on. I looked at the fellow and found he was not hurt. He was just afraid. He finally continued on and as we circled a small town you could see the main defense and well constructed pill boxes of the Margonet [Maginot] line. It was there that we found out that all that paper talk about it being poorly built and the guns only facing one way was a lot of bunk. It's the best built defense line in the history of the world and far better than the German Siegfried line. (I hope I spelled that right).

We being unable to break through that first day dug in and stayed all night about 400 yards from one large pill box. Later I was back and went through it twice. While staying in St. Avold, the ground was wet and I dug in alone that night and fixed my hole so the water drained off. I got a fair night's sleep and the next day we attacked. It was hard going for one platoon, but ours was very lucky. Twice I moved and twice a shell landed in the place I had moved from. I laid 4 hours beside a wounded German. I couldn't help him and I couldn't kill him. One German wounded squawks more than a company of Yanks. The first platoon attacked a wooded area with the third platoon. We were in support. They hit it hard and wounded men came past me with blood flowing down their faces, arms.

Some were walking, some being carried, others were knocked out forever. I felt kind of cheap there on the ground and not helping them, but that was orders. Finally the woods was taken and we moved up and through them as we moved along we past Yank who a hour ago was alive. One officer got a direct hit with a mortar shell. Once reaching the East edge of the woods, you could see the church steeple of a town by the name of Velemont [Valmont]. That was the one job which I took part in that I will always be

proud of. We were out numbered five to one. They had artillery and machine guns dug in. It was our Captains first attack and as he said afterwards he expected it to be the last. But something happened. We caught them with their pants down and give them the works.

I will write about that the next time I have a chance.