

July 02, 2011

The incentive to write the attached memories was because of a reception that was given to me by a Staff Sergeant from the first or third squad of the second platoon of C Company, 120th regiment, 30th Division in Belgium in January 1945.

It turned out this Staff Sergeant was from Boonville, NY. During the war, World War II, I did not get to know him, and later he was killed April 11th at Ufingen, Germany, alongside Robert N. Brooks from Missouri.

About 10 years after the war, I felt that I should contact his next of kin, but I dropped this idea because I didn't know what I would say to his family, and I didn't have the courage.

In 2004, I decided again that I should find out the name of this Staff Sergeant who I remembered was from New York State. I tried contacting different Legion and V.F.W. posts. They responded with different names, but they were people not from my division.

About 3 years ago, I wrote a number of letters to different government agencies, but with no success using the freedom of information act.

My son, Ron, and my daughter, Dee, posted messages on the internet to see if this would help, but I received no help.

Then a co-worker from Ozalid died on 11/11/2007. He was Steve Klimow. The obituary indicated that he was with an anti-aircraft battery at St. Vith, Belgium.

This prompted me to write a condolence letter to his son, Col. Retired, Matt Klimow. One thing led to another. Both he and his wife, Edie, Major retired, helped me to identify this staff sergeant as Victor E. Strobel, the date of his death and where he lived, plus a history of the regiment during April and May of 1945. This included 73 pages.

The Legion Commander, Christine Panik, Boonville, provided me additional details about Victor Strobel, his family and a picture and details of his death from the 1945 Boonville Herold news clipping, plus other internet articles.

All this came about after the government wrote me a letter saying that all records of World War II for the years 1944 and 1945 were destroyed.

Victor C. Strobel is buried at Margratin American Cemetery in Holland. Victor was a highly decorated soldier. I was able to have flowers placed on his grave this past Memorial Day. A photo was to be taken of his marker with the flowers, but none was received, probably because of inclement weather.

The events and details of my experience were memories that over a period of sixty-six years have come to my mind often and did not change when I would awake at night. The dates and places were taken from regimental history and correlated with memories but may not be completely accurate.

My son, Ron, used the internet to provide the roadmap of Germany to locate the towns, cities and rivers. Most of my memories involve only my squad. For the most part, I didn't know what the first or third squad did. Many of our attacks were at night and I had no idea where we were. But to identify this squad leader that has haunted me all these years has given me great relief, and that I might decorate his grave even though I was unable to contact any living person of his family has allowed me to make peace with myself.

I hope I may do the same for Pfc Robert N. Brooks.

The noises and smells of the war will never go away.

There are other activities that happened in basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, such as bayonet action and reaction, the gun range, swimming lessons, a midnight challenge, boxing and indoor football that can better be expressed verbally. As well as a drunken soldier's demeanor in the barracks at Camp Attebury, Indiana.

I was always proud to wear the Combat Infantry Badge.

Jack M. Brink

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jack M. Brink". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Jack Marien Brink 42122719
World War II

Graduated from the Owego Free Academy June 1944 at the age of 18. Drafted into the Army July 31, 1944 after passing my physical at Binghamton Armory. I was elated.

Transported to Fort Dix, NJ, by train. Went from Fort Dix by train to Midwest, then southward by troop train to Fort McClellan, Alabama. It was very hot on arrival. Almost passed out from the heat. Stayed in World War I barracks during 16 weeks of intensive infantry training. Training concluded with a 20 mile walk from bivouac area in snow, wearing a full field pack, helmet and M-1 rifle.

Marched in unison before an inspecting general with a number of soldiers who had completed basic training. I carried the battalion flag. Eyes right and dipped the flag in salute.

Was approached by a staff sergeant who had fought in the Aleutian Islands campaign to stay as a cadre to train new recruits. I declined the offer and said that I wanted to go overseas. He said that I would be sorry. Note photo of trainees from my barracks. I never saw them again. One fellow was Bob Bean from Nichols, NY, a farmer. Most of the draftees from my barracks were from Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Hartford, CN.

I spent Christmas with my folks. Left to go to Boston, MA, for demarcation to Europe. A liberty ship, the "Sea Tiger," was the troop ship for replacements. This is the last week of December 1944. Over the side looking down was a sub chaser. I got seasick in the harbor. We left at night and joined a convoy at sea that came out of New York City. It had an aircraft carrier, oil tankers, destroyers and sub chasers.

Our ship was faster than the others, so we brought up the rear. It had anti-aircraft guns on stern and bow manned by the Navy. Guns could be used against submarines.

About the second day out, the sea became extremely rough. No one was allowed on deck. Everyone got extremely seasick. Bunk hammocks were tiered 3 high. Garbage cans were tied down.

Had to go by the engine room to get to the mess hall. Made me sick from the fumes.

The ship was rolling so much that I could barely hold my balance. When standing to eat, the roll was such that you slid back and forth. The crew ate chicken. When the waves crashed against the wall of the ship, I thought the sides of the ship would not hold.

About two days from France, the sub chasers dropped depth charges. The ship alarm sounded. The loud speaker said all men on deck with life jackets on. I thought we had been torpedoed.

On deck, the waves were so high that the oil tankers disappeared behind them in the trough. I figured this was the end, since I didn't know how I would survive in the ocean even in a life boat.

Later our ship hung back from the convoy. We dropped garbage and debris into the ocean then caught up with the convoy again.

When we approached England coast, the sun came out. R.A.F. airplanes came overhead. Most of the convoy veered off to England. Our ship went into LeHavre, France in the night. There was lots of snow on the piers and land. A few dock workers were present. A few subdued lights were on.

I got on a train direct from the Sea Tiger at LeHavre. As we approached eastern France, it was daylight. Some of the troops shot at white hare rabbits from the moving train. We passed through towns and villages, the engineer blew the special European train whistle.

A truck took us to the Maginot line. I was very cold. Inside the concrete fortification, I had diarrhea. I took off all my clothes and ditched my long underwear and put on a fresh pair. We ate from our mess gear.

Went to Malmedy, Belgium. Slept on large cut sheets of paper that were stacked in a paper mill. Was then assigned to Company C, 120th regiment in the woods in the outskirts of St. Vith, Belgium. No one was pleased or cared to see me except one staff sergeant, Victor S. Strobel, from either the first or third squad. He had a big smile that I never forgot. My squad leader was Isler, a staff sergeant from the Midwest.

After several days in the deep snow and bitter cold, my toes were starting to turn black and were painful. I reported this to my squad leader. He told me I wouldn't like what I would see at the Aid Station and to suck it up. I found a wooden box in the snow. It had some German link sausages. They tasted good. There was a G.I. lying face down in the snow.

A gracious Belgium owner invited our squad inside to sleep on the floor. It felt warm to be inside. Outside, the road sign said St. Vith. The 7th armored moved through the 30th Division line into the village.

From St. Vith, we went by truck through Aachen, Germany. This area was part of the Siegfried line. It had huge tank barriers made of iron. Then on to Inden, Germany at about February 6th. Stayed in a house. Outside the house next to its outer wall was a 240 mm artillery piece that was camouflaged. The barrel extended to the top of the house. When they fired the piece, it shook the entire house.

During the day, a V-2 buzz bomb went overhead not too high up. Probably it was heading to Liege, Belgium. Flames protruded from its rear and it sounded like a washing machine.

At night, Jerry flew solo. You could hear its motor but could not see the plane. The searchlights would go on and the long beams of light would penetrate the darkness. The pilot would follow the beams down firing tracers.

I saw a TD – tank destroyer – with a side of beef attached to its front.

I got a letter from my Mom saying that they were burning a candle in the church for me. The word was out that since we were now in Germany, we did not require an invitation to sleep on the floors of the homes.

I never did sleep in a bed in Germany. When I got home on furlough, I tried to sleep in my bed, but I ended up on the floor the first several days. I traded my cigarettes (Lucky Strikes and Camels - 4 per package) in my K rations for chocolate and coffee. I had no trouble getting rid of the cigarettes.

There were some English tanks with an attachment in front that allowed the rotation of chains and attached balls that could explode land tank mines.

I wrote some letters to my folks. Also received some mail from them.

On February 23, our Company C crossed the Roer River on a footbridge at Krauthausen. The artillery laid down a smoke screen for us to cross a large sugar beet field during the day.

On February 24, our Company C made a night attack on Niederzear. Captain Spurlock, our company CEO, walked with an artillery observer who had a radio. He directed a heavy barrage of shells and white phosphorus just ahead of us. The shells were pouring in. I didn't know whether they were outgoing or incoming. One piece was landing short. We walked around the area as our artillery fire continued. The explosions lit up the area like it was daylight. I was glad it was our artillery and not the Germans. With this fire power, no Germans fired on us with small arms.

On February 26, we made a night attack on Grottenherten. There were German tank movements in town. I could hear the squeaking and clanking of the tank treads. I had to carry an anti-tank mine to lay on a road coming into the town. Parks carried a 68-lb. flame thrower. He was a big guy and sometimes my fox hole partner. It made me feel good that he had to carry the flame thrower. On some occasions when we were on 2 hours on and 2 hours off watch, he would shortchange me on my sleep because he had the watch. He would give me a kick and say it was my time.

I took a position in a barn facing down the road. Heard lots of burp guns firing. On March 2, we made a day attack on East Grevenbroich on the Eret River. A Germany soldier with his back against a tree was badly wounded. I took his stick grenade lying close to him. He started yelling "No!" He thought I was going to use it on him. I tossed it away from him. One of our soldiers from another platoon came up to me for me to hang back. No way.

At night we checked out houses. Hearing movement in the cellar, I yelled in German for the people to come out. I ^{was} ready to throw a grenade down into the cellar. A woman shouted, "Don't throw the grenade." I believe there were children with her. I left the house and moved on. It was a close call for me.

We dug in. I can't make out anything. I don't know where my next squad member is because it is so dark. A squad of Germans 10 yards away marched by me in single file. All I could see was their helmets. I could have picked off several of them before they hit the ground, but since I didn't know where my squad was, I held my fire. If I did fire, some of my squad may have been killed or wounded in the crossfire.

On March 7, the first battalion was sent to Wehr, Germany for training until March 21. The artillery had some 105s camouflaged and nearby bunders to dive into in case the Germans returned fire. They invited us to share with them some good hot food.

On March 20, I got a 12-hour pass to Heerlen, Holland. I bought a linked coin bracelet from a boy on the street using E.T.O. money. On March 23, our company moved close to the Rhine River to get ready to make a crossing using LCVF boats manned by the Navy or Coast Guard. Our platoon stayed at Ettraig. I went outside the house where we slept on the floor to pray and read from my Grandmother's pocket bible.

An armada of B-17s came overhead. I heard the roar of the planes coming and later disappearing. I thought they were going to bomb across the Rhine River, but their destination was a city further east. In the early hours, we marched single file up to berm and down to our landing craft. The 105mm artillery pieces lined just below the berm. They waved to us and wished us well.

The German mortar shells were dropping on us on the beach as we crowded the whole platoon into the landing craft. I was worried that a mortar shell would drop into the boat. The river was very wide. I couldn't see the other side. We hit the beach on the other side and the front hatch dropped. We ran to an area in front of the town of Mehrum and dug in. The 105mm artillery provided support firing into the town. The artillery was always one of the infantry's best friends. They provided cover when needed.

Pushed through Lohnen, Vorde and Rothausop. Dug fox holes. No sooner finished than moved out. Do it again and again. In an open field, German artillery were laying shells on us. We stopped. I fell over on my back exhausted. I was overloaded with hand grenades, rifle grenades, K rations, ammunition and field pack. It was a daylight attack.

On March 25, we reached the north-south autobahn. The autobahn was under construction. Some of the guys ditched some of their equipment to lighten their load.

On March 26, we reached Nottenborn. Later that day, riding a truck on a road preceding a woodland near Hovelsberg, there was a sign marked with skull and crossbones and "minem." Our truck drove out into a field to skirt the mined area.

On March 27, our platoon marched to a line of departure at Schmarz Heide or Schwarz Heide. Germans must have seen us go into the woods and its edge. We sustained 4 hours of continuous rocket fire (screaming meemies.) It was swampy in the woods.

The multi-barreled launchers were called Nebelwerfer. The wounded were screaming for help. Our platoon medic fled the area. I wondered if I should move one foot to the left or right. My face and body were crunched into the mud and water as I heard the screaming meemies approach. There were tree bursts as well as duds. I prayed to God to let me live. I said I was only 19 and I wanted to get married and have children.

At dusk the shells stopped coming. The word was to move out. No one moved. I got up and started pulling on some of the men next to me to move. I wanted to get out of this hell hole. As we moved forward into the night, we were among grazing cows. I fired into an open loft of a barn. I saw no one.

About this time, we rode in trucks down the railroad tracks. The truck's lights were very small, and we had a colored driver. All I could see were the whites of his eyes. I assume we were on the tracks because the road bridge was blown over the Oker River.

We made a night attack on Gelsenkirchen around March 28. When in the city, I was ordered to position myself in the doorway of what I think was a funeral parlor. There were many German bodies that I believe were civilians. I laid on top of their bodies.

During the day we were located across a street; and when crossing had to run across to avoid being a target of a German sniper. Our squad was assigned to find the sniper. We cleared several buildings. I went into a loft of one and found a huge Nazi parade flag. We never did find the sniper. During the calm of the day, I took a bazooka and destroyed an auto.

On March 30, we took showers and were given clean underwear and clothes at Verl. In the pouring rain during the following day, I huddled with about six men while the chaplain conducted prayers. I didn't hear what he said but I felt better from it.

The company moved to the east of Hiddesen on April 3. We dug in. My partner and I got a door and put it over our foxhole and covered it with dirt. The outside wall of our foxhole collapsed on me. I was buried up to my neck. My partner dug me out.

We were surrounded by Germans. Their artillery fire made a direct hit on a foxhole about 30 feet from our foxhole. In back of us a German ambulance was picking up German wounded. Our artillery fire stopped firing on this position when they saw the red cross.

Prior to Bad Pyrmont around April 6 or 7, we were riding on trucks on the road through a forest down a hill toward Hiddesen when we were ambushed. We piled from the trucks on both sides of the road that were clear cut. Bullets were whizzing all over the place. Across the road some Russians forced into the German army surrendered. One of our soldiers was cutting off the finger of a dead German to get his gold wedding ring. I thought that I could never do that. God would punish me if I did.

The Germans were dug in holes that they could stand upright along the road with Panzerfausts, an anti-tank weapon. Our squad leader, Staff Sergeant Isler, said that we were to take our squad down the hill into the woods to draw fire to see where the Germans were located.

We stopped and started firing. My M-1 got so hot that it burned my hand when touching the barrel. I fired as many clips off as fast as I could load between the trees not seeing anyone. My bandoleers were empty when the sergeant ordered us to retreat. A German fighter plane fired on our column of trucks. The machine gun fire sounded like a hailstorm coming through the woods.

Moving on, we rode tanks during the daylight. I believe around Feldbergen or Steinbrich, small country towns across open fields. When some German fighters appeared, we were ordered off the tanks. The tanks took refuge next to the farm houses.

We rode on trucks through a small village that had workers behind barbed wire as prisoners. We approached a town that had 4 tiger tanks side by side on a small hill. Evidently, they were not operative because of lack of fuel. We stopped in a small town where our soldiers were throwing the bodies of our dead soldiers into the back of a truck. It made me think of myself being in their condition.

We made a night attack on Ufingen April 11 on a moonlight night. I was on point in front of some homes with gracious lawns with a Mexican American, Chico Berreta. We heard two shots and a lot of shouting in back of these homes. We ran over to check why the noise and found Pfc Robert N. Brooks and Staff Sergeant Victor E. Strobel shot in the head. The assistant squad leader lost it. We searched for the sniper, but we found no one; and had to continue the attack.

On April 12 after Ufingen there was a canal. It was located east of Ufingen and before Notenhof. Notenhof was a few miles south of Braunschweig (Brunswick.) A bridge over the canal was blown. I and three others were ordered to cross the canal in a rubber boat to secure the area. A tank or anti-tank gun fired on the bridge and our position from Notenhof. I could see the muzzle flash of the 88s. Whiz-bang. When we crossed, I was worried that we would capsize, and I would drown. I was loaded with BAR ammo, my own ammo, grenades, my rifle and rations.

About April 14 our truck convoy stopped along a straight stretch of road. Everyone piled out of the trucks to urinate in a ditch. At that time the word was passed by mouth that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died the day before.

We moved by trucks through town until we reached the outskirts of Magdeburg. We crossed a field with power lines. We ended at some railroad tracks with box cars at night. We dug in. There were Germans on the other side of the tracks. I fired on the Germans under the box cars.

At daylight we walked into Magdeburg. On the way there was a German jeep with two Germans seated smoldering, probably from a flame thrower. There were large craters everywhere from our bombings. The holes were as big as houses. Magdeburg must have suffered thousands of deaths from the bombing.

On April 19, we moved to a position on the ~~U~~ser Elbe canal. The Elbe river was located on the other side of the canal with land in between. We dug in above Rothensee. I was instructed to not let the Germans fleeing the Russians cross. They were to be left for the Russians to capture.

One night I heard a noise below me outside my fox hole. I tossed a grenade over the bank into the canal area. I heard some swearing. It turned out that there was a houseboat there with our new lieutenant and others.

One day I saw a head rise up. I shot over his head. His head went down. I thought I killed him. He then raised a white flag and came across the canal in a long box. He was wearing civilian clothes. I searched him for a pistol. He said he left a 32 mm Walther pistol in a bunker on the other side. I paddled with a board in the same box to retrieve the weapon across the canal.

Our squad was ordered to guard a barge on another part of the canal. It had all kinds of technical supplies. We were told that we were to prevent the Russians from getting the supplies. Later we were ordered to leave because the Russians were approaching.

I saw a Russian command car with a flag on the left fender leading the other vehicles crossing the bridge from the back of our truck. A road sign at the bridge indicated it was 60 kilometers east to Berlin. The war was over and around the 6th of May we were heading toward Halberstadt. It would be later occupied by the Russians.

In Halberstadt I and my partner heard a shot close by. It turned out that a German husband was seeking help because his wife was raped by an American soldier. He was killed because the soldier thought he was being attacked. He didn't understand the German language.

Another day our platoon was lined up. A German woman walked with a lieutenant and stopped in front of each of us to identify the one who raped her.

On May 10 at Halberstadt our company commander gave each of us some captured parachute silk from a factory. I sewed it into the lining of my field jacket to take it home to someday use it to make a wedding dress. Another day one of our soldiers was carried away because he drank buzz bomb fluid. He died.

Around May 29 we left Halberstadt to go to Plauen on the Czechoslovakia border to guard German prisoners. There were hundreds in a valley including many SS troops. Some marched down a road into the prison camp. A flatbed truck came by my guard post. The truck hit a hole in the road and a German fell out of the truck on to the road. He was screaming in pain.

One night overlooking the prison camp, a mother porcupine with about four little ^{ones} walked in single file unconcerned to my presence. What a pleasant distraction for me.

Around July 8 we left Plauen to go to Camp Pittsburg near Reims, France. It was very dry there. I was given a one-day pass to Paris. When walking down a street, a young couple approached me and took an orange that was carrying from my hand. This didn't bother me because I thought that probably that orange was a treat to them for someone who didn't have fruit for four years of German occupation.

At Camp Pittsburg, our soldiers buried a jeep in a hole. I didn't understand why they didn't give it to a Frenchman. Our squad leader, Isler, was injured seriously in a jeep accident. I never saw him again.

We went to LeHavre and crossed the English Channel in a liberty ship, the Marine Wolf, to Southampton, England. About August 3, we arrived at an Army base, Tedworth Barracks, near Salisbury to train for an assault on Japan. We saw training films about Japanese equipment.

I got a one-day pass to Bournemouth, August 10. I sat in a park with flowers. It was peaceful. I got a haircut and talked with the English barber. Just about this time we dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan. The war with Japan was over. I was happy because I knew I would have been killed during the invasion. An infantryman's life is always on the line until it is over.

Our division took the Queen Mary to New York, leaving Southampton on August 17. We arrived August 21 when I saw the Status of Liberty. A real smooth trip. No seasickness. When I got off the boat, a young U.S.O. lady asked me what I wanted. I said a glass of milk. I got it.

Then I spent a 30-day furlough at home. Then to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, where the rest of the division became inactivated. Then to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. While at Camp Atterbury, a division serving in the Pacific was discharged in October 1945. The men were emaciated, haggard and yellow from taking Atabrine for treating malaria, but they were exceedingly happy to be going home.

I had some passes to Indianapolis. One day while walking on the street, a young girl approached me. She said her parents wanted her to bring a soldier home to share a Thanksgiving dinner. I sure enjoyed the company and the turkey.

Another time, I went to a bar. Ordered a glass of beer. The bartender asked my age – I said 19. He said that I had to be 21. Got a coke instead.

In July 1946 I was discharged with 37 points. I was glad to be out.

Our second squad consisted of the following:

- Pfc Santos S. Barrera, Bexar, Texas. Awarded Bronze star for valor.
- Pfc Esteban Barraza, El Paso, Texas. Awarded Bronze star for valor.
- S/Sgt. Edwin O. *Isler*, Squad Leader, Bismark, North Dakota. Awarded Silver star, Bronze star with oak leaf cluster for valor.
- Sergeant Nelson L. Ruling, Bainbridge, New York. Awarded Bronze star with oak leaf cluster for valor.
- Pfc Carl L. Wojcik, Buffalo, New York/Sloan, New York. Awarded Silver star, Bronze star for valor.

All above received their awards prior to my arrival. The rest of the squad that arrived the same time in January 1945 were:

- Pfc Parks, Florida.
- Pfc Jack M. Brink, Owego, New York.

A normal squad complement is 12. After we docked in New York, I never saw or heard from them again.

On March 1, 2012, the former Boonville, New York Legion commander sent me the history of the 30th Division. I didn't know any of the first names of the people in my squad until I received this book.

As far as I know, all the people that were in a squad are deceased. My son got their information from the internet after I learned of their first names.

	<u>Born</u>	<u>Deceased</u>
Pfc Santos S. Barrera	?	17 July 1983
Pfc Esteban Barraza	26 December 1909	October 1982
S/Sgt Edwin O. <i>Isler</i>	17 January 1920	1 November 2007
Pfc Carol L. Wojcik	26 January 1920	October 1975
Sgt. Nelson LaGrand Ruling	8 April 1918	9 January 1993
Pfc. <i>JACK M. BRINK</i>	02 December 1925	
<i>PK</i> <i>PARKS</i>		

From the 30th Infantry Division history, it listed the combat deaths as about 3,725 soldiers with their names covering 33 pages, and there were approximately 20,000 wounded. Action started June 15, 1944 in France and ended May 6, 1945 in Germany.



Fort McClellan, Alabama
July - December 1944



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Plauen
Czechoslovakia
June 15, 1945

Halberstadt
Germany
May 11, 1945

