

out thankfully, beginning to realize just how cold he was.

Amid a stamping of boots and blowing of noses, Mrs. Herd shouted hospitably, "Now, sit right down to this cider and cookies I have fixed. Just make yourselves at home."

Everyone responded with enthusiasm, gossiping about the newest quilt patterns, and the number of hogs killed at slaughter. At the height of the merry-making old

Father Time took it upon himself to remind the farmers that it was way past time for all good little children to be in bed. Each Paw and Maw, taking heed, reluctantly gathered their flock together and prepared to leave.

As the last good-byes were said, and everyone settled back in his seat for the long ride home, the jangling bells seemed to say, "See you again next year."

The Blades That Severed Two Lives

WILLIAM HARDMAN

The snow was still falling, as it had done during the past three days. The wind was gaining momentum, as the flakes glistened in the light of the shell-bursts. This was a new obstacle for the men who had fought through the rain and mire of France and Belgium. Although the defensive position was just inside the land-boundary of Germany, the climate had not changed with the borderline. Winter had set in.

It was the same war, fight ahead and wait patiently for supplies. We had been waiting for four days. It seemed like months, just waiting for the order to attack. Patrols were active every night, penetrating the enemy lines and estimating their potential strength.

The men had been well-seasoned in the functions of combat. The long and difficult maneuvering through France and Belgium had kept them closely affiliated with death. They had been acclimated to the sight of dead bodies, mutilated remains, and the more familiar sight of the seriously wounded. I, myself, had become accustomed to the pungent odor of dead bodies,

and the everlasting call of the wounded, "Medic, over here, I'm hit."

Another day had passed. The silence of the brisk night air was interrupted by the rumbling noise of a troop convoy, fresh troops. The men sensed the situation. It would only be a matter of a few hours before we departed to acquire more German held land.

The Lieutenant was busily preparing his maps and making a check of the men and their food rations. He was no longer called "Sir," as he had been in the previous months of training. For his own personal safety, he was known as "Jim" since the first day of combat. His uniform had lost its ornate character. The deep respect that the men had acquired for him and his characteristics of leadership stayed, although outwardly he could not be distinguished from them. Sharing his rations, helping the wounded, and his militaristic virtue of deploying his troops most advantageously to cope with the situation, composed the basis of the admiration.

The night was quiet once more, as the last truck deposited its' occupants in

the near area. In the capacity of Platoon Sergeant, I made my way through the snow to Jims' muddy domicile, reporting the number of replacements needed and rations. Looking up from his maps, Jim informed me of the hour of attack, which was to take place the next night at six-forty.

It wasn't to be a routine night-attack. The German Siegfried Line was one mile ahead. A full-scale attack, opposed by pillbox fortifications, tank defenses, and a reinforced German army.

The next day passed slowly, the snowfall intermittently mingled with artillery barrages. Electrified tenseness filled the air as Jim passed the order down the jagged line of emplacements, "Synchronize watches, six-thirty, ten minutes to go."

It was H-hour. The men moved slowly from their defensive perimeter into an attacking position. The dense snowfall was a soothing comfort, forming a protective screen for our advancement. Enemy contact was made without their knowledge of our proposed plan. Immediately, flares lighted the dismal sky above us in an effort to seek our formation of attack. As Jim had informed us, the terrain was level with the exception of a few coves and hollows. Pillboxes and machinegun emplacements, just as he had related.

Three days had passed. Three towns had been marked to our credit. It was on the outskirts of Nereswoilen, Germany, night had set in and the attack was to continue. The artillery increased with intensity as Jim, his beard of two weeks covered with ice, motioned the men to move ahead disappearing in the flashing darkness. Being second-in-command, I crawled slowly ahead, following the scouts who were to the near of Jim.

We had acquired the possession of two pillboxes when the scout relayed the mes-

sage, "Platoon Sergeant, forward." Those Jerries must be giving Jim trouble, I thought, as I crawled behind the scout. "He's ten yards ahead, beside a tree." The scout pointed, as he flattened his body in the snow. "Is that you, Sarge?" came a whisper as I neared the designated tree. "What's up, Jim? Are those Krouts giving you trouble?" "Just a little, Sarge. Got your trench knife wit hyou? That leg needs a finishing touch." I stared at the bisected leg which he was holding with both hands. I appeared as though a buzzsaw had passed through his knee, leaving only a lone tendon to connect the fusiform muscle of his thigh to the calf of the leg. I stammered, "Must I, Jim? I'll call the medic." "The medic can't help that leg. Go to work Sarge," he said, in an almost orderly tone. I tightened his belt around the exposed stump of the leg, which he had used as a tourniquet to halt the flow of blood. The blade of the trench knife quivered as it reached its objective. I steadied it, and with the assistance of the light from enemy flares, the order was carried out.

The weary body could stand the pain no longer. Jim was unconscious. I passed an order to the scout to send two men forward to carry the limp form to the aid station. The expression on my face was reflected on theirs, as they stared watery-eyed at the man who had led them through rain, mud, snow and the constant hell of German artillery.

Six days had passed, the last two of which were spent in a defensive holding position. The attack had bogged down in accordance with the muddy terrain. The much wanted order had arrived. Fresh troops were moving into our positions, meaning that we would procure hot meals and the privilege of a peaceful nights sleep, far in the near area.