

To:
GILLYS W. ALLEN - HENDERSON KENTUCKY

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France
Sunday, 14 January 1945

Dear Gillys,

I've planned on writing you some of our story as I remember it, concerning the German attack that began Dec. 16th. It seem as though I've been busy most of the time and have been delayed. I am in France now and out of contact with the Enemy.

For three or four nights before Dec. 16th. we heard considerable movement of motor vehicles over behind the Seigfreid Line to our front. A few weeks before, there had been similar noises which proved to be a change of troops in their positions. Their artillery had also just about ceased to fire on us. All this led us to believe that they were pulling out troops for use on other fronts. We were thinly spread with three Battalions on Line. I was holding enough front for a Regiment with two companies on the Line plus part of the third. Part of the third one was to the rear taking special training. The Germans had an ideal situation on our side for an attack, but we certainly didn't expect it.

Just before day on the morning of Dec. 16th, Saturday, we got a report by phone that a strong German Patrol was in rear of the Battalion on our right. A little later some of my right Company's mortars shot up some flares followed by some high explosive shells. As day began to break we found the Jerries all around us, especially on the long-sloping hill in the center of my Bn. Area. My Staff and I were in the rear of the town held by my right Company. Small arms fire had begun between my men and the Jerries. Someone came from the aid station and asked for a vehicle to take a wounded man to the rear. I sent my Jeep and driver, only to have him shot up (not killed) by a machine gun about eighty yards in rear of my house. This gun shot into my house and killed a man out back. By the time I spotted the gun, one of our own machine guns was working it over. One of my Sergeants also put in a few good shots. I placed my security men around and directed their fire on some Germans along the hedge to our rear. Soon some of my men were calling in some German Medics and a man or two around their machine gun which was out of action. We stopped our firing and twenty-one came in - "SUPERMEN" - (kids and older men)

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The day moved fast, but seemed slow. We fired at them as they came over the hill to our left front at about eight hundred yards, and discouraged many of them, hit a few. We got an intense artillery barrage, but very few casualties. These brick and stone houses are good shelter. I had a 50 Caliber Machine Gun by one of our Anti-Tank guns fire on some Jerries lying in a ditch along a road going over the big sloping hill to my left rear in the center of my Bn. Area. When their ammunition ran out about thirty or forty came out, waving white flags, moved to our rear and were taken in by the right Company's left platoon, along with others. At the same time, before day on, my left Company killed them by the hundreds. We must have sent back over two hundred prisoners and killed as many more in the Bn. that day, we'll never know how many. That afternoon, seven tanks came up in the center of our position, one hit a mine and the others went back when our Anti-Tank guns fired on them. Late that afternoon Tanks attacked part of our left Company with flame throwers, but the men had changed their position slightly. The tanks were knocked out by the Tank Destroyers to our left. In the afternoon the small German groups trying to work back to their lines would group around a Medic with a Red Cross flag to keep from being fired on. We had about twenty coming in to surrender at one time when the Germans threw artillery in front of them and forced them back. The Jerries we captured told us that we could expect a Regiment against us next morning. We spent the night laying new wire and bringing up ammunition and supplies getting ready for them.

Morning came eventually and there they were, big tanks and lots of Infantry rolling through the center of the Bn. position. They captured most of the left and support platoons of my right Company. Their Infantry had attacked our mortar positions behind the big hill and my boys had piled them high before being forced out. One rifle squad and a section of machine guns on top of big hill had piled them up that day and the day before. One machine gun section on my right had also done a good job. The left Company probably killed more than any others.

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The Tanks passed our town up except for firing their cannon direct into it when we fired on the Infantry along side them. They burned the house my Command Post was in and we had to put out a fire in the one we moved to, set on fire after we moved in. It was drilled full of holes by direct fire. Their artillery came on us all through the day, intermittently. I was glad it came as I knew they wouldn't try to move in with their own artillery coming in. They even used our Radio Channels and called for our own artillery on our position, which they didn't get. Our communication wires went out early due to artillery. Our radios didn't have the range we needed for good communication in this situation. My left Company was severely attacked and shelled. I let them move back and join the right of the Regiment on our left. I asked for instructions from Regiment which I didn't get until midnight. The remnants of "A" Company, my right Company, fought off two attacks before dark. In the meantime, from thirty to fifty tanks had gone through our position and to our rear. This had been one of the longest days in our lives, yet it was one of the shortest of the year, 17th December.

During those two days, my men had killed hundreds of them besides those we captured the first day. We lost too, but Jerry paid dearly for all he gained by pushing through our thinly held lines. We got our instructions to pull back, due to poor radio reception it didn't get through until midnight. By 1:30 A.M., Dec. 18th, my Staff, some artillery observers, part of two of my Companys, my Anti-Tank Platoon, and some few others, probably less than one hundred men, and I were moving back, keeping off the crest of the hills and avoiding roads as far back as possible. We had to fight through a German road block near a little town by the river, where most of our men crossed a bridge. I worked back behind the road block to pick up some of my men I thought were cut off. I found one. He and I waded the river to get out. Yes, it was ice water, there was snow on the ground, and it came above my waist. We warmed up soon though when we started walking again. We got back with our other men and moved through positions occupied by one of our Battalions at that time. By radio we got orders to move to a town a few miles back and join Regiment. You can imagine how our feathers fell when we saw a battle in progress between our Tank Destroyers, and German Tanks between us ^{and} there.

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We pushed on by this reached the town. They were all glad to see us. The Colonel had previously reported to Division that he thought he'd lost his First Battalion. We weren't all there but had enough to further fight the Germans before we got back through strong American lines, miles from there on the morning before day on Christmas Eve. The time until we got out was spent marching, digging in, and fighting. We were too tired to express in words but managed to eat enough to keep going those eight days and had made Jerry pay and had definitely delayed his progress on what I believe was one of his biggest mistakes.

I'll write you again soon and tell you about an attack my Bn. made a few days ago and captured a town, from 170 to 180 prisoners, in about thirty minutes fast fighting, and had only two of our men slightly wounded.

Your brother,

William H. Allen
Lt. Col.- Infantry
1st Bn. 112th Inf.
APO 28 c/o P.M., N.Y.

To:
G. W. ALLEN - Henderson, Ky

2-7
France
Thursday, 25th; January 1918

Dear Gillys,

I believe when I wrote you I told you about our experience up to December 24th, when we had finally passed through our friendly lines that held following the German break-through that began Dec. 18th.

After a couple of days in a rest position, we were moved back close to the lines and part of our Regiment committed, my Battalion, being spared because we were the hardest hit. We received some replacements, then, still well under strength, moved again to another spot behind the lines, and about a day and half later moved to another location to attack and straighten out a kink in the line where the Germans were firing on the flank of another of our units that was attacking to the South.

The news of this advance of ours came out in the paper so I can talk freely about it without the Censor clipping it. We were to make a river crossing and push forward to the South about two and one half miles and capture the little town of Spineux.

The Engineers laid a foot-bridge for us on ruins of a blown out bridge. My leading Company "C", crossed O.K. then was held up at the far edge of the town which was there, by a group of Jerries who were in a house, covering the road and railroad which ran between a river that was our right boundary and a high bluff to the left.

From my observation post on the hill to the rear I saw my other troops failing to move forward, so I came down off my perch and went forward to see what the trouble was. I succeeded in finding places to send "A" & "B" Companies up the high hill and bluff to the left to by-pass this opposition and left "C" Co. to clean this thing out. (This thing proved quite strong and I didn't get "C" Co. up with me until night.)

"A" Co. cleared out a few Jerries on their way forward, and I caught up with them. I had a Brigadier General from the Division we were doing the job for (attached to) join me near the bridge and stay with me a few hours. (It's bad enough to have to fight a War - let alone have a Brigadier General in your hair telling you how each squad should be run, outfit his
and what a good Division is.)

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We were moving forward toward our objective out of the woods for a distance now, passing a town where the En. on my left was fighting. I went by there with the General, hoping to lose him there, and did.

When my party and I got back behind the En. again, they were a little ahead of us and we entered woods again. We stopped about five minutes to let our radio man rest then started up again. We had no trouble following, as there was a nice snow on. I radioed my Mortar Platoon to come on forward as our troops were getting beyond supporting distance.

We started up again and as we came out of the woods to a small clearing where another trail crossed ours, some Jerries fired on two men ahead of me. One man returned the fire, hit one, other⁵ went for cover of woods, one stood with hands up. We dropped back quickly.

The Jerry with hands up jumped in a hole he was digging. One of my men leveled his rifle on him and called him out, and he came. He said there were twenty of them digging in a road-block. They hadn't seen my "A" Co. and "B" Co. pass, having just arrived shortly before. Being only eight or nine of us, we re-traced our steps to the town we had just left. The day was well spent by then. I lost radio contact with "A" & "B" and my mortars go in position in rear of the town. My "A" & "B" Companies and my operations officer arrived in woods by town we were to attack just before dark, and, being out of contact by radio, decided to pull back and contact me. They sent an officer and one man back to tell the situation. They never arrived and haven't since.

I got my "C" Co up to me that night and just before day my operations officer and Co. Commanders of "A" & "B" came in. Their companies were in same nearby woods. They had been fighting groups of Germans most all night in woods, then slept in snow as best they could without bedding. They spent a miserable night, but not their first one. We got food, water and ammunition to them, gave them time to eat a "K-Ration" breakfast, then we started out for Spineux again.

This time we avoided trails, worked through the edge (inside) the woods all the way around to Spineux. We passed one bunch of Jerries, dressed in white camouflage snow suits, looking for us. Our movement was slow and we ran into some Jerries in the edge of the woods about 150 yards from the town. One of my men shot one of them and the others

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moved away from us. While we were getting "A" & "B" abreast at the edge of the woods and artillery registered in, I had some of my men shoot a few Germans (3 or 4) who walked in the open to our left front. (They later proved to be a part of a Machine Gun Crew that may have done us a lot of damage from woods to the left of the clearing.)

"C" Co. went into position to protect our rear from Jerries we had passed in the woods behind us. All the town we could see was one house. We guessed at the part of the town it was in and hit it. The town was on ground that sloped away from us. Our artillery observer adjusted his fire some as the ten minute preparation was falling. At the end of the preparation, "A" and "B" were to move forward and take the town. At the end of ten minutes I thought we needed more artillery and asked for three more minutes. Just as the artillery reached "on the way", "B" Co. started forward, yelling and shooting, on the right. I immediately gave "cease firing" to the artillery, and "go ahead" to "A" Co., who's Commanding Officer was with me. As a result the artillery continued to fall until our running, shouting, shooting doughboys almost reached the town. Our mortars were in position just to my rear, in "A" Co. area and took care of the remainder of the Jerry Machine Gun Nest and some snipers to our left in good style.

In about thirty minutes or less time, the town was mopped up, with from 170 to 180 prisoners, including a Battalion Commander and his Staff, plus a number killed. Our own casualties, only two men slightly injured. (I doubt if there have been very many, if any, Battalion attacks in this or any other war that accomplished as much at such a small cost.) We attacked at about 4:40 P.M. By the time it was over, darkness was falling. They must have been completely surprised by an attack at that time of day, especially following those random shots at the wandering Jerries before the attack.

Our greatest worry was caring for the prisoners (more came in during the night) with a Jerry infested woods behind us and no communications. Luck was with us, and we got no counter-attack. After our eight days of fight and retreat from Germany, this success was certainly a tonic for them. They know once more that they are better soldiers than Hitler ever had.

Your brother,
H. H.