A Corporal's view of World War II From England, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria

16th Field Artillery
Observation Battalion

Harold B Kleinhenz

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Table of Contents

Preface

Why write now? It's really after the fact. This is the 67th year after the end of World War II, and the Battle of the Bulge has passed. I dedicate this autobiography to my mother and dad, who by their example, guidance, and support gave me a good background in Christian concepts. I know my mother said many prayers and shed buckets of tears for her four sons serving their country in combat zones.

The letters sent to my family at home have been stored in an old chest for many years. The hustle of earning a living and raising a family didn't leave much time for thinking about World War II. Still, it was a unique and exciting experience that one wouldn't care to relive or forget.

The second reason for writing this book was during World War II, America had 16,000,000 people in the armed forces. Today, only 2.5 million are still living. In only a few years the greatest generation will be history. I was assigned to the 16th field artillery observation battalion, made up of about 450 men. This was a fully independent operational unit. Our uniform had a small insignia saying, "Information please." Our job was, as forward scouts, to establish outposts several miles in front of the artillery, and find enemy targets or any information for the big guns to fire on. All this information was sent back to the fire direction center, where it was plotted on a map. This gave our artillery the direct target to fire on.

A forward outpost consisted of two or three men, one vehicle (most of the time a jeep), two-way radios, a field telephone, and a BC scope. This, under good, clear weather, could pick up any objects for two miles. Also, there were enough C-rations and K-rations for several days.

On August 16th, 1944, our unit boarded a liberty ship near South Hampton. It took us across the English Chanel about 15 miles to Utah Beach, near Normandy, France. On June 6th, 1944, the Allies invaded Normandy, France along 100 miles and five beaches. Prior to the invasion the Allies had built up a force in England that included 3,000,000 men, 8,000 tanks, 80,000 trucks, 5,200 bombers, 5,000 fighter planes, 2,400 transport planes, 1,200 ships including two battle ships, 2,500 landing rafts, and 1,000,000 C-rations and K-rations.

The landing consisted of Force 'A' with 60,000 troops and 6,000 vehicles and Force 'B' with 26,000 reinforcements with 4,400 vehicles. All this was American. The British and Canadian force was 75,000 men with 1,200 vehicles.

Harold B. Kleinhenz
1944 — 1945
Campaign Stars

1. Battle of Utah Beach - August 17, Normandy Beach, France
2. Battle of Northern France - August 23 to end of September
3. Battle of Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge) - December 16 to end of January
4. Battle of the Rhineland - October through March
5. Battle of Central Germany - End of March to V.E. Day (May 8)

Dog Tags

Harold B Kleinhenz

Serial: #35419919 Tetanus Shot: 1942

Blood Type: O 1944

Parents Name: Anna Kleinhenz
R.R. 2
Maria Stein, Ohio

Religion: C (Catholic)

December 7, 1941 — Pearl Harbor

I remember December 7th, 1941; we heard the news by radio, the attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan. There was no T.V. those days... I remember seeing my mother's tears. In a few days America was at war with Japan and Germany. Franklin Roosevelt being our president at this time.

Harold on a typical outpost.

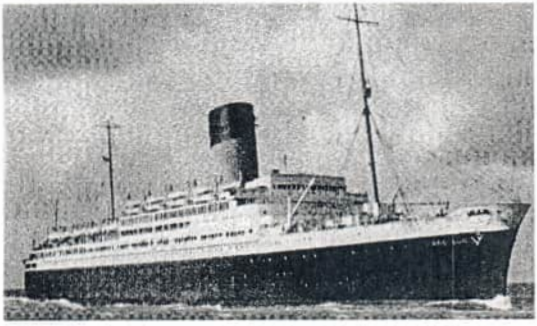
I had two brothers in the army doing their one year of military training, Joe my oldest brother, and Paul, my second oldest brother. This soon changed due to the duration of the war. At this time I was working at New Idea in Coldwater, Ohio where they manufactured farm equipment.

I was drafted by the army September, 1942, and my brother Walter was soon to follow. I left Celina, Ohio, and the Mercer County quota was 158 men for the month of September. We left Celina by train to Camp Atterbury, Indiana. Here we received our military uniform.

I went from Camp Atterbury to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, and here I was assigned to a new outfit just being formed. I was assigned to Battery B 16th Field Artillery Observation Battalion; this unit made up of 450 men. Our job was to be forward scouts. We did the locating of any enemy activity. All the information was sent back to our command post, and our artillery could fire on those targets.

Trip Across the Atlantic

The next 18 months we trained at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri and Fort Bragg, North Carolina. On June 6th, 1944, we heard by radio the Allied troops landed on the beaches at Normandy. At this time we were at Camp Shanks, New York, a large deportation camp.



The Louis Pasteur • Went to Europe on this boat.

We embarked from Camp Shanks, New York, for Europe on June 21st, 1944. We were assigned to the Louis Pasteur, French ship, managed by the English navy.

In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, we had a crisis. The English crew did not understand the French words on the equipment so they accidentally dumped the feed water from the boiler into the ocean.

We sat dead in the ocean for 22 hours for the crew to fill the tanks and get going again. We were very lucky there were no enemy submarines.

After eight days at sea, we landed at Liverpool, England. The Red Cross met us at the dock with coffee and donuts. The building had no roof from all the bombing by the German Air Force. It was raining—all our equipment was wet and soggy and was moved from the ship to a train. From here we went to Leominster, England. Here we checked all our equipment, getting ready for the real thing.

Charles Copeland & Harold Kleinhenz • Note the horseshoe for good luck (England 1944)

Battle of Brest, France

August 16th, 1944, we boarded a liberty ship from the US and crossed the English Chanel to Utah Beach in Normandy, France. We then climbed down a rope ladder and climbed onto a floating dock, and next onto a landing craft. Our vehicles were loaded with us on the ship. We drove off on the vehicles toward the city of Brest on the Plougastel Peninsula to set up an outpost. The city of Brest was a large sea port with many large shore guns and many large submarine bases. We got plenty of artillery fire and got religion real quick. We located many submarine bases and large shore guns, and had them destroyed by our own artillery. After four weeks, there was an unconditional surrender of the city of Brest.

Living in the Tower

Heinerscheid panorama taken from Chateau D'Eau

By this time, late September 1944, the hard driving American forces were going toward the German border. We were all thinking this could be over by Christmas.

Now we advanced to a small village, Heinerscheid, Luxembourg, about one mile from the German border. Near this village was a large tower about one hundred feet tall. Our mission was to set up an outpost in this tower. We moved into this tower under complete darkness. We had enough K-rations for several weeks. There were three of us to man this outpost. Charley Copeland, a West Virginian coal miner, Mosley from West Virginia; he was an insurance salesman, and myself. This being late October, we spent many cold long days and nights in this tower. We gained much valuable information from the Germans.

Heinerscheid, Luxembourg
We had an outpost in this tower.

All this information was sent back to our command post. One night a German patrol blew open the big steel door at the bottom of the tower. They put smoke bombs in the tower and it soon filled with much smoke. We were at the top dropping hand grenades down. They soon left and this was the end of our stay in the tower.

Now this being late November, much fog and sunless days were making it very difficult to do any observing.

Battle of the Bulge

December the 16th we were staying in a small village, Binsfeld, Luxembourg, living in a bowling alley. This was about three miles from the German border. Early that morning there was a heavy barrage of artillery that bombarded the area. Shells shrieked overhead while mortar and machine gun fire along with search lights streaked through the morning dawn. This was a complete surprise. We were unprepared. At daylight, our unit got orders

Hot chow for U.S. infantrymen during the Battle of the Bulge after vicious fighting in the subzero cold snows of the dense Ardennes Forest. Co. I, 347th Inf. Regt., 87th Inf. Div. near St. Hubert Belgium, Jan. 13, 1945

to move out. Our unit had no combat training as the infantry had. This was the start of the Battle of the Bulge. As the Germans swept through town after town, they took many American prisoners by the thousands. The German Fifth Panzer Army steamed forward, circling two regiments of the 106 infantry division. They took more than 7,000 prisoners. My wife, Virginia, had a brother taken prisoner here.

American soldiers march under the guns of the enemy after the Germans assaulted Allied positions somewhere on the western front in December 1944.

Three German armies cracked the lines on a fifty mile front. There were 1,900 pieces of German heavy artillery bombarded through the Ardennes, 250,000 German soldiers and 1,000 German tanks. The next 7 days the fog was so thick our buddies in the sky could not help us. The roads were like ice. The temperature was very cold—below zero. There was much snow, 15 inches in many places. Soon the American powerful reinforcements arrived to join the fighting. It was the worst winter in Europe in 50 years.

Almost a full month after the massacre of American soldiers by Joachim Peiper's SS troopers near Malmédy on December 17, a U.S. Graves Registration team performs the grim task of locating and identifying the victims. The pall of snow had preserved the bodies until Graves Registration could do its work.

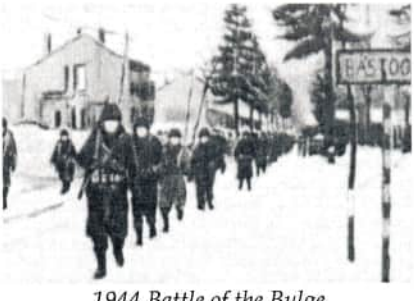
Malmédy Massacre

There were only about a dozen survivors of the Massacre at Malmédy, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge. Four of them live in Lancaster County today. One of those survivors, James P. Mattera, of Marietta, a private in the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, Battery B, was the first American

December - 1944 Battle of the Bulge

Belgian TB Sanitarium was adapted to our hospital in Eupen 10-12 miles from Aachen, and here we tried to patch up wounds during the German breakthrough. The tents in the foreground were "Walking wounded" wards.

American Infantry, Battle of the Bulge
(Note the medic taking a dead buddy to the rear)



1944 Battle of the Bulge
Bastogne, Belgium

Guarding German Prisoners

Field Hospital in a tent,
Belgium, 1945

A Graves Registration Company collect Allied and enemy dead.

Storage area for the ammo is on any country roadside near the front. As the front moves, so must the ammunition. Thus to the QM trucker the hauling of ammo becomes a case of pick it up, put it down, pick it up, put it down, all the way from Normandy to Austria.

At the Bastogne railhead where trucks of the 122nd QM Battalion supplied the fighting forces which beat back the German offensive. From the railhead it is hauled to the ASPs (Ammunition Supply Points).

At the recruiting office for nurses they told Ruth she would never go overseas because she was married and "over 30".

Home in Bastogne, Belgium.

Parked jeep is typewriter table for Bill Boni near Malmédy, Belgium.

A G.I. guards German prisoners with his M1 during the Battle of the Bulge.

The 75th Division move forward to relieve the 82nd Airborne men of the 291st Infantry.

A frostbound 88mm gun abandoned by the retreating German forces, somewhere in the Ardennes.

German City

The tribute to the Battle of the Bulge is a scene captured in Bastogne depicting the harsh weather conditions in the Ardennes and, thus, bringing to life the difficulties encountered.

GI's catch up on the news reading the STARS AND STRIPES in the Bulge. January 29, 1945

Patton's 4th Armored Division entered into the well-known Battle of the Bulge on December 19, 1944, after a 160-mile drive into Belgium which took twenty-one hours to complete. It was during those dark winter days of December 1944 that the Germans, realizing the tide of war had turned, massed an attack through the Ardennes Forest in an attempt to split the Allied advance by driving a wedge northwest to the sea. Pictured are Shermans moving down a snow-covered Belgian road.

to dash for freedom after the massacre on December 17, 1944.

On the 49th anniversary of the Massacre at Malmédy, Mattera gives the following account of the massacre of unarmed American prisoners at Baugnez, Belgium, by troops of the Waffen-SS at the outset of the German Ardennes offensive:

About three miles outside of Malmédy, our convoy was forced to stop because of machine guns shooting at us and also 88 shells hitting the trucks and blowing them off the road. Everybody dismounted and lay in a ditch along the road for protection. We were forced to surrender because we were not armed heavy enough to stop the tanks.

The outfit was put in one group and a German officer searched us for wrist watches and took our gloves and cigarettes. After the officer was through, we were marched to an open field about 100 feet from the road, where German tanks were moving by. Quite distinctly I heard the three words. The haughty S.S. officer issued this verbal command to his soldiers: "Machen alle kaputt"! which means in English, "Kill all of them"! Without any other warning, the German 9th SS Panzer Pioneer Co. opened fire: three tripod-mounted machine guns, a pair of tanks on the flanks,

German Prisoners of War

Infantrymen of the U.S. First Army plod through snowy woods in Belgium's Ardennes Forest as they advance to contact German forces at the start of the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.

General Patton

A Conference during the Battle of the Bulge. General Patton (right) talks to a grim faced General Eisenhower, the Commander in Europe.

Our favorite Cargo. A few loads of ex-"supermen" take a last look at the Fatherland before trucks of the 4051st carry them to a waiting PW cage. Prior to VE Day Third Army had captured in battle 956,000 enemy soldiers

individual infantrymen-triggered rifles and Schmeisser machine pistols.

This barrage of bullets hurtled toward me and the other 100-odd American prisoners of war prodded into an open field near Malmédy, Belgium, at 2 p.m. on December 17, 1944. Since our recent capture, the Germans had confused, abused, and amused us with their Prussian antics. Now they added death-straight from the jaws of hell. A stone's throw, 60 to 70 feet from the road, we prisoners stood in several ragged rows. Ironically, a light intermittent snow added a before-Christmas touch. When the Germans mounted the tripod machine guns and deployed their armor, I muttered "What the hell is going on?" Hands raised above our heads, disarmed, we offered no resistance.

Standing in the front row, I caught only a momentary glimpse of the destruction wrought. The hail of metal struck like an invisible hurricane-force wind. Those not hit dived to the ground and flattened out. The fusillade decimated our ranks-

American Infantry, Battle of the Bugle, 1944

some bullets penetrated two or three men. Blood, clothing and bone fragments sprayed in every direction. Methodically, the guns tracked back and forth until our former rows were merely mounds and clusters of bodies.

My head and helmet inched up until I viewed a scant horizon. This invited more angry bursts from the guns. I forced myself down, wiggled deeper between and among the dead and dying. After hammering us for many minutes that seemed like an hour, the Germans ceased firing. The pitiful cries and pleas of the wounded for mercy, almost like a lowing, reached a crescendo. Even a robot would have cried.

Armored columns, tanks, and half-tracks rumbled and roared by on the road, literally shaking the ground. This invited another danger. Just for kicks, each passing vehicle fired several bursts of machine-gun fire into the piles of American prisoners. It took the armor at least an hour to roar by...

After the high-speed whine of the engines grew faint, an eerie silence followed. Nor did any sounds come from the wounded. I heard German voices, commands, felt movement toward us. The SS men were coming to finish off any survivors... Targeted by a multitude of guns, I survived, miraculously not even wounded. Was I the only man not hit? Would God let me live?... Somehow these words escaped from me: "Let's go." I didn't know if anyone could hear me or join me. In slow motion, imitating a drunken man, I stumbled and reeled to my feet. About a dozen other men responded to my call. We slipped and hurdled over stacks of bodies to reach open ground.

A group of men headed for a Belgian farmhouse in the distance. (These men were later found by the Germans and killed when they tried to escape the burning house.) I raced for the woods. The German guards, somewhat astounded, shouted: "Halt, Amerikaner." Soon the single machine gun began its chatter.

Fear, adrenaline, whatever, my numbed legs pumped in a wobbly stride. Bullets tore up patches to my right, zinged to my left, between the legs; the gunner had the range. ..A rabbit hunter from Pennsylvania, I knew when the quarry tumbled or flip-flopped, this indicated a hit. I fell forward, legs and arms flailing and crumbled. I faked it. The gun shifted to another target. Up again, I repeated my fall tactic...

Dusk and ensuring darkness gave me an optimum chance. A slight detour from the woods and I gained the road to Malmédy. Alone in the dark, encountering no man or vehicle, I traveled three miles at a fast pace.

Up ahead a road block—Americans. Stress or the traumatic events of the afternoon caused a mental lapse-I forgot the password. My noisy approach invited a challenge. Password? None given. The alert sentries were dubious, suspicious. I cringed in anticipation of more bullets. In desperation I shouted: "I'm from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania-forget the password—outfit wiped out—the Germans are coming."

The troopers of the 291st Engineer Battalion at the roadblock sent me to the aid station. Three medics asked me if I was all right. One entire side of my uniform was soaked with blood and the shakes continued. "No, I don't think I'm hit." They stripped me and supplied a complete new uniform. Bullet-hole count: three slits in the seat of my trousers.

Matteras' account of the massacre was at first not believed, but eventually a captain listened with respect to his wild, rather jumbled tale of massacre and an impending German attack. Matteras was taken to First Army headquarters where he was further questioned. The next day, German armor pounced on Malmédy.

Mattera; Harold Billows, Robert (Sketch) Mearig, and William Reem, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion, were presented medals at the Lancaster County Courthouse on April 13, 1994, at 9 a.m. for their sacrifice to the country during the Malmédy Massacre. Five men from Lancaster County were killed in the massacre. Ernest Bechtel passed away in 1988. Charles Hammer recently passed away.

Christmas, 1944

German Platoon

On December the 24th, we were staying in a small town, Genrich, Belgium. This was about 50 miles from our departure on December the 16th. Early Christmas Eve, we had our jeep parked near a small modest home. Here our motor sergeant was helping Allen Holtzwarth and myself change a tire on our jeep. Looking through the frosted window at this home, we could see a lit up Christmas tree. It was very cold out. Soon, an elderly woman came out from the small home. She told us to come in and warm ourselves. Here I saw a young mother with two small children standing nearby. This lit up Christmas tree; the sight warmed me up very much, from the inside out. The young mother could speak good English. She told us that this was the first Christmas they had a Christmas tree since before Hitler took over. When we left the elderly woman gave us each 3 English walnuts.

Yet these people in Belgium and Luxembourg had been living under the Hitler reign all these years, their homes were destroyed, families were broken up, Hitler had taken most of their food supply and yet at this Christmas time, they still gave thanks to God in a modest way.

Christmas During the Battle of the Bulge

Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe, left, and then -Col. Harry W. O. Kinnard II at Bastogne, where a German surrender demand got a memorable response. General Kinnard, at left retired from the Army in 1969

Christmas Eve, we stayed in a large chateau near the town of Genrich, Belgium; the rooms were very large with high ceilings. Christmas morning was very cold, subzero temperature. The storms had cleared and I remember seeing many American bombers in the sky. Those planes just kept coming all day. On Christmas night, B battery, this included myself, was put on the alert to move forward to the town of Bastogne, Belgium. Bastogne was a key road hub in the area, a few highways with many back roads and trails. The city was under siege by the German army. Bastogne was a supply point for the American army. Much food and gasoline was stored here. This is what the Germans wanted.

Bastogne, Belgium - 1944 Battle of the Bulge

The next morning, we moved forward. Here we saw hundreds of our American infantry buddies lying dead along the roads in the snow. The snow was red with blood. How could we ever forget this memory? It's stayed with me forever. I remember near the village of Foy, Belgium; here I saw a convoy of 20 German vehicles that had been bombed by the American air force. Many of the vehicles were still smoldering. Some had the dead drivers holding onto the steering wheels.

Near Bastogne was a vast American gasoline fuel dump, more than 400,000 five gallon cans of gasoline lining five miles of roadway. This was only 1 mile from the gas-starved German Panzers. At this time the American General was McAuliffe, the commander in Bastogne got the following message from the German general.

"To the commander of the encircled town of Bastogne:

The fortune of war is changing. This time the U.S.A. forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armored units. More German armored units have crossed the river Ourthe near Oretheuville, have taken Marche and reached St. Hubert by passing through Hompre-Seibre-Tillet. Libramont is in German hands.

There is only one possibility to save the encircled U.S.A. troops from total annihilation: that is the honorable surrender of the encircled town. In order to think it over a term of two hours will be granted beginning with the presentation of this note.

If this proposal should be rejected one German Artillery Corps and six heavy A. A. battalions are ready to annihilate the U.S.A. troops in and near Bastogne. The order for firing will be given immediately after this two hours term.

All the serious civilian losses caused by this artillery fire would not correspond with the well-known American humanity.

The German Commander."

This vast American fuel dump - more than 400,000 five-gallon jerry cans of gasoline lining five miles of roadway between the Belgium towns of Stavelot and Francorchamps - lay just one mile from Joachim Peiper's gas starved Panzers after they crossed the Stavelot bridge on December 18. American units retreating along the Francorchamps road turned back reconnoitering German tanks by setting up an immense flaming roadblock in which 124,000 gallons of fuel were consumed.

The American General McAuliffe sent this message back to the general in one word: "Nuts."

We infiltrated into the city of Bastogne in small groups on this back road that had been cleared by the American infantry the day before. The city had been under siege by the Germans, we went forward under complete darkness. We were waiting for clouds to cover the moon; under the moonlight the Germans could see us out there. This was a very scary situation. We were worried about being shot by the American guards; the word was passed down the line that more Americans were out there. The American

1. Liverpool, England - Landed there from the U.S.A.
2. South Hampton, England - Left there to cross English Channel
3. English Channel - 20 miles from Utah Beach
4. Utah Beach - Near Normandy, France
5. Brest, France - Traveled to outskirts of Brest (large sea port with many large shore guns & submarine bases)
6. Moved to Heinerscheid, Luxembourg - 1 mile from German border. Here we lived in the tower for many days.
7. Binsfeld, Luxembourg - Moved here from the tower. This was the start of the "Battle of Bulge"
8. Bastogne, Belgium - Center of "Battle of Buldge"
9. Ohrdruf, Germany - German Death Camp
10. Seiferts, Germany - Was here when war ended (VE Day) a short distance from Czechoslovakian border
11. Pilsen, Czechoslovakia - Moved here to do police duty
12. Salzburg, Austria - Also did police duty here.
13. We left from here on a 40/8 train to go near Reims, France to get processed to go home.

guards down the road were told to shoot at anything that moved in front of them.

Under heavy German artillery fire, little by little American units managed to broaden a corridor through the German lines. The Germans attempted to close several times.

I remember the next morning we had an outpost under heavy artillery fire. We located a barn, there was much activity in and out of the barn. We sent this information back to our command post. Soon, we saw the barn in flames...completely destroyed. The holding on to the city of Bastogne was one of the events which frustrated the German army and brought a quick end to the Battle of the Bulge. My unit, the 16th Forward Observation Battalion, had about 30 people taken prisoner by the Germans during the Battle of the Bulge. The German losses were large: 120,000 killed or taken prisoner. The American army also had large losses: 8,000 dead, and 48,000 wounded or taken prisoner.

Much of the German ability to replace all their equipment was lost because of the American bombings causing the destruction of many of their factories.

Funeral Procession During the Battle of the Bulge

I remember on a cold winter day during the Battle of the Bulge in a small town in Belgium, a procession coming down the street. Among all the American soldiers, here I saw two men carrying a crude litter on which was a plain wooden coffin. The only mourner, a middle-aged woman, was weeping silently, her hands on her breasts. The two men were carrying the coffin through mounds of snow and ice, resting many times as they came near a little white church across the street from us. Here an elderly priest and two young altar boys came out. The priest said some prayers and made the sign of the cross over the coffin and then two men took the coffin into the church. Soon they came out of the church and the only mourner took a last look at the coffin and left. The two men took the coffin to a freshly dug grave, lowered the coffin into the grave, and covered it with clods of frozen ground. Later, we heard this man was killed by the Germans a few days before the Americans arrived. This was another cold day in Belgium.

We Hit a Land Mine

At this time, about mid-January, the American forces were again going forward. I remember on a cold morning, about daylight, my buddy Allen Holtzwarth and I were on this narrow road. Our mission was to set up an outpost. We were going along very slow on this narrow trail, with many large bomb craters and much snow. Soon, we hit a land mine. This blew off the left wheel off our jeep. Only minutes before I had been riding on the hood of the jeep getting through all the rough spots on the road. The only causality was Allen Holtzwarth, the driver, lost his two front teeth. In a few days, Allen had a problem. The gums in his mouth were bothering him very much. Our medical officer made arrangements to see a dentist in Bastogne. I was told to take him. You must remember all the people in Belgium and Luxembourg were our friends. We liberated these people. We found the dentist's office, many of the windows broken, no heat, not very pleasant for a January day. The dentist was a lady. She spoke good English. She treated Allen's gums and gave him some ointment to use. The dentist told us her husband was a medical doctor working for Hitler in a German hospital. I remember when we left, she gave us a smile and told us to come back after the war and have a visit. This was my day, some are rougher than others. But none are as rough as what the American infantry units have.

Going into Germany

At this time, the American army was moving forward with much less resistance. Soon to enter Germany, all this time the people in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg were our friends. We liberated these people from the German rule. We did not know what it would be like going into Germany. We were not to speak to the German people. The rain just kept coming down, the roads and fields all looked the same. I remember that night we slept in an old barn, many large holes in the roof. We could hear the American bombers overhead. This was just another day we were sweating out one day at a time.

Crossing the Rhine River

We crossed the Rhine River near Oppenheim, Germany on March 22nd under darkness and much smoke screen. The Rhine river crossing was under the command of General Patton. The crossing of the Rhine River was another setback for the Germans. At this time, things were coming home for the Germans; young boys and many older men were being called to duty. Well folks, this was my day. Some days are rougher than others.

German Brothel

At this time, early April, I remember this small town with many young, beautiful women. They had been liberated one day before we arrived. Down in the valley was a camp with many one-story barracks; this was until the Americans arrived. This was a brothel for the German officers. Many of the girls were brought in from France, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Many were kept in the brothel at night, while working in a big ammunition plant nearby in the daytime. There were many slave labor plants in this area. Here I saw a big sign. At this large ammunition plant which read: Arbeit Macht Frei. In English, this means, "Work makes you free." The atmosphere of this town was very depressing. We left before sundown.

Many years later, I still remember this town.

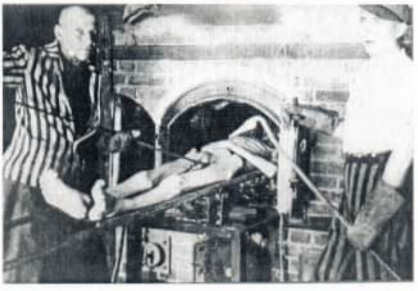
Ohrdruf — German Death Camp

This being about mid-April, 1945, we were staying in a small town Ohrdruf, Germany. Population may have been 1,000 people. Just outside the town was one of Hitler's many death camps. This camp had been liberated a day before we arrived by the American infantry. This camp was so horrible that I hate to talk about it. From the outside of this place, it looked like any other prisoner camp. There were many rows of squat, one-story frame barracks with high guard towers all around on all sides. There was much fence and barbed wire all around the place. Just outside the camp, along the road by the main gate, laid the body of a man who had been working inside the camp, shot many times. Here in the courtyard were the bodies of at least 20 men, many of the bodies only weighing 75 pounds. These people were killed shortly before the American infantry had arrived. Inside the camp were many rows of one-story framed barracks. This place was so filthy; I would have never even kept swine in this place. Just the odor of the place made a person sick. I remember

near the ovens where the bodies were cremated, there was a large pile of bodies. Here I saw a large steel table stained with blood. On this table, the bodies were checked for gold teeth and many of the bodies were covered with tar. This would make them burn much quicker. The American officers had the Burgomaster and his wife from Ohrdruf come to tour the camp. He was asked if he could not smell the odor from Ohrdruf, and he said he knew nothing of the camp. The Burgomaster was told to bring the people of Ohrdruf out the next morning for a tour of the camp. The Burgomaster is the same as the American mayor.

The next morning, the villagers from Ohrdruf arrived. The Burgomaster and his wife were not among them. They had been found in their garage, hanged by themselves.

Out of the many times in the past eleven months when ducking much artillery fire, putting up with much snow, and subzero temperature, this was the day I realized: this was not all in vain.



Slave Labor Prisoners

At this time in April, I remember seeing thousands of slave labor prisoners. They had been liberated by the American infantry, going all directions. All that these people had, they were carrying on their backs. Most of the people were from France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, walking in all directions to their homes, not knowing what they'd find there. We heard stories of how these people were starved. I remember seeing the results of starvation back in the death camp at Ohrdruf, this being late April, 1945. One evening at our supper meal prepared by our cooks, when done eating, I went to the sump to empty my leftover food. Here I was met by three Russian men. They were liberated from the slave labor plant nearby. One of the men had an old tin can where he put our leftover coffee. The other two men used their caps to put their food in. These men were very grateful for whatever bit of food they could get. We were told later by our interpreter this was the best food these people had had in months.

Hitler's Death

"The Crow's Nest" Hitler's Hide Out Top of mountain, he used an elevator to get there.

By this time in late April the American army had liberated Berlin and the hard driving Allied forces had liberated Italy and were going deeper into Germany. At this time, a prematurely aged Hitler shocked everyone who saw him. Hitler had no intentions of being captured alive. After getting married to his mistress, Eva Brown, the next day they committed suicide. Their bodies were cremated. Joseph Goebbels, his number 2 man, shot himself. Goebbels's wife and three young children were poisoned. Martin Broering was Hitler's secretary. He disappeared.

Taken near Hitler's Hide-out.

Germany - 1945: Note the German girl wanting food while soldiers are eating.

Hitler and Gorings Home.

Victory in Europe

On May 7th, 1945, the unconditional surrender of the German armed forces was signed at General Eisenhower's headquarters near Reims, France in a school house. This was called VE day, Victory in Europe day. Going back to August 1944 from the city of Brest, France to our location on VE day near Seiferts, Germany, only a few miles from the Czechoslovakian border, we had advanced 800 miles. Here we came in contact with the Russian army.

Chaplain with Jeep "Going my Way" in preparation for religious service.
87th Infantry Div., 3rd U.S. Army WW-II-European Theater - 1945

VE Day

On VE day, we were near Seiferts, Germany. We heard Churchill, the prime minister of England, announce the end of the war in Europe. There was not much celebration. For most of us the occasion brought about a pause. We had been sweating out VE day and now it was here, we had sort of an empty feeling. From here on, we did not know what to expect. You must remember, the war with Japan was still going on. For most of us, it was just one simple fact: we survived.

On VE day, I remember a Catholic Chaplin arrived. He told all of us, "No matter what religion, come to the services." He told us, "All of you have fought the same war, and the same God had watched over all of you." I remember the talk the Chaplin gave. He had a special prayer for all the fallen soldiers. This was very inspiring. It brought tears to the eyes of many hardened GI's, including the Chaplin. My buddy, Charley Copeland, a West Virginian coal miner told me this was only the second time he'd ever been to a church service in his 25 years of life.

German People

This time being about July 1, 1945, we were doing guard duty at a large German prison camp near Seiferts, Germany. We had much free time. I remember the older people in Germany realized they were defeated. This was not true for the younger people. All they knew was how great Hitler was. I remember I gave a young frail looking little girl, about six years old, a candy bar. She gave me a smile and put it under her arms so no one would take it from her.

Move to Czechoslovakia

At this time, mid July, our unit got orders to move to Czechoslovakia near a small town Libkov, near Pilsen, about 200 miles from Seiferts, Germany. Czechoslovakia is a very rugged country, many hills and mountains. We were told there could be some German hold outs in the hills. We set up several outposts after several days; all we could see in the hills were large flocks of deer. All the farms in this country were very primitive. Hitler had taken their horses, they were butchered for meat. The main crop was potatoes, and Hitler took most of them too.

1945, Czechoslovakia

Dropping the Atomic Bomb

I remember being near Michael Brunn in Salzburg, a small town in Austria. At this time, we were staying in a two story school house. We heard the first nuclear bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6, 1945. This bomb was called the little boy. The bomb weighed 9,000 pounds. It was ten feet long. It had an explosion force equal to 20,000 pounds of TNT. The second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, August 9th. It was called the fat boy. By the standards of today's nuclear armaments, it was very ineffective and very primitive. The formal war with Japan did not come until the signing of the unconditional surrender documents in the Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945.

Salzburg, Austria

Austria, 1945 - We were living in the school house when the first Atomic Bomb was dropped

Discharge Point System

The United States Defense Department had a discharge system set up on a points plan. One point for every month of service, one extra point for every month of Foreign Service. Five points for every battle star, five points for all married people, and five points for purple hearts. At this time, I had 72 points. This should get me a discharge by Christmas 1945.

Our Unit Broken Up

At this time, we heard rumors our outfit was going to be broken up. This seemed like a family was being broken up. Many of us had been together since the 16th Field Artillery Observation Battalion was formed back in 1942 in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Many of us had been together for 23 months back in the states and 14 months overseas. We sweated out much bad weather during the Battle of the Bulge, much knee-deep snow, and subzero temperature. We survived much artillery fire; we shared the same blankets, and the same dirty foxholes on the front back in Luxembourg. We shared our boxes from home. We shared clothing and newspapers. We shared our fears and our dreams, and our hopes for the future.

The night was long. The next morning at breakfast there wasn't the same usual cheerful talk. From now on, things won't be the same. I am proud to have been a member of the 16th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Here were some of the finest men I've ever known. We did our job, followed orders. We were dropped off in recently held enemy territory in mud and snow for days. We were shot at by snipers, shelled by enemy artillery, we were vital and necessary. Yes, we did help win the war. No mission too difficult, no sacrifice too great. Duty first. Yet, our contributions could never compare to the front line infantry men.

Transfer to the 101st Infantry Division

About October 1st, I was transferred to the 101st infantry division. This unit was being filled with men having enough points for discharge. We were staying in a small town near Salzburg, Austria. The city of Salzburg is a very beautiful city, tucked away in the Swiss Alps. Here I saw the Danube River with its breathtaking beauty. The water was blue. On a Sunday morning, I went to a small Catholic church. This was a very modest church, tucked away in all the hills. The priest could speak good English. He asked for all the American soldiers to come up to the front. Here the priest gave us the blessing for a safe trip back to America and thanked us for liberating all the people from Hitler's reign.

Swiss Alps, Austria, 1945

When leaving the church, I saw a large board. Here were the names of 73 members of this small parish who were killed during the Hitler years.

Railroad Trip

This was early November, 1945. We embarked for a processing camp near Reims, France. This was about an 850 mile trip. Our means of transportation was by railroad. This was the same as today's railroad boxcars. They were called the forty and eight cars, with capacity to hall eight horses or 40 men. After three days and nights, we reached Reims, France. The train moved very slow, many times stopping for hours. I was processed at camp Reims, France, ready for the trip to New York.

Homeward Bound on Train. Going from Austria to Reims, France. 800 mile trip

Going Home on the Atlantic

We boarded the La Cross Victory Ship. This was a rather small ship. Capacity: 2,000 people. The ship took the southern route, crossing the Atlantic Ocean staying away from all the rough waters near Iceland. After 11 days at sea, we arrived at New York Harbor. This was Thanksgiving morning, 1945. I remember being on the deck of the ship, this being about daylight with a light fog. Here I saw the outline of the Statue of Liberty. Gosh, this was a great feeling.

Harold Kleinhenz, on boat going home.

Atlantic Ocean, Going Home

Fact Sheet

U.S. Armed Forces Toll of War (1939-1945)

Killed	
Army & Air Force	234,874
Navy	36,950
Marines	19,733
Coast Guard	574
Total Military killed	292,131

Wounded	
Army & Air Force	565,861
Navy	37,778
Marines	67,207
Coast Guard	432
Total Military wounded	671,278

Merchant Marines	
Died as POWs	37
Missing/Presumed Dead	4,780
Dead	5,662
Killed at Sea	845

Six Brothers, Two Sisters

I had five brothers, all served in the military during or after World War II. Another brother was drafted, but was found unfit for service due to an injury. My parents, Anthony and Anna Kleinhenz from Maria Stein, Ohio, put a red, white, and blue banner in the front window of their house and added a gold star when each son left for the military.

Joe

Joe, my eldest brother left first—April 2nd, 1941 for the military. He died in 1994 at the age of 78. Joe was the first soldier to leave the Maria Stein area at that time. He left for one year of service. Although after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, he was in the military for the duration of the war. Joe was assigned to the field artillery and had the rank of staff sergeant. Joe served in New Guinea and the Southern Philippians and Luzon. He was discharged from the army January 3rd, 1946.

Paul

My brother Paul, the second oldest, left for his one year of service on September 17th, 1941. Paul was assigned to the Army Air Corps and obtained the rank of tech sergeant in the Army Air Corps. His assignments included Florida, Louisiana, and Saipan. Paul was discharged from the military in November, 1944. Paul died January 26th, 2011 at the age of 93.

Walter

Walter, my third oldest brother, had two deferments due to his employment at a John Deere store in Maria Stein, Ohio. Farmers could not buy new equipment during those days, so his mechanic job was considered essential on the home front. Walter got tired of hearing farmers come in and question him why he was not in the service like their own sons were. Walter soon threw away his deferment card and was drafted within six months. Walter served in Hawaii and Okinawa. Walter, who died in 2006, at the age of 86 years.

Mary & Katherine

My sisters Mary Kleinhenz-Heitbrink and Katherine Kleinhenz-Broering both had sweethearts in the service. Mary said she remembers Christmas 1944 being anything but happy. The Battle of the Bulge was going on and Harold was in the midst of all the action.

Harold

I was the fourth son to be drafted. I left home September, 1942. I was assigned to the 16th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. This unit had about 450 soldiers. I served as a forward scout for the field artillery. We found the targets for the big guns to fire on. I served at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, England, France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. I was discharged November 28, 1945.

Tom

Tom the fifth son. The army issued him an apron and he worked as a cook at Fort Louis, Washington. Tom never saw foreign soil. He served 1945-1946.

Stanley

Stanley, the sixth son, also was drafted; however, the army rejected him due to a power saw accident. This made the medics rule him ineligible having lost his index finger. Stanley died February 26, 2012.

Andrew

Andrew, the youngest son, was ten years old when Brother Joe left for the service. He said he used to sit on the front porch and wait for the mailman to come make his rounds in hopes of news. It took weeks for letters to arrive, so we did a lot of hoping and praying. Andrew, who lives in Centerville, also wanted to serve. His brothers persuaded him to join the Air Force instead of the Army. He ultimately served as a staff sergeant from August, 1951 to June, 1955 doing administrative work at the Rhein Main Air Force Base in Germany.

With the Korean War underway, he waited four days before his scheduled departure to tell his parents. Our mother shed buckets of tears and recited countless prayers over these years. Harold said, "she must've had a direct line to the man upstairs because we all came home in one piece."

A family's service

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Mercer County brothers will remember comrades, siblings on Memorial Day

By MARGIE WUEBKER
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Harold Kleinhenz proudly places an American flag on the porch of his St. Henry home just as he does every day of the year. He doesn't need the upcoming Memorial Day observance to recall his family's commitment to safeguarding freedom.

He and his five brothers all served in the military during or after World War II. Another was drafted but found unfit for service due to an injury.

"My parents (Anthony and Anna Kleinhenz of Maria Stein) put a red, white and blue banner in the front window and added a gold star as each of us left for service," Harold said. "And that banner stayed up until the last son came home."

Joseph — the oldest — left first. Following his induction on April 2, 1941, he completed basic training at Camp Roberts, Calif., and served as an Army staff sergeant in New Guinea, the southern Philippines, Luzon and some smaller South Pacific islands.

"My brother was the first soldier to leave Maria Stein and the last to come home," Harold said. "Back then, you went off to service for a year of training. After

the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor (Dec. 7, 1941), you were in for the duration of the war."

The eldest Kleinhenz, who died in 1994 at the age of 78, talked very little about his wartime experiences, other than to describe the work he did with mounted guns known as howitzers prior to his discharge Jan, 3, 1946.

"Joe often commented the Filipino people were nice to American soldiers," said his widow, Lucille Kleinhenz Herric. "They sometimes brought special treats like fresh eggs."

Paul left five months later (Sept. 17, 1941) attaining the rank of tech sergeant in the Army Air Corps and earning numerous medals as an air operations specialist. His assignments included Louisiana, Florida and Saipan in the Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific prior to discharge Dec. 1, 1945.

Paul's four sons took him to see the World War II memorial in the fall of 2009. The memory of him talking with other veterans at the site is treasured even more in the wake of his death in January at the age of 93.

Walter, son number three, received deferments due to his employment at a John Deere dealership in Maria Stein. Farmers could not buy new equipment in those days so his mechanic's job was considered essential on the home front.

"I think dad grew tired of hearing farmers come in and question why he was not in the service like their sons," Walter's son, Anthony, said. "He threw away his deferment card and was drafted within six months."

His military service from 1944 to 1946 included a stint in Hawaii as a diesel and gas mechanic preparing transport ships for missions. He then went to Okinawa, the staging ground for efforts in the Pacific.

After the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Army traded his wrench for a rifle as part of the occupation effort.

Walter, who died in 2006 at the age of 86, helped to route remaining Japanese soldiers from a network of caves. Unaware the war had ended, they did not surrender peacefully.

Fourth son Harold left Sept. 15, 1942, and his Army unit ultimately served in England, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria. The corporal was part of an elite force that went ahead of the artillery to pinpoint and then radio back targets for the big guns.

"We were not considered combat soldiers," he said. "All we had were small carbines and a few grenades. We went into the service as boys and came home as men."

His sisters, Mary Kleinhenz Heitbrink and Kathryn Kleinhenz Broering, whose sweethearts also were in the military, remember Christmas 1944 being anything but happy. The Battle of the Bulge was under way, and Harold was in the midst of the action.

Time has softened Harold's haunting memories except ones involving an April 1945 visit to a

Nazi death camp. His unit arrived in Ohrdruf, Germany, a day after Americans marched into one of Adolph Hitler's death camps.

"From a distance it looked like any other temporary camp," he said. "There were rows of squat, ugly, frame barracks with high guard towers and barbed wire all around."

The bodies of 20 men — shot as the infantry approached — lay in the courtyard. Another 100 bodies were stacked like cord wood in a building, where the filth and stench turned even the strongest stomachs. Blood stained a steel table near the cremation oven where bodies were checked for gold teeth and smeared with black tar to make them burn faster.

"This was the day I realized that being over there during the Battle of the Bulge and during the coldest winter in 50 years was not in vain," Harold said with tears glistening in his eyes.

He arrived in New York on Nov. 25, 1945, aboard a troop transport. Cheers erupted as the vessel passed through New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty appeared through the fog.

Thomas, who resides at The Gardens in St. Henry, never saw action on foreign soil. The Army issued him, the fifth son, an apron and he worked as a cook at Fort Lewis, Wash., from 1946 to 1947. He doesn't talk about his experiences, saying it all happened long ago and people aren't interested.

Stanley, the sixth son, also was drafted but the Army rejected him due to a pre-war accident involving a power saw. Medics ruled his damaged index finger made shooting a rifle too difficult. Stanley passed away February 26, 2012 at the age of 83.

Andrew, the youngest son, was 10 years old when brother Joe left for service.

"We used to sit on the front porch and wait for the mailman to make his rounds in hopes of news," he said. "It took weeks for letters to arrive, so we did a lot of hoping and praying."

Andrew, who now lives in Centerville, also wanted to serve, and his brothers persuaded him to join the Air Force instead of the Army. He ultimately served as a staff sergeant from August 1951 to June 1955, doing administrative work at Rhein Main Air Base in Germany.

With the Korean War under way, he waited four days before his scheduled departure to tell his parents.

"Our mother shed buckets of tears and recited countless prayers over the years," Harold said with a faint smile. "She must have had a direct line to the man upstairs because we all came home in one piece."

Epilogue

Following my honorable discharge from the military in December of 1945, I spent several months going through the adjustment to civilian life. After experiencing 11 months of observing many deaths and disturbing images, I had a very difficult time trying to overcome what I had witnessed. During this time I had many terrible dreams.

I remember the days in 1945 after my discharge. The auto companies, after five years, began making cars again. A brand new Chevrolet sedan was priced at $600. This is when I bought my first car, a 1946 Chevrolet with 12,000 miles on it for $450. Gas in those days was going for 18 cents a gallon. You could buy a bottle of Minster brewed Wooden Shoe beer for 15 cents. For a double shot of whiskey you paid 20 cents, a single shot 10 cents. There was no television back then. A ticket for a double feature at the local theater would cost 35 cents, and 15 cents for a box of popcorn.

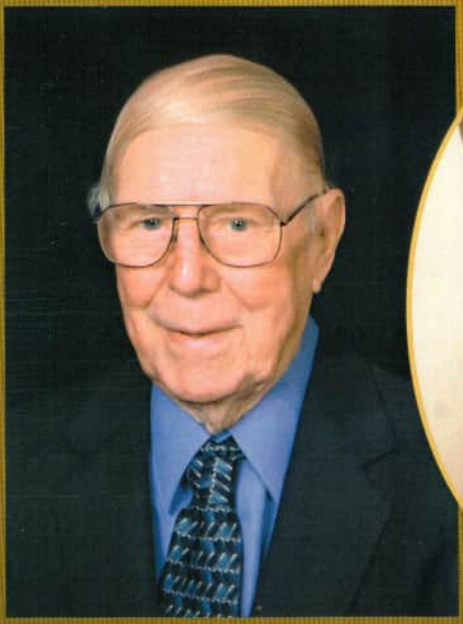
Early 1947, I started working in the livestock buying business. Four years earlier in 1944 Virginia Boehmer worked at Spoke Works where she painted Army bunks. They paid her 20 cents an hour.

In 1950, I married Virginia Boehmer and within ten years we became the parents of two daughters and one son. The year we got married we spent $10 a week on groceries. Our first home cost us $8,000. We put $2,000 down and $3,000 from a G.I. loan. The banker loaned us the other $3,000. The banker was leery about loaning us $3,000. During our meeting, he walked across his office, pulled up the blind and looked across empty lots to the house on Columbus Street and said, "I guess that house looks like it's worth the money." The bankers during that time were very conservative after they had experienced the Great Depression and World War II.

Virginia and I celebrated our 62nd wedding anniversary on November 11, 2012. That same house on Columbus Street in Saint Henry, Ohio has been our home all of those years.

A soldier's experience of frustration, fear, disgust, boredom and even fun at times in Europe during World War II.

These stories are supplemented with photographs and maps in addition to descriptions of the general European Theater Battle situation at the time.



Harold B Kleinhenz