Huppenbroich, Germany

From the 311th Combat Journal…The morning of January 30th was bleak and freezing. A full scale blizzard blew in from the west, continuing so all day long. Up at 0300, ready by 0500 and jump off was at 0530.¹ My father recalled that Huppenbroich was at the top of a long hill and the snow was sometimes knee deep or more.

The 3rd Battalion (Companies I, K, L & M) had two defensive positions to break on this day before they were to be masters of Huppenbroich. The initial jump off looked like a Benning demonstration. For this attack the men had been issued white camouflage suits,² the only device of concealment available to them. It was soon apparent that the additional effort entailed in issuing them to each and every man was worth it, because the cost was repaid many-fold in the averted casualties that would otherwise have been sustained.

The initial advance was over open snow-covered terrain, then on across the cavern-like ravine up to the heights of Huppenbroich. The fierceness of the struggle is permanently recorded in the casualty list for the day. The cost to the Germans was, however, greater than our own.³

*The following narrative is from an After Action Combat Interview of K Company’s Captain Feery; and the CO’s of I & L Companies and the Exec. Off. of the 311th Inf; taken on Feb 16, 1945 at Harscheidt, Germany. It will be interspersed with anecdotes from my father and other veterans as noted.*

¹ 311th Combat Journal, pg 25
² Actually, they were issued white sheets according to my father and others in K Company
³ 311th Combat Journal, pages 26-27
take the town of Huppenbroich. The battalion attack order placed L Company in the lead, with Companies I and K to follow. (Huppenbroich is southeast of Simmerath for orientation)

In preparation for the attack the 307th Field Artillery fired in support of the regiment, while section of tank destroyers of Company A, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion fired from Simmerath on a strongpoint at the road junction at F. Simmerath. The strongpoints(sic) consisted of World War I type trenches built around several machine gun nests. The trenches were L-shaped and the Germans would crawl along in them beneath the surface of the ground. The enemy had to be dug out of these positions. When L Company assaulted these positions they used hand grenades to flush the Germans out, but even after this was done and L Company had gone ahead several Germans, who had been well dug-in, came out of their positions. About 27 (PW’s) of them gave less trouble. The attacking elements simply fired anti-tank fire on them in order to pin the Germans down until the following infantry could come up and throw in hand grenades. I Company, which was following L Company’s advance, took charge of the prisoners who came out of their shelters to surrender.

The strongpoints(sic) at F. Simmerath had been attacked several times before by other battalions of the Division. The Battalion Commander (Lt/Col. Lipscomb) ordered L Company forward, three platoons abreast. The boundary was moved to the right to take in a machine gun position (the 2nd battalion of the 310th was on the right and the machine gun was within its boundary) which had a beautiful field of fire. T/Sgt. William J. Groceman, from the 1st platoon of L Company, took an assault squad and seized the machine gun during darkness. By 0614hrs L Company had taken F. Simmerath. It was difficult to estimate the number of enemy casualties since it was still dark and the number of killed and wounded could not be counted, but the total number “was about 50”.

After F. Simmerath was taken L Company was ordered to proceed to objective number 3 (overlay unknown) which was a strongpoint southeast of Simmerath. A battory(sic) had been there, but it had moved before the company arrived. L Company was to clean up “the ungodly draw” nearby and then to move to objective number 4 (overlay unknown). As L Company moved to objective 3, I Company moved on the right or west side, mopping up. K Company moved on the left or east side, accomplishing the same mission.

Bronze Star Medal, with ‘V’:
Private First Class Charles A. Dehne, 39047327, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy on 30 January 1945 near Simmerath, Germany. Private First Class Dehne, company runner, went to the aid of a critically wounded soldier in a minefield. With three enemy prisoners, he threaded his way to the injured man under heavy enemy fire, prepared a makeshift litter from tree limbs and overcoats and evacuated the man. He then led a litter party back into a draw and while so engaged, the entire party of eight men, including himself, was wounded by an exploding artillery shell. He painfully made his way back to the aid station unassisted and directed another

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4 I have not used map references, not having the map referred to.
5 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division General Orders #555; 14 November 1945
party to the wounded group before being evacuated. His courage, initiative and intense loyalty to his comrades are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from California.

On the approach to Huppenbroich, my father guessed that the snow was about 2-3 feet deep, so they started out walking single file to make walking easier. Even so, they were floundering in the snow. Every so often, they stopped and kneeled down to listen, and changed the point man who was busting the snow. A couple shots were fired and everybody hunkered down. Upon doing so, my father said he heard a "snap", like you would make with your fingers, beside his right ear. He turned his head to look to the right and just that quick; he heard the same sound by his left ear. Then it dawned on him that a sniper had him targeted and had twice tried to shoot him in the head. He got face down and flat out, 'PDQ' (Pretty D... Quick) as he called it. He never heard the rifle reports. Looking around, a small bush behind him exhibited a clipped branch, as if cut with pruners. Perhaps the sniper was only playing with him, to get his reaction. Dad was just glad the
sniper’s sense of humor didn’t included a more important, and dear, target. He said he’d been very lucky and another group of GI's ahead got the sniper.

The soldier who got the sniper, and saved my father’s life, was PFC Louis Hillary, although his name was never known by Dad or exactly who it was. The incident led to a Bronze Star, with ‘V’, earned by Hillary as follows:

Private First Class Louis D. Hillary, 13142142, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy on 30 January 1945 near Huppenbroich, Germany. Three well-concealed enemy snipers halted the advance of the platoon through a draw approaching Huppenbroich. Private First Class Hillary, himself a sniper, proceeded alone to a ledge, where, although exposed to the enemy, picked them out carefully and destroyed them all. The threat to the platoon removed, he rejoined them to participate in the main action ahead. His exceptional courage and skill were exemplary and are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from Oregon.

Lt. Groves yelled for the platoon to follow him and my father began to move forward again. Dad looked back and the men had all stayed down. Typically, Peters wasn't around and Lt. Groves yelled back to Dad and said “Sgt. Cooper, I'll lead everybody but you have to make them follow me." So, Dad tongue lashed the slow movers. Dad looked over at Sgt. Allabaugh and said "Allabaugh, get your squad moving." Allabaugh did so and they moved on. Dad pushed the following squads as well.

They had to be careful and not get snowmelt from their hands in their rifle actions. Some guys had them freeze up on them, which was only a problem if you didn't have it loaded because usually when you shot the gun, the action worked. On the move in a push, riflemen had a round chambered. During periods of inactivity, a round was only chambered when necessary. They had army green wool gloves that had leather palms and long underwear. He doesn't remember being cold during the fighting, only when they stopped for any length of time, but he would guess the temperature was down to about 10-15 degrees above zero. Estimates have placed the wind speed that day at about 50mph which added to the blizzard effect.

As K Company moved down the right side of the road they encountered a straight line of trenches. There were also about 9 two-man foxholes. The company took five foxholes, but left the others since they were in another sector. I Company moved in a column of platoons. They picked up about 15 prisoners. The companies were marching now through a blizzard which blinded them. They were struggling through snow about four feet deep. To add to their difficulties they received small arms, machine gun and direct fire. Their weapons were wet and dirty and could not be fired. At this time they had no supporting weapons. In regard to the lack of supporting weapons Captain Gero of L Company said: “we started out carrying satchel charges, but after we had gone 20 yards we dropped them. It was strictly a rifle squad deal the whole way”.

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6 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division General Orders #555; 14 November 1945
7 CW Cooper notes Dec 1985
8 CW Cooper notes Apr 2000
The Germans placed mortar and 88 fire on L Company as it came down the road. One 88 gun by the road was later knocked out by some of the tanks. Mortars, emplaced east and south of Huppenbroich, followed L Company all the way down the draw, so that L Company suffered casualties all the way. The Germans fired at the last men in the column. They killed Lt. Henry K. Trowbridge and wounded two other men. K Company got most of its casualties in Huppenbroich, while I Company suffered most of its casualties at the edge of the draw. L Company captured a horse and sled, which the Germans had used to haul ammunition, and made use of them to evacuate the dead and wounded.

As they began taking mortar fire, a call for ‘medic!’ was heard. Shortly, Dad saw Ritchie limping back calling 'Cooper', 'Cooper' every 10 yards or so, limping the whole time, but walking on his own. Well, Dad heard him and went over to him. Ritchie said "Coop, I took one and I'm going back to the aid station". Ritchie taking the time to say goodbye while the shooting was going on. It was one of those moments when you had the thought that you might never see each other again. They embraced and Dad said it was like losing the brother he never had. Even so, my father thought ‘boy are you lucky to be out of it’.  

PFC Harvey Jorgensen, 1st platoon 3rd squad, wrote in Feb 2004 “When I tripped the mine, Sgt. Ritchie and 2 or 3 others got slight injuries I was told. He could have received a piece of shrapnel from that mine. I do not recall who else was injured.” PFC Jorgensen lost his foot.

They couldn’t stop, but had to struggle forward and through the incoming rounds trying to get ahead of it. Dad put PFC Ralph Charlton in charge of Ritchie’s squad and made sure he knew what to do. Each squad was staggered and not in direct line of the next, so Dad had to keep all three squads on track and on the objective, moving from Lt. Groves back to each squad leader. Sgt. Davis’ squad was bringing up the rear, flanking any resistance. One squad moving up and then covering the next one as they went past.

S/Sgt Martin Pike, 2nd platoon, 1st squad leader, wrote in Oct 2002 “During the closing days of the Bulge, Pfc. Jose Sanchez was my foxhole companion. As we were preparing for the attack on Huppenbroich, we were issued white sheet-like camouflage gear, grenades and instructed to get our weaponry cleaned and ready. Someone, seeking to be helpful, had taken an empty canteen, filled it with gun cleaning oil and placed it on the table where we were working on our weapons. Jose, not knowing it contained oil took a big gulp of it and became a very sick young man. In spite of his pain and discomfort, when it came time to head for Huppenbroich he was in the line. Just before reaching the village a number of '88' rounds hit in the midst of the platoon. Jose suffered a head wound from which he succumbed in the night. He was a fine young man and a tragic loss. There were eleven of us in the squad when we started out for Huppenbroich. Before the second day was over only one was left. It was on that second day that I received the wound that took me from the company.”

9 CW Cooper notes Apr 14, 2000
10 CW Cooper notes Apr 14, 2000
Companies I and K were advancing on Huppenbroich at 1100(hrs). Company I proceeded along the right side of the road, while K Company swung to the left (overlay unknown). In making this maneuver K Company crossed the draw in front of L Company. After K Company had crossed in front of L Company, L Company proceeded on its mission to objectives 4 and 5 (overlay unknown). As they approached their objectives (the high ground northeast and east of Huppenbroich) resistance stiffened.

K Company met stiff resistance in the draw from machine guns which were in well prepared positions. The Germans had obviously been preparing their defenses for a long time. Company I, which entered the outskirts of Huppenbroich about 1115(hrs), gained two hours on K Company which was held up in the draw and was unable to come into its section of town.

A Silver Star was earned by both PFC’s Robert White and Charles Rayfield. Both men were members of the 4th platoon machine gun section attached to the 2nd platoon for the above action. Their citations, worded slightly different, are given as follows

Private First Class Robert H. White, 34896023, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action on 30 January 1945 at Huppenbroich, Germany. When the second platoon and the machine gun section attached were delayed by accurate and intense fire from seven enemy machine guns, Private First Class White, machine gunner, advanced with his assistant [Rayfield] and, after killing one enemy machine gun crew, took over the enemy gun and threw grenades into hostile positions until they were completely silenced. Ten of the enemy were captured. This courageous action enabled the platoon to capture its objective without further delay or losses. The initiative, skill and devotion to duty displayed by Private First Class White are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from South Carolina.

Charles Rayfield, who was promoted to PFC just the day before on Jan 29th, was White’s assistant, and did not hesitate to engage the enemy as follows:

Sergeant Charles J. Rayfield, 38682384, (then Private First Class), Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action on 30 January 1945 near Huppenbroich, Germany. When the second platoon and the machine gun section attached were delayed by accurate and intense fire from seven enemy machine guns, Sergeant Rayfield advanced with the gunner (White), and after killing one machine gun crew, he and his companion took over the enemy gun. From this advantageous and newly-won position, and with his ammunition being expended, he fired the enemy gun and threw enemy grenades into hostile positions until they were completely silenced. Ten of the enemy were captured. His courageous action enabled the platoon to capture its objective without further delay or losses from casualties. The initiative, skill and extreme devotion to duty

11 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U.S. Army General Orders #559; 14 November 1945
12 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U.S. Army General Orders #555; 14 November 1945
shown by this soldier are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from Texas.

Company I fought until dark from house to house, using assault squads armed with rifles and grenades. K Company by-passed its opposition and came into town in the early afternoon. When night came they were in one house while the “Jerries” were in the next one. The Germans were well under cover. The bazookas, which had been frozen earlier in the day, were beginning to thaw out so that they could be used. By night I Company had cleared out seven houses, K Company eleven while L Company was holding objectives 4 and 5.

Hedges bordered the roads on the edge of town. There had been some sporadic shooting and a few Germans were holed up in a building. Once again, my father was passing out ammunition. Someone told him to stay down and, again, Dad thought he was out of range. Shortly, the Germans in the building stuck a white rag out a window, indicating they wanted to surrender. Sgt. Allabaugh raised his head above a hedge to wave them in and was shot square between the eyes. The eight Germans who came out were all shot by Allabaugh’s squad. Upon reflection, a different German who had not seen his comrades attempt to surrender had probably shot Allabaugh. After Allabaugh was killed, Lt. Groves told Dad to take over his squad. The assistant squad leader, Rocco Aceto, protested, so Dad told him he could have the squad. Aceto picked his own assistant squad leader and chose Knox, a guy from Tennessee. The Germans shelled them pretty good.  

Dad told me that they wanted to take towns, or a building, because then you could crawl into the cellars for the night and get out of the wind and cold. The alternative was to dig a hole in the frozen ground and tough it out. In those cases, they didn't sleep much, but shivered a lot. The Germans were just as determined to hold the towns for the same reason. Dad says they were fighting for towns and for each other and didn't think about 'the big picture'. To go home meant you had to go forward and get the job done; it was an unspoken thing, but they all knew this. Mostly, you did it for your buddy.

Dad reflected on the loss of PFC Isadore Goldberg: (He) Once told me he wouldn't allow himself to be taken prisoner because the Germans didn’t treat Jews well. This was before any of us had heard about the death camps. We were attacking Huppenbroich, Germany and everyone was wearing white sheets over our clothes, including the Germans. It was hard to tell who was who. A group of men were seen in a building and Goldberg said "I'll see if they're German or not" and he walked out into the open and was immediately shot. We cleaned out that building and didn't take any

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13 CW Cooper notes Aug 20, 1985
14 CW Cooper notes Apr 9, 2000
prisoners." PFC Harvey Jorgensen added this about Goldberg: "I remember (him) as being a very outgoing person. I recall going to a Belgian restaurant with him and others, while on a 24-hour leave from the front lines. I ate horse meat for the first time in my life."!

After capturing a prisoner at Huppenbroich, Dad instructed PFC Ralph Charlton to take him to headquarters for interrogation. This was some distance behind their position and it was almost dark. About 15 minutes after leaving, Charlton returned. When asked what happened to the prisoner, Charlton said he'd tried to escape so he shot him. Later, Charlton confided to Dad that he'd simply shot the prisoner because he didn't want to go the distance. Charlton said the guy never knew what hit him.

On 31 January (1945) at 0730hrs K Company finished mopping up its section of town. L Company, attempting to move on to objective 6, met extremely heavy resistance from the hedgerows on the high ground southwest of Huppenbroich. They received small arms and automatic fire from the hedgerows, which had been cleverly and accurately selected for a perfect defense of the high ground. K Company was again committed to help L Company in cleaning out the strongpoint and the rest of the battalion objective. This proved to be the worst part of the fight for K Company. K Company committed all but its 1st platoon and one squad from L Company assisted them effectively. The enemy had 50 men of whom 32 were taken prisoners; the rest were killed.

L Company was sent to take Objective 6. It was the level ground southeast of Huppenbroich. Capt Gero took his 3rd platoon and a light machine gun section of M Company. They got into such a difficult fight that Capt. Gero had to send the 60mm mortars. The mortar observers crawled out and they started laying the stuff in there. As they started across the open field they saw three men in snow suits and German overcoats. At first they thought that they were American soldiers with "Jerry" prisoners, but learned better when the men turned around and fired on L Company’s men.

Two battalions of 155 FA and 1 battalion of 8” guns were firing on the high ground southwest of objective 5 (west of Huppenbroich) as a preparation for the attack. Following the artillery preparation, 1st Lt. (actually 2nd/Lt) Donald Walls, of K Company (2nd platoon) tried to move in on the point and was pinned down immediately. Attempting in every way to overcome resistance and still failing, he again called for artillery and kept pulling it into him until he was receiving casualties from his own fire. Lt. Walls lifted the artillery and advanced. Again he was pinned down. At this time a Tank Destroyer was called by Lt. Col. Andy A. Lipscomb, Battalion CO, for direct fire support of the platoon. This was the first time the Tank Destroyers had been in the fight. With that assistance, Lt. Walls aggressiveness and the aid of L Company the strongpoint was taken. The battle of Huppenbroich was finished at 1600hrs.

2/Lt Donald Walls earned a Silver Star for his work this day.

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15 CW Cooper notes Aug 20, 1985
16 Letter from Harvey Jorgensen, Jan 1, 2001
17 CW Cooper notes Nov 22, 1999
18 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U. S. Army General Orders #497; 25 September 1945
Second Lieutenant Donald E. Walls, 0-2000565, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action against the enemy on 31 January 1945 at Huppenbroich, Germany. When Second Lieutenant Walls was ordered to clear high ground of entrenched enemy to thwart possible enemy counterattacks, he called for and directed artillery fire on the positions after advancing to within 75 yards of the entrenchments. With but fifteen of his men he advanced through waist-deep snow to assault and destroy the enemy. Later he mounted a tank destroyer and directed fire which destroyed another enemy stronghold in an old barn. His fortitude, intrepidity and judgment are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from Indiana.

Another close friend of Dad’s, S/Sgt Virgil Knight, the 3rd squad leader in Walls’ 2nd platoon, also earned a Silver Star in the same action, but it cost him his life and was awarded posthumously.19 He was wearing his double buckle boots he’d bought in New York and they still had the ‘VK’ burned into the tops.

Staff Sergeant Virgil K. Knight, 34352799, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action on 31 January 1945 in the vicinity of Huppenbroich, Germany. When the operation of his platoon was being held up by a platoon making a flank attack on the enemy, Staff Sergeant Knight volunteered to contact the attacking platoon and determine its exact location. Unable to find cover or concealment, he crossed 200 yards of open terrain under intense artillery and small arms fire. After locating the platoon and preparing to return with the information, Staff Sergeant Knight was ordered by his company commander to report for medical treatment for a wound received on this mission. His display of courage and disregard for personal safety are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from Georgia.

The other platoon referred to in the citation above was the 3rd platoon. The 2nd squad leader in it was another friend of Dad’s. He recalled that S/Sgt. Milton Carroll was killed by a direct hit from a mortar or artillery. The only thing left was his foot and part of his leg still in his boot.20 PFC DeMien had a more vivid recollection: “I recall that he was plastered all over the side of a barn after he was hit.”21

A member of the 4th platoon, PFC Alva Jackley, earned a Bronze Star, with ‘V’, using only a Colt .45 pistol, the personal weapon carried by a light machine gunner (.30 caliber). His display of valor also led the French Government to award him the French Croix de Guerre with Bronze Star, the only one earned in K Company during the entire war.22 PFC Jackley’s citation is as follows:23

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19 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U. S. Army General Orders #49; 22 February 1945
20 CW Cooper notes Aug 20, 1985
21 Fred DeMien email Sept 2002
22 In the United States military, the Croix de Guerre was commonly accepted as a foreign decoration.
23 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U.S. Army General Orders #39; 18 February 1945
Private First Class Alva B. Jackley, 39562603, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for Heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy on 31 January 1945 in the vicinity of **Huppenbroich**, Germany. The platoon (4th) of which Private First Class Jackley was a member was pinned down by heavy machine gun fire. It was established that there were seven gun emplacements opposing the platoon. Although armed with only a pistol, Private First Class Jackley assaulted one of the guns and silenced it. His actions so inspired his comrades that they overpowered the seven enemy positions and captured 28 prisoners. His enthusiasm and disregard for personal safety are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from California.

Dad’s platoon leader earned a Bronze Star on the 31st and his citation indicates the situation the 1st platoon encountered:

First Lieutenant THURMAN M. GROVES, 0-1324462, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for heroic achievement in connection with military operations against the enemy on 31 January 1945 in the vicinity of Huppenbroich, Germany. During the house-to-house fighting within the town, First Lieutenant GROVES and his platoon (1st) encountered such intense enemy machine gun and rifle fire that movement was impossible without risk of excessive casualties. After ordering his men to remain under cover, First Lieutenant Groves took a bazooka and moved out to fire on the enemy machine gun positions. The accurate fire he brought on the enemy position killed the crew and silenced the gun. He then led his platoon forward to overcome additional resistance and accomplish his mission. His inspiring leadership and aggressiveness are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military service from West Virginia.24

Another Silver Star was earned at Huppenbroich, by S/ Sgt Jack McKinney, on the 31st and his citation is given here25:

Staff Sergeant Jack R. McKinney, 37606832, Infantry, Company K, 311th Infantry Regiment, for gallantry in action in connection with military operations against the enemy on 31 January 1945 in the vicinity of Huppenbroich, Germany. The (3rd) platoon being led by Staff Sergeant McKinney, as it approached to within twenty yards of a wooded area, was pinned down by a hail of machine gun fire. Staff Sergeant McKinney ran into the edge of the wooded area alone to clear it of the enemy. The platoon leader (1/Lt George Harrison) followed and found that Staff Sergeant McKinney had already killed four of the enemy and caused the surrender of two and was still advancing inside the edge of the woods. They then proceeded forward together until both were wounded by fire from a machine pistol. Staff Sergeant McKinney, as he crawled away from the fire, was wounded the second time. His bravery and daring cleared the way for the successful advance of the platoon and are in accordance with the highest military traditions. Entered the military

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24 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U.S. Army General Orders # 157, 30 April 1945; Bronze Star with ‘V’ device
25 Headquarters 78th Infantry Division U. S. Army General Orders #105; 3 April 1945
Another member of K Company, S/Sgt John Jackson of the 4th platoon, had this to say about S/Sgt McKinney at Huppenbroich: “There was a large Co K soldier, a very nice farmer from like Nebraska or Iowa (actually from Missouri) named Kinney or McKinney. In our attack on Huppenbroich, down in that big open valley before Huppenbroich, I came up behind him. He was standing kind of dazed, mad & relieved too. A well camouflaged Kraut had shot (Mc)Kinney a few inches below his privates in the inside fleshy parts of both legs. The Kraut was held standing up by his small enclosure. (Mc)Kinney had bayoneted him right up through his throat probably into his brain & he didn’t bleed a drop.”

In regard to the taking of objective 7, the western part of HUPPENBROICH assigned to I Company, Major Peter J. Newton made the following emphasized statement: “I Company ran into terrific automatic fires which it was impossible to overcome even though the Company had a foothold in the town dearly paid for. At this point, Capt. Vanninger called the battalion Commander and advised him of the situation. He said that the daylight was running out and asked for permission to withdraw and for artillery upon the enemy automatic weapons which were holding his advance. Capt. Vanninger brought the fire so close that one of his men was wounded. I Company again closed upon the enemy, as the fire lifted, and succeeded in cleaning his part of the objective for the day. It is my opinion that the command decision made under the stress of this battle by this commander, to give up the foothold which he had in town to call for artillery support was a decisive factor in the success of securing that part of town.”

Later that afternoon, a battalion briefing was ordered. For some reason the 1st platoon Leader and platoon Sgt. were not present, so Dad filled in for them and was present for a briefing headed by Capt. Vaninger of I Company. Vaninger was a southern guy and talked real slow with a drawl, but was one of the nicest guys. I company took a lot of casualties, one of them a red-haired Sgt named something like "Bailick" and Vaninger stood there with head hanging down "We lost lots of good people today and I don't know how many of us will be left tonight". Dad said it made you feel depressed and not very optimistic. When the order came to jump off the next morning to secure the town, Dad had to cross the street and did so as fast as he could and dove the last few yards. No shots. Come to find out, the Germans had pulled out and they had a real break.27

Casualties for 30-31 January (1945)

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<tr>
<th>Company</th>
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<td>I Company</td>
<td>8-9 KIA and 16 WIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>K Company</td>
<td>55 KIA and WIA  (Capt. Feery could not separate the figures)</td>
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<tr>
<td>L Company</td>
<td>5 KIA and 20 WIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>M Company</td>
<td>22 KIA and WIA</td>
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The Battalion remained in these positions in and around Huppenbroich until relieved on the 3rd of February 1945. *End of ‘AA CI Feery 2.16.1945’.*

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26 Letter from John Jackson May 2000
27 CW Cooper notes Aug 20, 1985
Despite the odds against them, the shrinking force of (German) defenders refused to quit. Their stiff resistance slowed the advances, but it could not stop the GIs. Lieutenant Colonel Andy A. Lipscombe, commander of the 3rd Battalion of the 78th Infantry Division’s 311th Regiment, reported on a successful assault on Huppenbroich, deep in the Huertgen. "We were fighting the elements," he said. "The men were tired when they moved up the hill. The snow was very deep. The wind was very high, sweeping the snow in their eyes so that they could barely see or hear. They were so very numb and tired they couldn’t hit the ground when the artillery and mortar fire fell beside them. . . . Every house contained enemy." Still, they took the village. He added, "My men were evacuated by German sleds and horses. Some of my men died from exposure after being wounded. A reasonable amount of casualties could have been saved if we had the winter equipment to evacuate the wounded."28

PFC DeMien, of the 4th platoon, recalled his memory of the Huppenbroich battle as follows:

This time we were to take a small town about two miles from where we were camped. It had snowed during the past couple days, and the ground was well covered with at least four inches of new snow as well as some drifted areas along the fence rows and road ditches. At our jumping off area, we all covered ourselves in white bed sheets and wrapped our rifles and carbines in white cloth or white tape. We used whatever we could get our hands on to cover us in white to blend in with the snow. I think that the army had white capes especially made for this reason, although we were given white sheets to make our own. I might say on our behalf that we all did a pretty good job of camouflaging because as we moved out along a fence row, it was not long before we could hardly see the men a couple hundred yards away. We left from what was once a store or a repair shop and crossed the road and headed over an open field. We stayed on the left side of a fence row that was overgrown with small shrubs and small trees. The first 300 to 400 yards were uneventful, and it was just a matter of crossing over a few snow drifts, following the tracks of those ahead of us.

At first we drew no fire from the Germans, but as we approached a barbed-wire fence to cross, we were very much aware that this was not just another march: Someone ahead of us had pulled on the barbed wire and set off a booby trap that had been tied behind a fence post. A short time later, one of our men passed us going in the opposite direction. He had been hit by shrapnel and was going back to be treated. When we reached the fence, word had been passed back to us not to touch the barbed wire because there were more explosives. As we crawled under the wire, we could see the explosives tied to other posts. We knew that after the first booby trap was set off, our move on this town was no longer a surprise. Shortly after the first booby trap exploded, we began to get peppered with mortar shells, although most of them fell behind us because we had quickly moved away from the fence. The Germans had this area zeroed in and were really putting their shells on target. From here we quickly took cover in the woods surrounding one side of the town.

As we got closer to the town, we began to get tree burst from the German shelling, but we kept going up the hill and finally got into a trench that had been dug around the town by the Germans. There was a lot of automatic rifle and machine gunfire, but we managed to get into the houses at the edge of the town. These houses were like most German homes: made of stucco, brick and, at one time, had a roof. The framework seemed to be made of 6” x 6” or 8” x 8” lumber with the brick and stucco filled in between the heavy framework. Because of the heavy shelling, the homes were mostly rubble.

28 Combat Interview summary, 78th Inf. Div. CI 148, A Dark and Bloody Ground by Edward G. Miller 1995
I saw several bodies of German soldiers lying in the yards around these houses; they had been killed by the troops ahead of my squad. By this time it was getting dark, so we stayed in the houses at the edge of the town, but we each pulled double guard duty in the trench about 20 yards away from the house that we had made our command post for the night. It was pretty dark so our company had only taken over a few homes at the edge of this town.

While on guard duty from inside the trench it was very hard to see over the edge. It had been dug deep so we had to walk along in it to try to get an advantage post. It was pitch dark by now and almost impossible to see much of anything. We found one place in the darkness that seemed to have a step up where we could stand and look out. It was completely dark and the ground was frozen and it was mighty cold, and, of course, we could use not use lights, so we didn’t know what we were standing on. We had to keep stomping our feet to keep warm. Everyone on guard duty that night—we all ended up pulling triple duty—would stand on this step so that they would have a clear vision of fire and could keep from being surprised by any Germans.

The next morning as it got light enough to see, we were surprised to find out that the step we had been using was a dead German soldier. He had been shot and fallen in the trench and froze. That same trench also held another surprise for us. We had been moving around a little but not far from the trench and the first house. While I was in the trench and on early morning guard duty, it was getting lighter all the time. I looked up, and two Germans stood looking down at Herb Hunter and myself. They were as much surprised as we were and did not fire upon us, but we immediately covered them with our rifles. They dropped their weapons and raised their hands above their heads and surrendered to me.29

The 311th's 3rd Battalion casualties at Huppenbroich totaled 125 men; K Company alone accounted for just short of half of that number. Its losses for the two day battle totaled 51 men or almost 32% of the Company. The breakdown was 16 KIA and 35 WIA.31. How many of those men killed in action died from small wounds, having fallen unseen in the deep snow, not found in time and having succumbed to shock, loss of blood and the cold, is not known. This was a very costly engagement for K Company. Additionally, there was also one case of desertion which was not used in the above numbers.

**KIA**

S/Sgt Donald J. Allabaugh  
S/Sgt Milton R. Carroll  
S/Sgt Virgil K. Knight  
Sgt George S. Culver  
Sgt Cecil L. Shaw  
PFC John S. Butkowski

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29 Fred DeMien memoirs 2000  
30 A Dark and Bloody Ground by Edward G. Miller, Texas A&M University Press 1995 pg 191  
31 K Company MR's Jan 1945
PFC Isadore E. Goldberg
PFC Heber N. Mizell
PFC Jose E. Sanchez
PFC Harlon L. Sevier
PFC Clinton O. Thornton Jr.  
PVT Raymond E. Anderson
PVT Bencil J. Hinkle
PVT Donald D. Long
PVT Zack C. Smith
PVT Donald F. White

WIA
1/Lt George E. Harrison
T/Sgt Wade R. Gray
S/Sgt Charles Bleiler
S/Sgt Walter A. Hennig
S/Sgt Jack R. McKinney
S/Sgt Martin E. Pike
S/Sgt Thomas J. Rickel
S/Sgt Warren L. Ritchie
Sgt Charles F. Bartling
PFC Daniel E. Bennett
PFC Arthur W. Burgard
PFC Charles A. Dehne
PFC Andrew Fontenot
PFC Valmore W. Gaulin
PFC Robert F. Goolsby
PFC Daniel J. Hourihan
PFC Henry M. Hutchings
PFC Harold M. Ingram
PFC Harvey A. Jorgensen
PFC Iven P. Norris
PFC Nick S. Ortolano
PFC Wilbur C. Peddicord
PFC Kenneth A. Vogel
PFC James O. Watson
PFC Louis H. Weston
PFC John Zbihley

32 From Catie Rhodes, a g-niece “A soldier who was with Junior at the time of his death contacted my great-grandparents after the war. He and Junior were fighting from within a house and talking to one another. Junior stopped talking, his friend looked over, and saw Junior had been shot.” May 29, 2011
33 K Company’s first replacement soldier, Dec 27, 1944
34 Joined K Company Jan 18th with twin brother, Richard.
During WWII, some men reached the point where they could no longer endure combat. A few from repeated injuries in action and returned to the lines. Other men succumbed upon their initial introduction to combat conditions. Some of these men, if not sent back to an aid station, inflicted injuries upon themselves such as shooting themselves in the foot or other extremity. Still others deserted and hid out in the countryside. One of the first documented instances of the latter in K Company occurred at Huppenbroich. The fact that he wasn’t sentenced to be shot indicates that he took off before the engagement. PFC Earl Warren was listed as MIA on Jan 30, 1945, returned to duty on Feb 12th and his status changed to AWOL. He was charged with desertion, reduced to Private and confined to Military Prison. He was lucky. The Army executed Private Eddie Slovik by firing squad on Jan 31st for doing the same thing. The first such soldier in 80 years shot to death by members of his own unit.

Even during the heat of battle, replacements joined K Company and were sorely needed by this time. The Company roster had been reduced to 111 men by the end of the day on the 31st. The six new men made it 117. The new men were Privates John Howard, Clyde Kenney, Raymond Kirwin, Leonard Kohles, Wilfred Martell and John McBride. What these new guys found at Huppenbroich was a ghost town, now inhabited by souls from both sides, with no structure undamaged.

Dad reorganized the 1st platoon once more as well as his other duty of replenishing the ammunition, supplies and equipment that was expended during the 2 day assault. Sometimes this included the need to beg, borrow or steal when necessary from BN supply, when S/Sgt Piraino didn’t have enough. Dad found that generally there were three types of riflemen: some were trigger happy and expended thousands of rounds and begged more ammo; others shot at ‘targets only’ and had to be told to shoot in general directions for cover and thirdly, some guys hardly ever fired and were worthless.

On February 1, 1945, K Company Headquarters was moved from Bickerath to Huppenbroich.
Extract

My Father’s War

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