

JOHN P KLINE - CUB EDITOR  
5401 U 147TH ST W  
APPLE VALLEY MN 55124-0385

MARCH 17, 1992

DEAR JOHN,

IN THE LAST ISSUE OF "THE CUB" A NEW MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATION FROM MY COMPANY INQUIRED ABOUT THE ARTICLE I SENT TO YOU LAST YEAR THAT WAS PUBLISHED IN "THE BULGE BUGLE."

I SENT A COPY OF THE STORY TO JOHN SOFARELLI. AS A FELLOW L COMPANY MEMBER I INVITED HIM TO CORRESPOND WITH ME AND INVITED HIM TO OUR PITTSBURGH REUNION.

ENCLOSED IS A COPY OF THE STORY ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE WITH L COMPANY ON THE FIRST DAY OF COMBAT.

WOULD YOU BE ABLE TO INCLUDE MY STORY IN THE NEXT ISSUE?

I MISSED THE LAST REUNION BUT WILL DEFINITELY ATTEND THE PITTSBURGH REUNION. HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE.

WARMEST REGARDS,

*HARRY*

HARRY F MARTIN, JR.  
L COMPANY

424TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

PO BOX 221  
MT ARLINGTON NJ 07856

( 201 ) 663-2410

*not a member  
is member  
of the "*

## THE FIRST DAY OF BATTLE

The morning of the 16th one of our leaders came charging into our cabin just before dawn screaming, "THE GERMANS ARE COMING! THE GERMANS ARE COMING! WE'LL ALL BE KILLED!" Those exact words are etched in my brain for the rest of my life.

Thoughts raced through my head: this had been a quiet sector for almost three months. We had only been here for five days so why are the Germans attacking us?

We grabbed our rifles and steel helmets without wasting a second. Bill and I were assigned to the open foxhole on the extreme left flank. The rest of the 3rd platoon went to the log bunkers.

As soon as we got into our foxhole, Bill announced that he was going to use a rifle grenade. He sat down in the foxhole and affixed the grenade to his rifle. Seconds later, I could see hundreds of shadowy heads bobbing up and down, coming over the crest of the hill just before dawn. They acted like they were drunk or on drugs. They came over the hill screaming and shrieking. Their shrill screams went right through my head. I was absolutely terrified.

They had already out flanked our company and now they were coming to finish us off. Being on the extreme left flank with nothing on our left and out of sight of our platoon on the right, it felt almost like we were against the entire German Army. I was horror-stricken. There was no thought of running away or surrendering, the thought never entered my mind. I had an absolute conviction to fight to the death, while being certain that we would be killed.

Just about this time Bill tugged on my leg. I was vaguely aware that Bill asked me to let him know when the Germans were close enough. Neither one of us had ever fired a rifle grenade before, and we did not have the slightest idea of the effective range. There were so many of them storming down the hill coming right for us, there was no way of stopping all of them. I had a feeling of utter hopelessness of surviving the attack. I was panic-stricken. I felt my entire life force had left my body. I was already dead and I was fighting like a zombie. Sheer panic set in, causing me to fire my rifle without thinking or aiming. I was unaware of my body, just terror, firing my rifle as fast as my finger could pull the trigger.

But they kept coming as though they were immune to death. Apparently I was not hitting a thing. I was so transfixed with fear and terror, my eyes did not focus on the individual enemy attacking. I was firing blindly as

fast as I could, without thinking or looking through the sights of my rifle. All hope of living was gone.

Bill tugged on my leg again and yelled, "ARE THEY CLOSE ENOUGH?" I can remember telling him no, but my brain did not register distance or range. I could not even think about what Bill was saying. He tugged on my leg a half dozen times during the battle, and I kept telling him no.

In my terrorized seizure I continued to fire my rifle frantically in the general direction of the swarming sea of terror coming my way. I could only see the huge mass of bodies charging toward me. It appeared as though the entire hillside was alive and moving in with its huge tentacles reaching out to devour me.

Some of the Germans went to their right and stormed the company command post. I was vaguely aware of hearing hand grenades exploding inside the CP. They killed our Company Commander. But with the Germans charging closer and closer, still screaming, and bullets zipping by my head, thoughts of regret did not register; we all would soon be dead anyway.

In the middle of this terrifying battle I heard a very confident calm voice inside my head say, "Squeeze the trigger." I instantly calmed down, took careful aim at one of the charging Germans through my gunsight, and squeezed the trigger. He flung his arms up over his head and fell down dead, shot through the head. I felt a sensation surging through my whole body. I was no longer a zombie. My life force had come surging back. I was alive and for the first time I felt that I had a chance to live through our first day of combat.

At this very moment I was a veteran combat soldier. I continued to shoot the attacking Germans until they finally stopped coming. The battle was over. After such intense fighting it was very strange how suddenly the battle ended. How quiet everything had become. A feeling of disbelief that it was over.

Later, I thought about the voice that I heard that told me to squeeze the trigger. In basic training, over and over they drummed the procedure into my head, always ending with, "SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER, SLOWLY SQUE-E-E-ZE THE TRIGGER, SQUE-E-E-ZE THE TRIGGER. After a while, at night I dreamt about squeezing the trigger. We had made fun of doing things by the numbers, but it saved my life.

The battle was over. I had conquered my worse fears and I had stood to fight the enemy. The battle had started just before dawn. I have no idea what time it was over. It had seemed like an eternity. But now it was over. What a great feeling it was to have survived our first battle.

I had just started to relax a little when I came to the full realization of what had happened. Capt. Bartel was dead, and I was responsible. At the beginning of the battle when I was firing my rifle without thinking or aiming, some of the Germans dispersed to their right and surrounded the CP. If I had not been so terrified, I could have stopped them before they reached the CP. Because of my inability to function at first, Capt. Bartel was dead. I felt tremendous remorse.

About thirty minutes later, I looked up as some of the men from the other platoons walked by. There, among the men, stood Capt. Bartel. HE WAS ALIVE! OH, THANK GOD! CAPT. BARTEL WAS ALIVE! He had not been in the company command post when the Germans threw the grenades in; he had left that post before our 3rd Platoon was alerted. He had been up with the main body of our company. ~~We had slept through the heavy artillery barrage that struck our forward platoons.~~

When the artillery lifted our company was attacked by hundreds of German infantrymen. As the men of the 3rd Platoon continued to sleep, Capt. Bartel called on our 591st Field Artillery to fire on the Germans. As the Germans got closer the captain continued to call for artillery support. When the enemy broke through our lines the captain called for artillery to fire directly on Company L's positions. When the artillery did not respond he called again explaining that the Germans were in the open while they were in fortified positions.

Harry F Martin, Jr.  
L Company  
424th Infantry Regiment