

BATTERY "A" 39TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION
A. P. O. #3 U. S. ARMY

COMPLETE DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE RENDERED

I am WALTER W. WEISPFENNING, O-1998698, Field Artillery, First Lieutenant, Forward Observer, Battery "A", 39th Field Artillery Battalion, in which capacity I was present at and an eyewitness of the following action:

On 26 January 1945, Company "B", Fifteenth Infantry, was in position south of the Bois de Riedwihr near HOLTZWILH, FRANCE. In the afternoon, at about 1400 hours, we received a terrific concentration of artillery fire which lasted approximately ten minutes.

When the artillery fire ceased, I saw six heavy tanks emerge from enemy-held woods about 400 yards to our front. The tanks rolled forward, firing on us with their "88s" as they advanced across the snow-covered ground.

Company "B" was commanded by Second Lieutenant AUDIE L. MURPHY, O-1692509. He ordered his men to withdraw to prepared positions about 200 yards inside the woods as it was apparent that the enemy was launching an attack in massive strength.

As the men withdrew, I saw hundreds of German infantrymen swarming out of the woods, firing their automatic weapons on us as they advanced. Lieutenant MURPHY remained at his CP, which consisted of a telephone under a tree at the edge of the woods, and directed artillery fire on the advancing line of tanks and the infantry elements coming up behind them. He was all alone out there except for a tank destroyer, which was in position about 10 yards to his right. During this phase of the German attack, I radioed fire directions to Battery "A" from a vantage point in the cleared ground approximately 100 yards in front of Lieutenant MURPHY's CP.

Our directed artillery had a murderous effect on the KRAUT infantry. Shells exploded in the midst of their skirmish line and among their support elements. I saw Germans falling or disappearing in clouds of dirt and snow. We must have killed more than 30 of them, but others immediately took their place.

A direct hit from a German "88" smashed into our tank destroyer. Smoke and flame spurted out of it and the crew bailed out. I saw the TD men withdrawing through the woods toward the rest of the Company. Then Lieutenant MURPHY told me to withdraw and set up my CP in the woods where Company "B" had its prepared positions, stating that we couldn't afford to lose my radio and that he would continue to give fire directions by telephone as long as possible.

As I worked my way back through the woods, I saw the German tanks crashing their way through the heavy snow on both flanks of us, firing round after round into Lieutenant MURPHY's position. Although shells exploded between the TD and the place where the Lieutenant was standing, showering the tree beside his OP with bits of flying steel, and despite a hail of machine gun fire from the tanks, Lieutenant MURPHY kept on transmitting fire orders with the utmost calm.

Rejoining the Company, I set up an OP in the forest. The woods were sparse and there was practically no underbrush. I could see everything that was happening.

The KRAUT tanks rumbled past Lieutenant MURPHY's position, passing him by as close as 50 yards and firing at him as they passed. They didn't close in for the kill because they wanted to give our tank destroyer, which was burning but not in flames, as wide a berth as possible.

While we attempted to hold off the tanks with directed artillery fire and bazooka rockets, the KRAUT infantry line, consisting of two full-strength companies of 125 men each, surged up across the open meadow in a wide arc. As they advanced, they fired their machine pistols and rifles at Lieutenant MURPHY.

Then I saw Lieutenant MURPHY do the bravest thing that I have ever seen any man do in combat. With the Germans only 100 yards away and still moving up on him, he climbed onto the slowly burning tank destroyer and began firing the 50 caliber machine gun at the KRAUTS. There he was, completely exposed and silhouetted against the background of bare trees and snow, with a fire under him that threatened to blow the destroyer to bits if it reached the gasoline and ammunition. 88mm shells, machine gun, machine pistol and rifle fire crashed all around him.

Standing on top of the TD, Lieutenant MURPHY raked the approaching enemy force with machine gun fire. Twelve Germans, stealing up a ditch to flank him from his right, were killed in the gully at 50 yards range by concentrated fire from his 50 caliber gun. Twice the tank destroyer he was standing on was hit by artillery fire and Lieutenant MURPHY was enveloped in clouds of smoke and spurts of flame. His clothing was torn and riddled by flying shell fragments and bits of rock. Bullets ricocheted and careened off the tank destroyer as the enemy concentrated the full fury of his fire on this one-man strongpoint.

He was wounded in the leg by fragmentation from an 88mm shell, but he kept on fighting. With blood spreading over his torn trouser leg, he continued to hold off the entire German force of about 250 men, aided only by our artillery fire. The enemy tanks,

unwilling to press their attack on Company "B" without infantry support, had meanwhile returned and were milling around the meadow, firing their "88s" at Lieutenant MURPHY's position.

Covered with grime and dust, Lieutenant MURPHY withstood persistent fire from the tank guns and a hailstorm of automatic weapons fire from the tanks and infantry. Germans crept forward through ground folds; others attempted to rush his exposed position. He killed KRAUTS as close as ten yards from his burning tank destroyer. Their corpses lay clogging the draws and on the open meadow beyond the woods.

Fighting on despite his wound, Lieutenant MURPHY killed and wounded an estimated 35 of the enemy in addition to the 12 he killed in the ditch. After an hour long fight, exhausted, bleeding profusely and his ammunition spent, Lieutenant MURPHY limped back to his Company. He reorganized his men and led them in a violent attack on the enemy, driving the Germans from the area. Lieutenant MURPHY then had his wound treated on the field. He consistently refused to be evacuated.

Lieutenant MURPHY's intrepid stand resulted directly in inflicting at least a hundred casualties on the attacking force. Fighting alone against overwhelming odds, he smashed a powerful assault, enabling his Regiment to hold ground that was won at a heavy cost in blood.

Walter W. Weispfenning
WALTER W. WEISPFENNING
1st Lieut. 39th FA Bn

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18 APR '46