

From Luxembourg to Germany, 1944-45

From an article in the *Newsletter of the Orange County Historical Society* written by Virginius R. Shackelford., Jr. This article is a soldier's first hand account of the waning days of World War II.

"Editor's Note: Just weeks before he died, Virginius R. Shackelford, Jr., gave a copy of his memoirs to long-time friend Joe Rowe, with instruction that when he had finished reading it, he should give it to the Historical Society. This Joe did. After securing Mr. Shackelford's--and, later, the family's--permission, we are extracting the memoirs in this...issue of the Newsletter as a tribute to one of Orange's most prominent citizens who saw a lot of life and seemed to find something of value in the experience.

"By the time I arrived in Luxembourg and established the Advance Section of G-4 (Ordinance), the Panzer units of the Germany army had surrounded Bastogne and the Battle of the Bulge was in full sway. The relief of the troops in Bastogne was largely carried out by the troops under Gen. [George S.] Patton's command with great help from the Air Force. At a staff briefing on December 23rd, when Gen. Patton was advised that the weather had cleared sufficiently for airdrops to be made, he is reported to have ordered the Chaplain to print up 2,000 more copies of the prayer that was being sent with the Christmas rations to the front lines.

"Before the breakthrough by the Germans, the area in the vicinity of Bastogne had been the responsibility of troops under the command of Gen. [Omar] Bradley. After the breakthrough, this area was turned over to [British] Gen. [Bernard] Montgomery. It infuriated Gen. Patton when Gen. Montgomery trumpeted through the British press that he had come to the rescue of the U.S. troops when actually it was [Patton's] Third Army which blunted the attack of the Germans and forced them to withdraw. As a matter of fact, Gen. Montgomery promoted a withdrawal behind the line of the Meuse [River] so that he could regroup for a spring offensive across the Rhine [River]. Gen. Patton directed his Staff officers to comment on Gen. Montgomery's proposal, and since I was in charge of the Advance Section of G4 it became my responsibility to state our position. I reported to the Chief of Staff that we were prepared to support the attack and that there should be no withdrawal behind the line of the Meuse as recommended by Gen. Montgomery.

"The battle of Bastogne lasted until early in January when the troops under the command of Gen. McAuliff were reinforced after he had said "Nuts" to a demand that he surrender. Gen. Montgomery continued to be intent on maintaining a holding position, but Gen. Patton was equally intent on continuing the attack. It was bitter cold, and although Gen. Patton never got the green light to conduct an attack, he pressed forward on limited offenses. There was no such thing as staying put.¹

¹ Virginius R. Shackelford, Jr., "V's Trip: From Luxembourg to German, 1944-45," *Newsletter Orange County Historical Society*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring, 2005), 1.

“Gradually the Germans were forced to withdraw and by the end of January the ground lost on the breakthrough by the Germans was regained. Much to the chagrin of Gen. Patton, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that the main thrust across the Rhine was to be made by Gen. Montgomery and Third Army was delegated the task of conducting a diversionary attack to the South. Nevertheless, Gen. Patton continued to make plans for an assault across the Rhine and asked his staff to report on the relative merits of crossing in the vicinity of Koblenz as compared to a crossing in the vicinity of Worms-Mainz. I was given the task of preparing a memorandum on this subject and concluded that an attack in the vicinity of Worms-Mainz was to be preferred (*because of the better road and rail network-ed.'s note*).

“The initial crossing of the Rhine was accomplished by the Ninth Infantry Division, a part of the First Army, the command of which had been restored to Gen. Bradley. We did, however, cross the Rhine over a pontoon bridge in the vicinity of Mainz, and it was reported that halfway across, Gen. Patton [urinated] in the Rhine, fulfilling a long-awaited experience. You have never seen such destruction as there was at Mainz, which had been flattened by successive bombings by the [Allied] Air Corps. To see it now, reconstructed with funds made available through the Marshall Plan, makes it hard to believe that at the time it was a mass of smoking ruins.

“By the middle of March it was clear that the German Army was in complete disarray and thousands of their soldiers were surrendering. This created a great problem of keeping them alive and getting them into prisoner-of-war camps. Most of them were terrified that they would be captured by the Russians, who would have shown no mercy, and were glad to have been captured by the Allies.

“We were shifted to the Southeast after we crossed the Rhine to seize the so-called ‘National Redoubt’ in Bavaria, where it was supposed that Hitler would make his last stand. There was considerable resistance, but elements of Third Army finally crossed over the Danube into Czechoslovakia in the latter part of April. I was in Regensburg [a city in eastern Germany at the confluence of the Danube, Naab, and Regen Rivers} when on May 7th, we received a TWX from SHAEF [Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force] advising that the Germans had surrendered.

“Several days later Gen. Patton, accompanied by his staff, including General Muller, met with the Commanding General of the Russian force occupying the area opposite from Third Army. It is my understanding that prior to the meeting they consumed considerable quantities of olive oil to counteract the vodka which they were expected to consume in toasts with the Russians. The long and short of it was that we were directed to withdraw all troops from Czechoslovakia and proceed south into the Bavarian area in the vicinity of Munich.

“Gen. Patton wanted to go to the Pacific and show Gen. McArthur how to kick the Japanese, but that was not to be. The headquarters of Third Army was established in Munich and the Advance Section of which I was a part was stationed at Bad Tolz about fifty miles south of Munich. Bad Tolz was a lovely village and I had the pleasure of being billeted in a small hotel in a grove of

trees. There was a well-appointed casern [military barracks] adjacent to the village which had been an officers training facility of the German army, which we used to house enlisted personnel. The people of that area were very friendly, as a matter of fact they were so frightened that they would be taken over by the Russians that they bent over backward to be nice to us. During my stay at Bad Tolz I had the pleasure of a visit from Lyne who, with Lew Baldwin and Harry Gilbert, went with me on a tour of the Alps in a command car which I was able to arrange to be put at our disposal. We went up in a small car to the Zug Spitzen, where there was still unmelted snow for skiing and had a great time in the mountains of Austria. On the way back as we came around a sharp curve we passed a U.S. Army jeep which was driven by Ted Scott who had grown up across the road from us when we lived at 'Greenock'--a small world. Later we visited the 'Tergen Zee' area where the Germans had established hospitals and rest camps for their troops. I talked to the proprietor of one of these camps into letting me use a small sailboat, which I assured him would be well taken care of. Well, we got the sail up and were having a great time when a thunderstorm suddenly hit us with hail the size of golf balls. Our sail was ripped up and we barely made it back to shore. I think I came closer to being killed on this occasion than at any other time when I was overseas.

"Editor's Note: Major Shackelford returned to the United States in the late summer of 1945..."²

² *Ibid.*, 12.