

Excerpts from the Memoirs  
of  
Werner Mork

“Aus Meiner Sicht (From My View)”  
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The original German text can be found  
on the website of the German Historical Museum:  
[The Battle of Ortona](#)

Translation by Daniel H. Setzer  
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*Private First Class Werner Mork's job with the 90<sup>th</sup> Light Infantry Division was Rechnungsführer, or Refü for short. He was responsible for purchasing food and materials for his unit and tracking inventory. In this role he reported to the Quartermaster at headquarters rather than to his company commanding officer.*

*The company commanding officer developed a taste for the canned fruit which was strictly reserved for soldiers who had a medical need for fruit and who had a doctor's prescription for it. Private Mork kept careful records and dutifully reported the missing cans. This got the commanding officer, known to the men as "Old Fritz," into considerable trouble.*

*Later, as the unit was evacuating Corsica (See the section on this web site entitled, "Mork on Corsica,") Old Fritz got off the island ahead of his men, leaving them to shift for themselves. He was censured by a military ethics board and spent time under arrest.*

*One day, to the astonishment and dismay of everyone, Old Fritz showed up again, reassigned as their division commander.*

*Old Fritz had not forgotten Private Mork's 'insubordination' during the Canned Fruit Affair...*

\* \* \*

Our Division was moved from our post in the northern Adriatic and deployed to the middle Adriatic coast near Ortona, Italy. There, the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army, with the support of heavy ship artillery off-shore, were attempting to break the German defensive lock on the Sangro River then the Moro River. Success would relieve pressure on the heavy fighting in the center of Italy around Cassino. While Cassino held the Allies could not advance up the Mediterranean coast. On the Adriatic coast if they broke through, they would be able to move across the flat coastal plain and attack the Germans. They could avoid the mountainous lands in the center of Italy and move quickly toward the Alps along the coast.

Shortly after my instruction through the acting company commander regarding the nature of German marriage, but before his issue of my permission for a 'Matrimony Leave' came through, we were struck by a bolt out of the blue. Old Fritz returned and was once again placed in charge of the company. No one would have guessed that. We thought that the reprimand he suffered would be sufficient to keep him from command ever again. But now his short time in jail was over and he would have a chance to prove himself as an officer on the front lines. Of all places it would be back at his old outfit where he was still as universally hated now as before. And the sleazebag had not forgotten any one of us.

Suddenly, he was back and acting as though he had just returned from a short leave; as though nothing had happened. Old Fritz was enjoying himself immensely to see so many of his old people. Now he was going to lead a front line combat company and thereby get all of the medals that he still lacked.

His first big project was to totally reorganize the company so as to get it ready, in his opinion, for combat duty. This included changes in supply and provisioning in which his greatest satisfaction came from relieving Private First Class Mork from his slacker job as Refü [quartermaster]. He should instead be pushed off to an infantry combat squad, even though he had no idea what to do there.

The Battalion had set up a staging area near a mill just to the west of Ortona. The company command along with the non-commissioned officers, orderly room and supply moved to the complex near the

mill. In the short time I was there I made good friends with the pretty woman who was the miller. She did not want to leave her mill regardless of what was going on around it now and regardless of what was to come. With my passably usable Italian I was able to speak with her from time to time when I had the chance. She was a true miller who ran the entire mill by herself, although under the present circumstances it was not possible to do so. She was a tall black-haired woman in the best years of her life. She developed an attachment to her "big, blond young man" and broke down in tears when I finally had to take leave of her.

## ORTONA

In accordance with the order from my new/old commander I had to give up my post as Refü and make myself ready to join a squad on the front line. There was no one nominated to fill my position yet, so the orderly room was made responsible for my old duties. I asked the sergeant about my request to go on leave to get married. I had to hear from him that the request could no longer be presented to the old commander and no one had the chance yet to give it to the current commander. I started to get really gloomy. The sergeant liked me and his inability to get this leave for me did not bode well. He promised to do what he could with the request for leave and to see if he could get my assignment to the combat squad reversed so that I could travel home to get married. The arrival date back home would be determined by the civil registry office and they handled marriage ceremonies without problem once the soldier was back in the homeland.

Every evening members of the supply staff working with the kitchen staff had to move meals to the front line along with supplies and ammunition. They would take advantage of this transport to move soldiers to the front or move them back off the line. They would move them in automobiles up to the point where the runners would take the food canisters for distribution. In most cases this would end up being a hit or miss shot. Sometimes the car would arrive, sometimes it wouldn't. Sometimes the runners would be there and sometimes they wouldn't. Unfortunately, it was common for the cars to return to base with the food canisters because they could not be delivered to the men on the line. Often the food would not get to the troops because the runner did not make it and the food was left scattered in some field with the runner dead as a doormouse next to it. In the night the road might be under heavy fire making it impossible for the accompanying cook or forager to get through. They would have to turn back, if they could, that is. All of this had to take place under the cover of darkness, because during the day there was no hope of being able to move. The area was under enemy observation on the ground, and also from the air.

After my separation from the supply staff and orderly room there was nothing for it but to go with the supply car to the spot on the front line near Ortona where the company was in place. I was detailed as the no. 3 gunner for a machine gun team. This meant that I was to carry the ammo and the ammo boxes. It also meant that I was to lie behind the other two gunners and feed them the ammunition belts as needed and to run back to the rear to re-provision the ammo when necessary.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 101-507-2253-15  
Foto: Schneider, Toni | 1944 Sommer

### *MG-42 Machine Gun Team*

I had no idea how I was supposed to do any of this. I had no training for it whatsoever in the army. I had not the slightest knowledge or experience with this sort of thing. But with the army everything is possible! No one had any interest in the fact that I knew nothing about machine guns and had never even fired one in practice. Nevertheless, if one of the other gunners fell in action, I would be expected to step into their place and take over. The motto was, “If one falls, another must rise up.” It didn't matter if he knew what he was doing or not. The only important thing is that there must be three men on each machine gun. You had to learn quick or die, simple as that.

This part of the company was taking the heaviest fire from the English, not only regular artillery but especially from the naval guns off the coast. There, the battleships of the Royal Navy lay undisturbed and lobbed their heaviest shells over to us. There was no one to hinder them, no defense from the land and nothing to see from the skies. German aircraft had become a rarity and the sky buzzed with the Tommy's aircraft, bombers and Jabos [Jäger-Bomber: Fighter bombers].

These aircraft had been bombing and strafing for days along the whole front and the rear areas. Even the area where the mill was located was 'visited' several times by dive bombers. My “Tobruk-Syndrome” [Mork was nearly killed in a B-17 attack while he was in Tobruk. The psychological effects stayed with him for years. See '*Driving Supply Trucks in Africa – 1942 Part III*' on this website.] compelled me to run when they flew over. My psyche went down the drain. This running away was stupid, but I couldn't help it. An irresistible panic took over that I could not overcome. In the moment 'reason' was not to be found and I would crack.

On the night I had to move up, the supply car finally managed with great difficulty to find the unit that I was to join. It was also where Oberleutnant Tschechow [Old Fritz] was. I reported in and was given over to the care of a courier who would guide me to where Sgt. Müller's squad was dug in. Müller and I knew each other well. He looked at me with mild shock as he tried to figure out what to do with this totally inexperienced raw replacement. He clearly thought that it was crazy that they sent me to him.

But, there I was, and there was no going back. Orders are orders even if they are crazy.

Our position, that was being so heavily shelled by the Tommy's, was not a position in the usual understanding of the word, with dug-out defensive works and connecting trenches. It consisted simply of shallow holes in the ground, hollowed out by the soldiers with spades. In these holes the men had to lay uncovered in the filth while the enemy shells flew overhead. This had been going on for days.

Their job was to sit it out and wait for the expected attack by the English infantry, and then to hold their positions at all costs even if the cost was their very lives. But the Tommies took their time. The tactic was to use the heavy artillery to decimate and demoralize the German troops before moving in with a ground attack. They hoped to minimize their casualties with this tactic. They had no shortage of heavy guns and ammunition.

[Translator's note: Mork refers to the 'English' infantry and to the enemy as 'Tommies.' We think of this term as a reference to British troops. The attack on Ortona was actually a Canadian operation along with Indian troops. More information can be found here: [The Battle of Ortona](#) and here: [Canada at War](#). The average German soldier would have used the term 'Tommy' to refer to any of the Commonwealth troops.]

I finally found 'my' hole, but the food did not. The food canister took a hit from an artillery round and our meals were strewn all over a field somewhere. These Landser [Landser: Common soldier, roughly equivalent to our term, G.I.] would have to go yet another night without food, and could only hope that the supply car would be able to get through tomorrow night. In the mean time they would just have to make do chewing on part of their 'Iron Rations.' [Eisernen Ration: Emergency rations.] The worst part was that there was nothing to drink. Thirst was worse than hunger.

Now, laying in a hole, I had to endure the fireworks dancing over me while I lay there motionless with my head in the dirt. The other two gunners had greeted me curtly and told me to keep my mouth shut and not to poke my head out of the foxhole. Several days ago the Tommies had brought some very good snipers to the front. The machine gunners were pleased to take the munition boxes from me. This was better for them than food because they felt that they did not have enough ammo for the expected



*Canadian Sniper in Ortona*

attack. Munitions were even more important than food.

We got through that night and now it was day. The Tommies still had not attacked, and the artillery was somewhat quieter. Now I had some time to take notice of my surroundings. A few meters to our right was the foxhole of our squad leader, Sgt. Müller, which he shared with the corporal. The two of them had found a discarded machine gun and rebuilt it so that at least they would have a real weapon. Pistols and carbines were not used much anymore. I was surprised to see how close they were to me. In the night I had felt myself to have gone a very long distance crawling on my belly to my foxhole. That night a miracle occurred, our food delivery got through and there was enough to go around to every foxhole. It remained fairly quiet and we hoped the quiet would continue into the night and we might get a little sleep. A little sleep would do us all good.

Our hopes were in vain, we were going to have a very bad night. Somewhere in the night artillery fire suddenly erupted from both sea and land. The Tommies were firing at us with everything they had. The barrage landed right in our lines. We were happy to have had something to eat and drink, so that at least we did not have that to worry about in addition to everything else.

What happened next was horrible. The Landser lay in their foxholes helplessly while the barrage raked over them. My comrades in my foxhole were of the opinion that the English infantry were going to attack tonight as soon as the barrage halted. They took care to make sure that the machine gun was loaded and ready. I was not doing well. This was something I had never experienced before. I was afraid, I mean really afraid. I was sure that I was not going to live through this. Then, a certain calmness came over me. It was a feeling that nothing could be changed, that one simply had to wait for whatever came, whether it be death, injury or capture.



*An attack on Ortona is preceded by artillery shelling.  
(Loyal Edmonton Regiment Museum)*

What overcame me was what the Landser referred to as KmA-Feeling, meaning Kiss my Ass-Feeling. [LmA-Gefühl: Leck mich am Arsch-Gefühl.] In a hopeless situation bitching and complaining accomplished nothing. All you could do was wait, nothing more. Its just that the waiting could be really agonizing.

Then something awful happened. From the direction of our squad leader we heard loud, frightening screams. Someone must have been hit. A short while later the corporal who was in Sgt. Müller's foxhole crawled over to us and dropped into our foxhole. He said that Müller had been hit by artillery shrapnel that ripped his gut open. He was going to die and there was nothing we could do to help him. The foxhole was full of blood and he had to get out. He tried to staunch the bleeding with his first-aid kit, but it was hopeless.

The ever nice and cheerful Sgt. Müller was a rather small but agile man, a really great guy. On Sardinia he, Sgt. Hamm and I had great times in the evening and shared more than a few drops of wine

together. Now he was dying just a few steps from me, alone, in a filthy hole without any help. For this type of severe wound there was no help to be given. This kind of belly wound was always deadly. It was only a matter of time before death would free him. There were no medics anywhere around us and they couldn't have gotten through the barrage anyway. We also had lost contact with the rest of the company, the phone lines were broken. At any rate a medic would not have been much help to him anyway. Other than change the bandages which would just soak through again with blood almost immediately, there was nothing much more he would have been able to do.

There was nothing we could do to help our Müller. All soldiers feared this kind of belly wound, be it a bullet or shrapnel in the gut, in either case only death would end the agony. The agony could take hours, and with our Müller it would take a long time for him to find his eternal rest.

In spite of the heavy artillery fire that night we heard his mad screams and him calling for his mother. It was gruesome, and even today writing these lines I want to break down and cry. It was truly horrible to have to listen to his screams and the awful sounds he made, but it was a relief for us when it dropped down to a shuddering whimper and then quiet. Our good comrade Müller was now dead, fallen due to the madness of a war that we were having a hard time seeing the point of anymore.

This was no "Hero's Death" as it is always so stupidly described. It was a senseless brutal murder, a crime perpetrated by men on other men, who for whatever reason had declared themselves to be mortal enemies. It was no longer comprehensible, I could no longer understand it.

The cries of Sgt. Müller, not just the cries of pain, but the calling for his mother and his wife rang in my ears for a very long time. I am still not free of it. It was the first time I had witnessed such an ignoble death, such an excruciating demise of a man. I aged in this night, I became a different person, I was not the same man I was before I came to this place.

The screams had stopped, but the artillery barrage had also stopped suddenly. It was quiet, but it was eerie. The barrage hitting us had moved on, we could hear it behind us, but now around us it was still. It was truly the lull before the storm. We were uncertain as to what would happen next. Would there be a night attack by the English infantry? Would the feared English tanks accompany the attack? All this would happen in the night when you couldn't make out one thing from the other. This was a very bad situation for us in our foxhole because we didn't know who, if any, of our fellow soldiers survived the barrage. We were alone in our position with limited view of the rest of the company. There was no one to talk to and no one to give orders. Could we be the only ones who survived the inferno? It seemed as though that were the case.

So we lay there in the pale moonlight in our foxhole. We four Landsers did not know what to do or how to behave in such a situation. We were cut off from the rest of the company, and it was questionable if it even existed anymore.

The only thing we could do was sit tight and wait to see what would happen. By this we meant that our only recourse would be to put our hands up, be captured and take comfort in being alive. Hopefully, prison wouldn't be too bad. We had to be thankful for survival even if there were a lot of uncertainties in our minds about being prisoners of war. None of us knew what to expect.

Then, in the still of the night we suddenly saw a few meters to the left of us a long line of Tommies marching in single file quite unconcerned. They were walking in the direction of Ortona. They were unconcerned because they believed that no one could have survived the intense barrage. In fact there



was no defensive fire from the German line, the line was dead.

Our line wasn't silent solely because of the heavy casualties, but because Battalion had ordered the Company to fall back during the night. We, in our little foxhole, were not informed of the move. Later we found out that the courier tried to get to our squad leader, Sgt. Müller, to give him the fall-back order. The phone was down and we didn't have a radio. The courier found Sgt. Müller lying dead in a foxhole full of blood and no one else. When he got back to the command post he reported that Sgt. Müller's entire squad had been wiped out. Because of that report we were written off, we no longer existed. We weren't only forgotten, we were erased from the Company and out of the mind of our chief, Oblt. Tschchow [Old Fritz]. It was only much later that I found out about all of this.

So it was no wonder that the Tommies were able to walk so carefree through the night toward Ortona. If they were walking in a wide line rather than single file, they would have almost certainly have stumbled upon us rather than just walk on by. War can be so bizarre sometimes. We four in our foxhole were situated in such a way that we could have mowed down the entire line of Tommies with our machine gun. We did not even try because we knew that it would have meant death for us also.

We wondered at the fact that they could march on Scott-free and that from wide and far there was not one of us left to take a shot at them. There were also no command posts. We concluded that it was true that we were the only ones left, and now we were behind the enemy lines. This was not a good feeling. What was good, however, was the quiet in which we did *not* hear the noises from tanks. We were behind the most forward units of the enemy, and without doubt the rest of the troops and the tanks would soon follow.

The four of us whispered back and fourth our thoughts about what we should do next. We came to the conclusion that the best plan would be for us all to split up and, under cover of darkness, for each to try and find their way back to Ortona where the German troops still held the city. It would be done without weapons or equipment. Our MG 42 machine gun was made unusable, then each of us one by one set out to make our way back on the same paths that the Tommies were using to move forward. We felt that we were making the right move. If we made it to the German lines, then good, if we did not make it then we would be captured by the Tommies, which would have happened in any case if we just stayed in our foxhole.

We all agreed on the plan. We would attempt to get back to our own lines, and do so right now. The night would help us, it would be impossible during the day. One by one each man crawled out of the foxhole and began to make his way in the direction where we thought Ortona should be. We followed our nose, without compass, just using the innate sense of direction that all soldiers have. This was done with careful crawling movements that we learned well in basic training. We moved through a territory that was not only unfamiliar, but also concealed innumerable dangers. In addition to discovery by the



*Canadian Troops at Melfa River,  
May 1944*



English, there was the danger of mines, and also unexploded ordnance that could go off for no reason. There was also the danger that the German sentries would take us for the enemy. We did not know the passwords of the day to identify ourselves. All in all it was a crappy situation that was doing me no good. I was totally on my own and I started moving in the direction that I hoped was the right one.

Everywhere there were noises that I couldn't identify, and frequently I could hear voices that must be coming from the English, but I couldn't make them out. I heard and saw nothing of my comrades. It was strange that the night was mostly quiet, only broken from time to time by the crackling fire of machine pistols. Who shot at whom was not clear, or if the shots might be directed at one of my comrades who was discovered. Slowly I continued on and crawled into the dawning daylight. The breaking dawn made it clear that, uncharacteristically, it would be a very clear day with good visibility. This was not a good thing for people who did not want to be seen. I looked around and did not see any Tommies. I managed to find a place where I thought I could hide myself. This hiding place would not do me much good if at daybreak I found myself in the crossfire of German and English artillery. Or if waves of English infantry charged over me toward the German lines. There was always the possibility of a German counterattack. These were god-awful possibilities, but I had no choice. I couldn't continue crawling, the English would have spotted me without a doubt and that was something I wanted to avoid if I possibly could. I would have to stay in my hiding place and hope for the best.

I lay somewhere in a 'No Man's Land' that was created when the English rolled over the positions that the Germans abandoned. This was the spot where our detail was situated. The remaining German units pulled back and now there was a gap between the two lines that was open both far and wide. But since the land was so open and movements could be so easily observed, there was no activity by either infantry in broad daylight. Instead, there were artillery and grenade rounds going off. In spite of all that, and without good cover, I still had the good luck to get through that day. From where I was I could see the buildings in Ortona, so I knew what direction I would go in. I waited until dark when I would once again try to find the German lines. I had not seen any more Tommies, but I definitely had the feeling that I was in the middle of their territory. What I didn't know was that the heavy defensive fire of the German artillery that flew over my head had managed to force the forward elements of the English back. I did not know that until much later. At this moment I believed that the Tommies were all around me with their noses in the dirt, just like me in my hiding-place.



*Canadian Troops Approach Ortona*

When it was totally dark, I crawled out of my hole and made my way in the direction of Ortona hoping that somehow I would get there safely. During the night on the outskirts of Ortona I reached the German outposts. Now I was finally at my goal, or only a short hop away. With great difficulty I

managed to convince the German sentries that I was not an advanced element of the enemy, but just a poor straggler, a private in the German Wehrmacht. This was very difficult because I did not know the password of the day. They sort of believed me but remained skeptical. The sentry thought it unimaginable that anyone could come back from the old HKL alive. [HKL= Hauptkampflinie: Main Battle Line] He said that other than me, no other soldier had reached the new outposts.

From the outpost I was 'escorted' to the commander, with the safety 'off' on the sentry's rifle. You can never be too sure. The commander regarded me with an amazed skepticism. After the commander allowed himself to be convinced that I was both truthful and harmless, he got me on the next transport toward the rear. It took a lot of searching and questions to get me back to where I started from just a few days ago. I thought it would be of most help to ask if anyone knew where the mill was where my outfit was stationed. I had thought it would be helpful, but there was nothing left of the mill but a pile of rubble after the dive-bombers worked it over.

The supply group for my company was still in the same spot. When I walked in and reported, they stared at me like they were witnessing an miracle. I wasn't supposed to be here anymore. The news had come to the supply group that all of the men in Sgt. Müller's squad had fallen in battle, me included. No one in the squad survived except one who came through yesterday and gave everyone the bad news. I was among the dead. And now there I was, the dead man, once again among my comrades in the supply group.

I heard now that the Tommies in other locations had run into stiff resistance from intact German units, forcing them to fall back to their original positions. That was my good luck. I wasn't behind the English lines except on the first night when we left our foxholes. But that was quite enough. What happened next, we can only guess at. I was the only one of us to get back to our lines. The other three comrades were either dead or captured. Until this day there has been no trace of them. All we have is the hope that somehow they made it through alright, although it is not very likely.

Once again I had some very good luck that did not come from my cunning and skill, but from being compelled to save myself by taking some kind of action that in normal times I would have hardly thought possible. What I did was not a heroic act, it just was an attempt to stay alive in spite of the war.

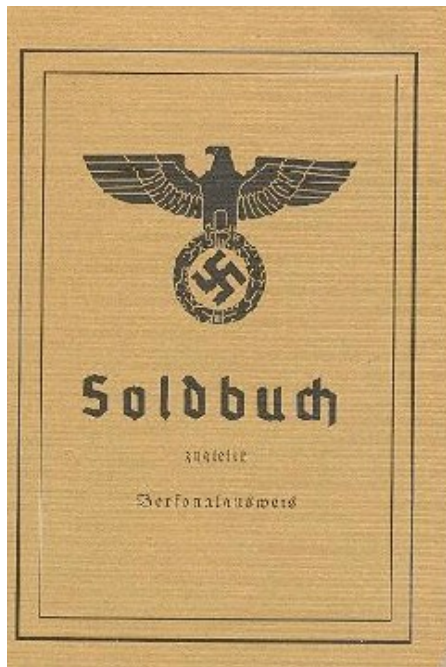
There was another who had no luck at all. "Old Fritz," Herr Oberleutnant Tschechow, had 'fallen' during that fateful night. He was really and truly dead. It was said that it, "unfortunately," caught him from behind. He must have inadvertently turned in the wrong direction. No one cried a single tear for him, on the contrary, everyone in the company who survived that night was glad this "Herr" was gone. He brought this fate on himself, there was no sign of pity for this war victim. There was also no sympathy for his very Prussian mother in the Brandenburg District. She could now be proud that her son, true to his duty for the Führer, Folk and Fatherland, had found a 'Hero's Death'. She would soon learn of this in what was sure to be a very heartfelt letter from the Regiment Commander. If it were an enemy bullet or a German one that led him to this heroic death would never be known since there are no postmortems done in wartime. Dead was dead, they took your papers and your dog tags and dropped you in a hole in the ground. Perhaps later in the area around Ortona a German military cemetery would be built and the bodies would be moved from the many shallow graves and reburied there. There might also be a grave and a cross for Oberleutnant Tschechow. With a wink it might be noted that at his squad's position there was no direct enemy confrontation at the time he was hit. It must have been a stray bullet.

There would be no letter of condolence written for me, even though I was on the company's list of 'fallen in battle.' Although Private First Class Mork was written off as dead, he was delighted to be in the best of health and still in the land of the living. There would be no wooden cross erected over a shallow grave somewhere around Ortona, but he would get an Iron Cross. The regiment commander had ordered it and it would be awarded by the new company commander right here at the old mill. Actually the old mill did not exist anymore and the pretty miller was also not to be seen. No one knew what happened to her.

But something unheard of happened with the intended award of the Iron Cross 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. I declined the decoration, even though it would have made my father very happy. I said that I could think of nothing I did that would be worthy of such an honor. I referred to the Führer and the German High Command who indicated that such a medal should only be awarded for outstanding bravery in the face of the enemy. This was not the case in my situation, so I did not feel that I could accept this distinction.

The real reason for my behavior was that I did not value that piece of tin in the least. I did not want to carry it around on my chest. I was totally fed up with the army, the war and everything. Naturally, I could not say this out loud, so I said what I thought I could get away with.

Of course I could have just kept my mouth shut, taken the medal and shoved it in my pocket. That wasn't enough for me, I wanted to put my two cents in and make some kind of statement. An entry was made in my Soldbuch [pay book] giving the reason for my refusal of the decoration. A sequel to my decision played out in 1945 and could have had very bad repercussions for me. When I was captured by the Russians they noted that I had refused the medal. This probably saved me from years of confinement in a Russian prison.



*German Soldier's Pay Book*

My behavior was apparently very unusual in the Wehrmacht. My company commander had quite some consternation over it. But I was acting like a good German by invoking the name of the Führer, and modestly proclaiming that I had done nothing worthy of the medal. The note in my paybook, it could be argued, would also act to hinder any future possibility of an award. At any rate my Sergeant shook his head at my decision and in his eyes I was once again, or still, an idiot. Even more so because I still wanted to be granted special leave to go home for a few days to get married. But the Sergeant signed-off on my leave request, which might not have been the totally 'correct' thing to do since the new company commander may have said, "No." In any case I got permission and could go on 'Matrimony Leave.'

So, Private First Class Mork, who only a few days earlier had been reported 'Fallen in Battle,' could now walk down the aisle as a living human being. This was assuming that I could get out of Ortona, something that might be very difficult to accomplish. The Sergeant told me again that he hoped I could make it back home, peacefully get married, then make it back to the troop. He would see to it, now that "Old Fritz" did not exist anymore, that I would get my old position back as company quartermaster. He wished me a good journey and sent me off with the hope that I would be able to make my way through the jumble and clutter in the

rear of the front lines. The situation to the rear at this time could not be characterized as 'very good.'

As I was getting myself ready to leave, the pretty miller suddenly showed up. After the destruction of her mill she wandered around aimlessly for a while, but now she wanted to be near her mill, even if it were only a pile of rubble now. She felt that she would soon be able to start rebuilding it, mostly because the British would soon be here and things would be quiet once again. That was her opinion on the matter, and mine too.

After our short visit I set out on foot along a very rough road along the Adriatic coast in the hope that somewhere, somehow I would come across a railroad station that still functioned and that there would be trains running toward the North. No one knew of any working rail stations nearby so I had to go it on my own. The path was not only uncertain it was also unsafe and during the day there was hardly anyone on it. Passing vehicles that could possibly have given me a ride were not running during the day. The British fighter-bombers saw to it that they only traveled at night. The nights could also be dangerous. There were many incidents of night time air attacks also.

For the most part I had to go by foot. Particularly when there was a bridge to cross that was partially destroyed. It had to be negotiated with the greatest of care. As I made this march toward some unknown train station an unknown distance away I found myself a few kilometers beyond our supply staging areas. I could have run into my Uncle Karl Briem if I had have known he was in the area. As I was waiting for a train, he was stationed nearby as a truck driver for an artillery unit. We did not know how close we were until much later when we were talking over our experiences in Italy. Then we figured out that we were both in the nearly the same spot at the same time.

Somewhere, somehow I managed to find a train station where I could board a train headed toward Northern Italy, from there it went to Vienna and Prague(!) in order to arrive at Bremen. The train trip was hindered by Allied bombers and in Italy by fighter-bombers. You couldn't travel according to the train schedule. You simply had to get to a train station then try to figure out a route to the next stop. The result was a lot of detours and a lot of lost time.

In Vienna I stayed longer than I had to just to give myself the chance to see the city. It is where my girlfriend Paula came from, my great love when we were working in Oldenburg before the war. I also took some extra time in Prague and went as far as Hradschin. These unplanned stops allowed me to see something of these cities. If it weren't for this 'shitty war' (I had no other words for the insanity) I would never have had the chance to visit them.



*Model of the city of Hannover as it appeared in 1945*

A sad sight greeted me in Hannover when I saw for myself what the bombing had done there. I had tears in my eyes when I saw the endless rubble, much of it in the neighborhood of the train station where I had so many good memories. Hannover was just one big heap of rubble. That it could ever be rebuilt seemed outside the range of possibility. Even worse was the thought of the many, many victims of the bombing raids. I was filled with anger, not at our country's leaders, but with the English and the Americans who flew these barbarous air raids and also with Churchill, whom I held personally responsible.

It is natural that we only saw the horror that rained down on us as a criminal act. As I have noted before, the German attacks on England, from our point of view, were only retaliation for the attacks on our people. They not only destroyed cities but also hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, for the most part women and children who were killed or crippled.

[...to be continued...]