

# “Halt! Who Goes There?”

by James T. Calvert, 925-B

*James T. Calvert entered the Army in 1939, served with the 5th Infantry Division, then got out until he was redrafted and became a member of Battery B, 925th Field Artillery Battalion. His son, Jimmy, used his father's letters to help tell the story.*

I was working in my hometown's hospital and had wanted to become a nurse but couldn't afford to attend the school. One day this old man who worked with me said, "Grasshopper join the Army and they will put you through the school," and so that was that I did in 1939.

After my basic training I was sent to Denver, Colorado, where I started my med school, but two weeks before finishing, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and I was transferred to the 5th Infantry Division where I was placed in the 46th F.A.B.

The 5th was at Fort Custer at the time of my arrival and getting ready for the Tennessee Maneuvers. From Fort Custer, which was in Michigan, we marched twenty miles a day to where the trucks would be waiting to pick us up. We were then taken to a field where the kitchen was set up and we would spend the night. We repeated this each day until we arrived in the Lebanon area which was great for me because my home was only sixty-five miles away, so weekends that I didn't have duty I was able to go home.

After the maneuvers had finished, we returned to Fort Custer and after a short time were sent to Iceland. In a short letter home I wrote:

I knew you either read or saw in the movie shorts how the wind blew here one time. Earl Wilson and myself were walking guard together and we had one [tough] time staying on the ground. There are plenty of girls here and they are gradually getting friendly day by day, but they are nothing like our good old American girls. Well Mr. Pitcher, I must close, hoping to see everyone soon. My greatest ambition now is to see the Statue of Liberty, and then I will know I am back in God's country again. If you see anyone who would care to write, please give them my address.  
Sincerely yours,  
James Calvert

In Iceland there wasn't much to do on our time off. So you either went down to the dock to watch an Icelander cut up a whale or go to the only bar they had. So I decided to take up boxing and won a number of matches. The only other entertainment, if you wanted to call it that, came from Bed Check Charlie, who was a German pilot. Each night at 2200 hours it started out with the faint sound of his engine coming closer as he neared our base. After circling the base a number of times, you would hear the sound of one bomb falling and then the explosion. He would then fly off, ending our night's entertainment.

From Iceland we were sent to England. No sooner had I landed there, than I got into a fight with a Scottish soldier for asking him one question, "What are you wearing under your dress?"

In November of 1942 I had had four years in the Army and was sent back home. Before leaving, Tommy, a guy who I got to know said, "Grasshopper you'll be back in two weeks," but it was long after returning home that I was redrafted. This time I found myself in Battery B, 925th F.A.B., 100th Infantry Division, attached to its Service Battery and found myself not only helping in the laying of phone lines but also assigned to the 399th at times.

On our trip over I was aboard the SS George Washington which was an old World War I German transport. After so many days at sea our convoy ran into a hurricane, causing our ship to lose its steering for a time. We landed at the port of Marseilles, France, on October 20 and started unloading our gear and equipment.

Out in the field, as I said, one of my duties was to help in the laying of the phone lines. One day I was helping lay line, and we were taking some sniper fire. I was crawling across the ground in these woods, dragging this spool of phone wire as I went, when all at once one of my pants legs became caught in some

wire. It seemed like forever trying to get my pants free and the whole time I was trying to free it, all I could think of was a German sniper had me in his sights.

As we moved along, there were times we came across German tanks and other equipment that had been knocked out. One day we came across this German tank that had been knocked out, so I decided to take a look inside of it, which turned out to be one of the sickest things I ever saw. Bits and parts of its crew were all over the inside and, needless to say, that was the last time I ever wanted to check out a tank.

One day we were ordered to move down along a line of trees that ran along a field. About halfway down it we were told to cross the field.

Across from where we were to cross at was a barn that sat on the edge of the field. Just as we got about halfway across, the Germans opened up on us from the far end of the field with not only small arms fire, but also an anti-aircraft gun that they had. As I made my way, I came to a hole which I jumped into and found our medic working on a number of wounded. The hole wasn't deep enough for all of us in there, and after a number of rounds just missing me, I decided that it wasn't the place to be at that time. Climbing out, I took off running across the field with a trail of rounds hitting behind me as I made my way to the barn.

Inside, I found some officer who said we need fire support. He asked where the radioman was, and I pointed out the radio man to him, who was still on the other side of the field.

He then removed a pack of Pall Mall cigarettes from his shirt pocket and wrote on the back of it. He then handed me the note and told me to take it to the radioman to call in. Having just barely made it the first time across the field I thought to myself I wasn't going to be so lucky trying to cross it again as I looked out the doorway.

At the time I had been carrying a carbine and at the side of the door was a pile of horse shit which I stuck my carbine into it, barrel down.

As I did, this officer said, "Soldier I can have you court-martialed for that."

I looked at him and said, "Sir where I'm going I won't have a need for it anymore," and stepped out the door of the barn into the field. As I did, grass and dirt started flying all around me and as it did, I took off for the other side.

After we cleared the Germans, I return to the barn only to find the officer gone as was my carbine.

One day during early winter I was walking point with this boy we called Cotton. As we made our way through the woods that ran alongside a stream, it reminded me of a Christmas card. Caught up with the beautiful landscape around us, I guess we weren't paying attention because all at once we walked up on a German who was on the bank of the stream washing his face. He was maybe fifty yards in front of us and we were so surprised we just froze dead in our tracks. At first, the German hadn't seen us but as he stood to his feet he did. Still frozen, we watched as he picked up a hand rocket and fired it at us. Unable to move, we both stood there watching as this thing hit the snow-covered ground and came at us like a large snake and passed right between the both of us. Unable to move, we watched him pick up his things and walk off. After he had gone, I looked at Cotton and asked, "Am I as white as you?" and he replied "If you are, you're as white as snow."

When word came the Germans were coming and to fall back, I was hoping to catch a ride out of the village I was in. Hearing what I thought to be one of our tanks coming down the street, I ran to catch a ride on it. As I ran around the corner of the street, I found myself facing a German tank. Not missing a step, I made my way right back around the corner and as I was running, I remember thinking to myself, "Hell they're not coming, they're here."

While in one of the small villages outside of Bitche, I was standing guard duty one night. All the civilians had been told to stay in their homes at night for their own safety. That night as I stood there I heard someone coming down the street. We had been told as we went on duty, if you hear something coming from that way, it would be more than likely Germans. As the sound grew closer, I raised my rifle and called out, "Halt! Who goes there?" which got me no answer. Again I called out, "Halt! Who goes there?" and still no answer. The third time as I called out, I put my finger to the trigger and it was then I

saw an old man walking up the street at me waving a white hanky in one hand and his other hand over his head. I told him to come closer.

I was not able to speak French and he couldn't speak English, which made it hard to find out why he was out so late at night. I decided to take him back to the CP. As we walked along I got madder thinking how close I came to shooting him, so I kicked him in his butt, probably three times.

At the CP we learned that he was the mayor of this village and he was out looking for his daughter who hadn't come home.

In a letter I wrote home,

Dear Mom.

Sure proud to hear from you and to know that everyone is OK. I have been fine with the exception of a cold now and then. I also heard from Naomi and Norman. She writes quite often and keeps me informed in the latest news. Tell her to keep up the good work. Do you hear from Mary and Joe quite often?

Mom, please don't think I have forgotten Mother's Day, for I sure didn't. The last two Mother's Days we have been apart, but here's hoping we see each other before the next. Just because I am not there, remember I am thinking of you often. I sure wish I could have sent you a present of some kind, but there is nothing appropriate to send from here.

Naomi tells me that James Lone's and Leo Fitzpatrick's mother and you get together and talk about your wandering boys. Sure would give anything to listen in on the conversation. Where is Leo at present? Nothing much to write, so I will close and write real often and you do the same.  
Lots of love  
James Calvert

At one time I had kept a German luger stuffed in the side of my boot until one day as we were sitting around in this village a motorcycle courier came riding in. After asking him a number of times to let me ride his bike he gave in. Well the street was muddy and it got away from me and before I knew it, I was on the ground with it on top of me. As I hit the ground the luger went off, blowing a hole in my boot. I took the luger and tossed it into the field that was beside the road.

In my last letter home I wrote,

Winnenden Germany  
Sunday May 28, 1945

Dear Mom and Dad.

Thinking how you are and thought I would write wondering how you are and hoping that you are fine.

I have strong hopes of being with you sometime next month, but if I am not don't worry for I will be home as soon as I can get there. You can sure get that out of your mind about me asking to go to Japan for I have had enough war to last me forever. There is only two of us who have enough points in this battery to go home and we hope to go together. He was in Iceland with me so you can see we are big buddies.

You ask in one of your letters some time ago how I came over this time. We came around by North Africa and up through the Mediterranean Sea and landed in Southern France. By the time we landed, the Germans had been pushed way back and we didn't go into combat until around St. Die. I guess you have heard of that.

Going to cut this letter short but will write another again soon. All my love to both.  
Love always  
Jim