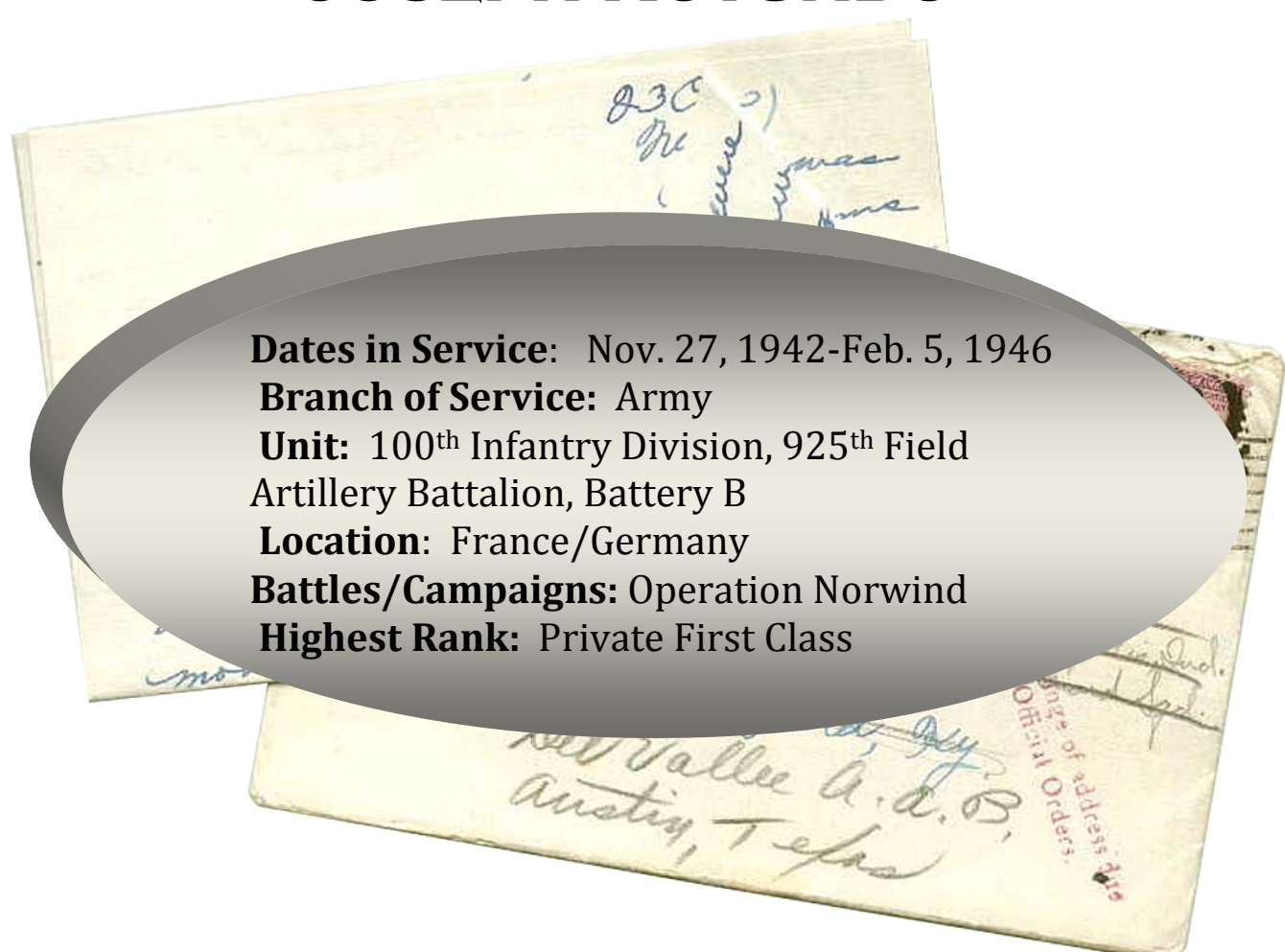


## The combat stories of **JOSEPH ROTUNDO**



**Dates in Service:** Nov. 27, 1942-Feb. 5, 1946  
**Branch of Service:** Army  
**Unit:** 100<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 925<sup>th</sup> Field  
Artillery Battalion, Battery B  
**Location:** France/Germany  
**Battles/Campaigns:** Operation Norwind  
**Highest Rank:** Private First Class

Joseph Rotundo remembers his time in an artillery battalion constantly attacking and being attacked by the Germans, and the time he thought a good friend had been killed.

These stories were compiled by an interviewer, who prefers to remain anonymous, and goes by the nickname 'Kilroy Was Here.' These stories are posted through a partnership between 'Kilroy Was Here' and the Witness to War Foundation. Permission to use any of these materials must be granted by 'Kilroy Was Here,' which can be obtained through the Witness to War Foundation.



Having been trained as an artilleryman, on the trip overseas my duty on the ship was to help in manning one of the five-inch guns. This duty allowed me to spend more time on the top deck in the fresh air. Believe me, with all the guys down below seasick and as bad as it smelled down there, I didn't mind the duty at all. We really never saw any action while at sea, but were scared all the time worrying about U-boats. For example, one day on the horizon smoke was spotted and as we neared, we could see that the smoke was coming from two burning ships. The word was that they had run into each other during the night, but we felt they had been hit by a U-boat.

During the winter of 1944 it was cold, and I mean cold, and all it did was snow and then snow again. If that wasn't bad enough, our food was short at times and all I had as far as a coat was my field jacket and blanket. At one point I remember them coming around and anyone who could carry a rifle was given one and sent to the front lines. It was also during this time a German plane came over and strafed us. I had taken cover behind a tree and as I sat there, I heard someone on the other side of me shooting a .45. I looked up only to see old sergeant Gibbs standing there shooting at the plane with his 45. I'll never forget old dumbo; he was a real card.

In artillery, you were on duty 24-7; you eat at your gun and sleep beside it or under the truck. Each gun was to



be manned with a six-man crew but there were a lot of times that there was only two of us to do the work. Each gun also had a man assigned to be a truck driver and ours was one of the best. I remember on January 30<sup>th</sup> they asked for volunteers to take a 105 and move to a place overlooking the German held town of Reyersviller. The guys who volunteered were Sergeant Drayer, Sergeant Krebs, Cpl. Walden, and me. It called for us to move in without being heard and knock out the buildings the Germans were using. I'll have you know that our driver had us right in there at almost point blank range without them knowing it and before the Germans knew a thing, we had hit the buildings and were out of there.

Talking about sleeping at your gun, one of the closest calls for me came during the time I was asleep at my gun and never knew it until I got up the next morning. That night I had placed my gasmask beside my head and when I woke the next morning, I found a piece of shrapnel in it.

We would get our share of shelling and it was during one of these shellings that I remember Sergeant Thomas falling to the ground next to me. As the shelling stopped and I was picking myself up off the ground, there lay Thomas next to me. The ground around his head was stained red from his blood. It looked as if he had been hit in his head by shrapnel, and I thought to myself that he was a goner. The medics, whom I felt



were some of the best, came running up to Thomas. As I walked away, I thought that would be the last time I would be seeing Thomas. Years later at a reunion, some of the guys told me to have a seat in a room and to wait there because they had a surprise for me. It wasn't long before the door opened and there stood old Sergeant Thomas. Sitting there I thought I was seeing a ghost. Thomas spoke up and said, "You thought I was dead you SOB," and from that day on we were big buddies and attended all the reunions together.

On Thanksgiving, we were told that the kitchen was sending us a hot meal but with all the rain we were having that day it was soup by the time it got to us.

During the night of January the first, I was down in the basement of a farmhouse with a number of infantry guys trying to get some sleep when all at once all hell broke loss. The house shook and dust flew through the air in the basement. It was a mad house down there with everyone running around trying to get their things and hightail it out of there. Those of us from the battery were to stay put until the all clear was given. As soon as we heard all clear, the three of us from the battery jumped into our weapons carrier and headed out, stopping a number of times to set up and fire a few rounds to support the infantry boys. As we got to the river we had to cross, we removed our boots in case our truck turned over in the river. Boy, now that was one cold crossing.



There were times we would go through towns and villages and on buildings and fences would be painted “Kilroy was here.” Mail was always slow catching up with us and it was always good to hear from home. Along with the mail, there would be Stars and Stripes. I looked forward to Wily and Joe in it and sad Sack.