

# Leaves from a War Correspondent's Notebook

By Hal Boyle

WITH THE 517th PARACHUTE COMBAT TEAM, WESTERN FRONT, Jan. '6 (delayed) (AP) —"I still feel funny about that hill," says Lt. Dick Spencer. "We never lost a hill before—and we have never lost one since."

Dick will never forget "that hill" because he thought he had disgraced the paratroopers there. He ordered his platoon to pull back after 22 of its 28 men were killed or wounded trying to storm the slope and knock out 22 enemy pillboxes—a full-sized job for a regiment.

"They had us cold that day," said the slim little 24-year-old former University of Iowa journalism student. "We had been taught how to win, but nobody had taught us how to lose. We didn't know how because we never expect to—in the paratroops."

Dick was assistant platoon leader that day, weeks ago, when they attacked the double-sloped hill at Col De Braus, France, in the Maritime Alps.

"We thought those pillboxes were empty," said Dick. "I studied them for 15 minutes through a telescope and didn't see a sign of any movement. But just as we started up the hill I felt something was wrong."

"Then I heard a shout and looked up and the air was full of hand grenades and anti-tank grenades," Dick said.

One grenade burst at Dick's feet. His leg was numb and he was bleeding from his mouth and ears. Several men were killed or wounded, but Dick and three others managed to drag themselves to the nearest pillbox where Dick set up an aid station.

Two men trying to bring up water were killed. Although realizing he was facing incredible odds, the young platoon leader—he had just come back from the hospital the night before—reorganized for a second attack.

"The Germans opened up again

and the leader was killed at the start," said Dick.

Although the Nazis caught them with burp guns, machine-guns, rifles and grenades, the paratroopers surged up the hill. Men fell every few steps. The Germans began dropping mortar shells behind them and flames spread in the grass and brush.

Finally they had to fall back to where Dick was caring for the wounded. One German was killed almost at the entrance to the pillbox. A paratrooper staggered back with a wounded man under each arm. A third wounded man, clinging to his waist, was shot through the lung. The paratrooper himself was wounded in the face, arm and shoulder. He wears the Distinguished Service Cross now.

Only six men were unhurt. The only non-com on his feet was a sergeant with a bullet wound in his knee. He looked down at Dick and said:

"What'll we do, sir? We are being butchered. But we will try once more if you say to."

The lieutenant gave the order to pull back. They worked their way down the hill, with each man helping the wounded as best he could. Eight paratroopers on another hill opened fire and routed a column of 200 Germans trying to cut them off.

"All the way back I thought I would be thrown out of the paratroopers for falling back without orders," Dick recalled.

Instead, he got pats on the back from the battalion commander, who had given orders, after the first attack, for the platoon to withdraw. But their radio was knocked out, the platoon never got the order—and made a second gallant try.

Two days later a battalion and two companies of paratroopers—more than 500 men this time—attacked and took the hill, capturing 18 Germans in the first pillbox alone.