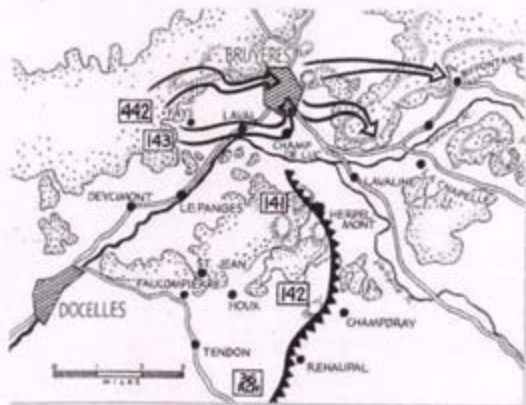


# *Biffontaine*

## *October 23, 1944*



**By: S/SGT Kakuto Higuchi  
Bronze Star and Purple Heart  
2009**

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It was a dark night; so dark that me and the rest of the 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon used toilet paper to mark our positions. The idea was to let the guy next to you know where you are by spotting the white of the toilet paper in all that darkness.

Up on the front line you never really fall into a deep sleep. Your senses are wide-awake. You may close your eyes hoping to fall asleep, but that never happened for me. My buddy and I took turns sleeping, or at least closing our eyes. It seemed I had just closed my eyes when dawn broke. You look around and see soldiers moving about, cleaning up;

preparing for another day and whatever we encounter.

As sunlight brightened the forest, there was a strange sound coming straight into our shadow line. All of a sudden everyone stated firing their weapon. When the shooting stopped we ran to whatever we were firing at—a dead horse and a shot-up wagon. Somehow the driver got away by jumping into the dense undergrowth. It was impossible to track him down. We checked the wagon, still upright, and what do you know...a German breakfast wagon- five-gallon milk cans and food. We had a warm breakfast for a change...much better than c-rations.

After our lucky breakfast, the morning started with a brisk walk. It must have been about an hour later when here comes a black uniformed marine. It could have been a sailor, but I never bothered to find out. Anyway, our intelligence must have received good news because we started to march double-time toward our objective...Biffontaine.

We quietly moved down to the edge of the forest over-looking Biffontaine. Our heavy caliber machine gun was set in place to provide cover and our platoon leader met with the captain to formulate the plan of attack. We only had the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> platoons to attack the village. 1<sup>st</sup> platoon left earlier in the morning, dispatched to another mission. Our platoon leader got back to us with the battle plan and described the positions of Cos. A and B. We were stalling for all of us to be in position before attacking, but our machine gun started firing on a command car that was heading into the village. When that happened, it changed our plan of action. We had to move and were told to cover A Co.'s left flank. The platoon leader led us to the perimeter of the village and from there we headed for the hill on the left. The enemy machine gun fired on us as we were dashing for the hill. We were lucky that no one was hit. We settled in a drainage ditch at the edge of the forest. Lt. Miyashiro took a squad around the bend and about the time he rounded the corner, artillery fire started to pound our position. As soon as the artillery fire stopped, here comes Lt. Miyashiro running down the hill mad as hell, yelling whose artillery was firing at us. It seemed that the shells were coming from behind us. He came up to me

and said, "See that white house?" pointing toward the village, "There are many jerrys in the house; go get 'em". I didn't have any men with me, being the platoon guide. He told our squad leader Leonard to go along with me.

The Lt. and I ran back to the perimeter homes dodging the same machine gun fire that harassed us going up the hill. Looking back, there's no one following us, so we yelled back and told Leonard and the rest of the squad to get over here. One by one they came down. We went into the village looking for our command post. Once there, we asked where Rudy Yoshida and the 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon were. They didn't know for sure but if we followed their telephone line we'd find them.

My platoon Sgt. Ben Takayesu joined us at the command post and I was thankful for that (I had been with Ben since our landing in Anzio). We followed the phone line and sure enough, it led us to Rudy and the rest of the platoon holed up in this house. We asked Rudy, "where's the enemy"? Turned out that all the houses across the road was enemy territory. This road led directly to the white house. My eyes darted to every window along the road, but I especially

focused on that white house. I made it across the road kneeling down when Ben tapped me on my shoulder and said, "Go"! Ben took the front door and I took the side door. When I came through the kitchen, I saw Ben with 7 prisoners in the hallway. We headed to the second floor, found nothing, and ushered the prisoners up the stairs. Looking out the window, we saw a jerry dug into a half foxhole in the hillside. In fact, we were looking at him almost from his back. We gave our BAR man the honor. He can't miss with the BAR (Browning automatic rifle). He shot the jerry, but another jerry quickly took his place. The second jerry was shot and there were no more replacements. They got wise on where our shots were coming from.

Things changed from then on. The jerrys knew we were there. About half an hour later a jerry Mark IV tank passed our house not more than 50 ft away, firing into the village. The tank started to reverse and it stopped right in front of our house. It was using the gun turret to knock down the fence made of steel and 8 ft tall. But the fence held. The tank reversed and stopped at the edge of our house, fired it 88 mm, and brought down our laundry room. Then it disappeared.

Fifteen minutes later an armored car pulled up to the gate of our house, started firing round after round at the front door, and opened up a hole the size of the vestibule: 6 ft X 10 ft. When the firing stopped we expected an assault so took up positions to handle the charge. We waited and waited but they didn't come.

There was a lull after that incident allowing us to catch our breath. At the backside of the house I watched as Co. B was dug in between a group of jerrys and the cover of the nearby forest. As the jerrys got closer to the forest, Co. B opened up and I could see the enemy taking casualties and retreating.

Toward evening two ladies came out of the cellar and wanted permission to cook for their two families. I went down to the kitchen and posted myself outside the kitchen door. Half an hour went by when a jerry approached the back door. I shot a couple of rounds through the door and I could hear his hobnail boots retreating. I looked toward the front door expecting something or someone to come through the door. A few minutes later there's a loud bang outside the kitchen and the poor ladies



were shaken up. I ran upstairs and asked Spike if he had thrown a grenade. Yes. He heard something outside. I went back down to the kitchen and told the ladies to hurry up and finish their cooking. The cooking was a long process because they had a cold stove and it just took time to stoke up the fire. On top of that they had to boil the water then boil the dried meat. When the meat was tender they put cabbage into the soup. So they had meat and cabbage soup. They were generous and gave us a cup of soup before they took the pot down into the cellar. It was terrific!

That night was really dark both outside and inside the house. I stayed on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor for a little while longer and moved myself to the stairway's first landing. That way, I could look out the landing window through the broken glass and keep my eye on the front door as well as the back of the house. Soon after taking up position I could hear jerrys talking by the woodshed. I fired a couple of rounds at the shed. Boy, what a racket they made trying to get out of the shed and into the dark. Minutes went by when I heard this noise like someone was crawling in the garden. It seemed there was more than one jerry. I snuck up to the second floor and told Spike to throw a grenade into the garden.

After the grenade went off I could hear them scattering for cover. It turned out that the German Battalion command post was in the house next to ours. Our area was crawling with jerrys.

Not long after that a machine gun started to fire through the window where Sagara and Stanley were. We were fortunate that the windows had wooden shutters. It deflected most of the bullets. Still, the bullets were flying all over the room. It's a wonder that no one was injured. The jerrys were starting to get closer and we kept throwing hand grenades to keep them away from the house. Earlier in the day we found some jerry grenades and they came in handy. We had used up all of our grenades and our ammo was down too. We were concerned the next assault would come through the front door and we didn't have the firepower to ward off a major attack. They were yelling at us to surrender. Surrender! It went on like this till midnight, them yelling for us to give up, and us waiting for the assault. It finally quieted down and we could hear different types of vehicles moving. The jerrys were retreating. Boy, were we lucky! No one was injured that day.

The night got real quiet; no noise of any kind. Then we remembered the POWs in the cellar (we took the prisoners down to the cellar earlier because they were in our way during all the fighting). Ben told me to check them out. I went downstairs and checked out the first floor. Everything was so quiet. Spooky quiet. I opened the cellar door located just inside the back door. There was a glow from a candle the civilian families had lit on the cellar table in the far back of the cellar. I could see the prisoners seated on benches at the bottom of the steps at the front of the cellar. I sat next to the jerry on the end of the bench and gave each one of them the "eye". They were all young with one older man. I got comfortable on the bench and asked if anyone spoke English. One guy answered, "a little bit." I gave him one of my cigarettes and pretty soon they were all reaching out for one. They offered me one of theirs and I tell you, it was terrible- like dried grass.

Before I go any further, I have to mention about this Moroccan who was captured in Africa and was used as a handy man or gofer by the jerrys for almost two years. He talked better than the jerrys and I used him as my interpreter. He was so anxious to be free; he kept pestering me to leave with him

to freedom. I kept telling him to help me watch the prisoners and I'd take him to freedom. Anyway, we were making small talk and I was surprised that almost all of them spoke some English. The first thing they asked me was my nationality. I told them I was Japanese-American. Pretty soon the Moroccan and I were the only ones awake. I could see that he was still anxious to leave. I told him again- you help me watch and I'll take you to freedom in the morning. My eyes were getting very heavy, very heavy. I had to stand up to chase the cobwebs away. I sat back down on the bench trying very, very hard to keep awake.

I heard this loud bang from outside. I grabbed my rifle and ran up the stairs, throwing open the cellar door. It was daylight. Sure funny that everything was so quiet. I yelled up to the second floor and slowly Ben, Leonard, Sagara, Kimura, Spike, Harry, and Stanley - they all came down. We went out the back door to check the German Battalion command post. No one was there. We went to the home in front of the command post and that was empty too. We came back to our house and Ben told me and my buddy to take all the prisoners including the Moroccan to the

command post. When I found the Moroccan later, boy was he pissed!

At the command post, I asked if they knew where we were. It seemed to me that they didn't know either. But they did know our platoon leader, Lt. Miyashiro was captured by the jerrys and so were Oscar and Bumper. After the war I asked Lt. Miyashiro what happened to him that day. He told me he was trying to get the rest of our platoon to join up with us, got shot, and taken prisoner.

I forgot a lot of what happened after that day and many years later I asked Warren Iwai, our 1<sup>st</sup> Sgt. if he remembered. He said we walked back the way we came in. It must have been a long walk.

We went on reserve and started our five days of rest and recuperation. It wasn't far, just somewhere quiet but still near the front line. I was so tired, that it was nice just to goof off, lying around, catching up on reading and writing letters. Everyone was tired. Our R and R was supposed to last five days, and you know what? The third day came and we got orders to pack up and prepare to move out. Christ! It was pitch black when we assembled and were told

that we would be heading for this mountain range. We had to be extra quiet and not have lights of any kind. This was the beginning of our trip towards the Lost Battalion. But that's another story.





"C" Company



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