

LERMOOS, AUSTRIA

day 66

Continuing forward, CC B soon found that the only two optional routes through the Alps had been effectively blocked, one by an impassable concrete barricade and the other by a large deep crater blown into the road. Bypassing the Alps was no longer an option.

With the routes blocked, CC B turned east and entered Lermoos, Austria, only six miles south of the German border on Monday, April 30. That same day Adolph Hitler committed suicide along with his wife of twenty-four hours, Ava Braun, in

their underground bunker. Hitler shot himself while Ava ingested poison. Later, their bodies were taken outside the bunker and



Present day Lermoos, Austria

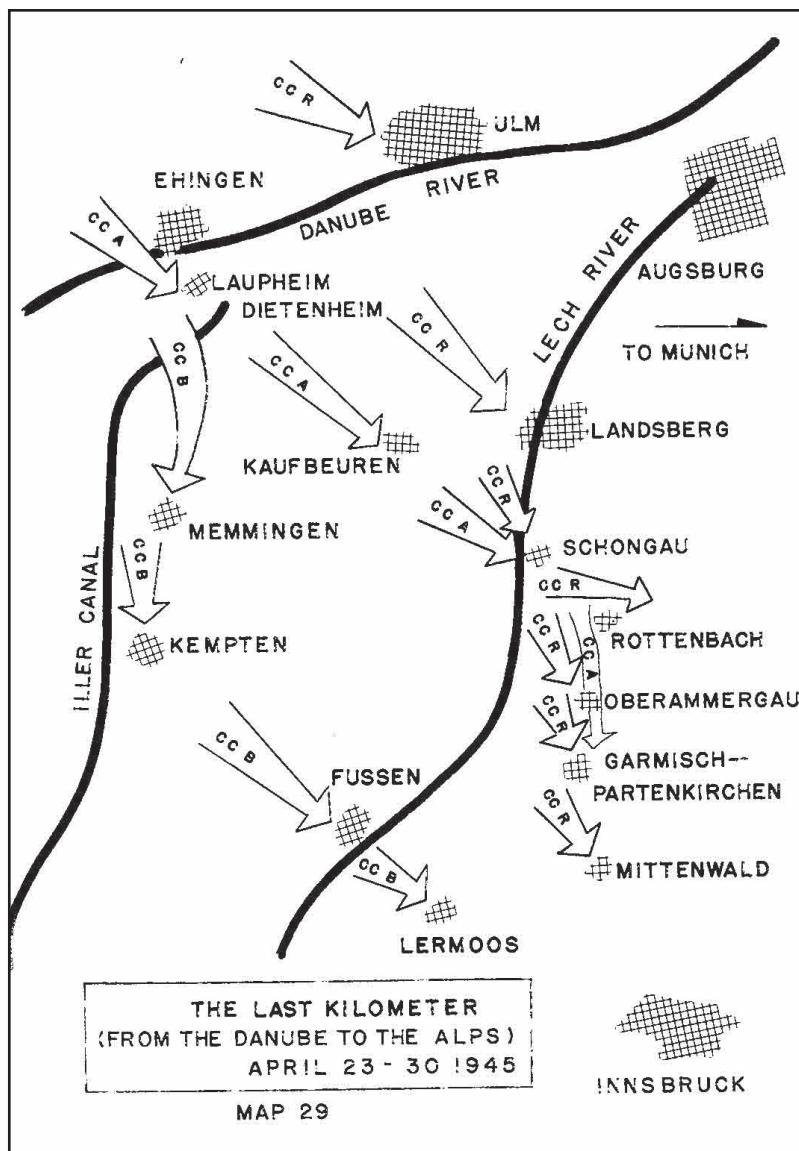
burned to keep them from falling into Allied possession.

The Shermans were randomly placed throughout several large fields on the outskirts of Lermoos while a number of nearby farmhouses were commandeered to house the soldiers of the 10th Armored Tigers.

While there were still small bands of skirmishers and resisters, for all intents and purposes, hostilities had come to an end. Germany had been defeated. Hitler was dead. His two most trusted officers, Himmler and Goering, were in a struggle between themselves over who could sue for peace with the Allies the quickest without Hitler's approval. This further devastated Adolph Hitler. He felt he'd been betrayed by those he had trusted most.

Hitler's statements earlier in the war that American soldiers would never stand and fight proved little comfort to the Nazi commanders who'd been routed and pushed from one side of their country to the other by the Allied Armies. They'd seen their cities destroyed and their government collapse.

Still, the Shermans bivouacked in the surrounding fields had to be guarded from potential saboteurs. Each armored member was subject to guard duty at any time day or night. The night of Wednesday, May 2, was assigned to Melvin. In the



early morning hours, he awoke for his assigned duty. Realizing that he'd left his M4 Grease Gun inside the tank, he searched in the darkness for a weapon to accompany him. Sharing the farmhouse with soldiers of the 44th Infantry, he easily lo-

cated an M1 carbine standing upright in a corner with several other guns in what would have been the kitchen of the small dwelling. Quietly opening the door he stepped outside into the cold mountain air, his breath condensing into a vague vapor as he began walking the half mile or so down the narrow lane to the fields.



M1 Carbine

The night was crisp and the Alpine sky was clear. The moonlight was bright enough to light the way down the winding gravel road. Waist high brush lined the edge of both sides of the road. A slight embankment rose on either side just beyond the brush.

Hostilities had nearly come to an end, and Melvin, still a bit groggy with sleep, walked at a leisure pace. He was finally able to think thoughts not related to war and self survival--who was in front of you, who was behind you, and had they seen you before you had seen them.

Carrying the M1 carbine in his left hand this night didn't seem so different from the times he'd spent hunting rabbit and squirrel just across the

creek from the farm in Indiana.

He was half way down the deserted silent lane when up ahead there came a sound. Something rustled the bushes on the side of the road. Instinctively Melvin froze in his steps. He squinted through the moonlight trying to see the road ahead. He heard the bushes rustle again but much closer this time.

Melvin back-peddled, quickly zig-zagging back and forth from one side to the other not taking his eyes off of the road ahead of him. Finding an opening in the brush, he ducked in, then pulled the bolt up and back on the M1 to chamber a shell. To his surprise the bolt came completely out of the receiver. His left hand held the gun stock and barrel, his right hand only the bolt.

In the darkness with apparent danger in the brush up ahead, he struggled to replace the bolt into the rifle. Seconds seemed like minutes, but his training came through. He'd had to learn how to disassemble and reassemble various firearms



Thompson submachine gun

blindfolded during basic training. Afterwards he'd become qualified as a sharp shooter with an M1 carbine and rated an expert with a sub-machine gun.

With his carbine reassembled, he emerged from the brush and back onto the road, carefully inching forward. Again the bushes rustled. He shouldered the carbine, finger on the trigger ready to fire. Just then a rabbit jumped clear of the brush and in a flash disappeared down the lane.