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VA File #C-08693944
SS #439-14-7593

My outfit, the 103rd Inf. Div., went into action Nov. 11, 1944, at St. Die, France. I was 19 years old at the time, a Pfc. in Co. L, 411th Inf. Regmt, with a newly awarded CIB.

The 103rd relieved the 36th Div. and took over the job of driving the Germans out of the Vosges Mountains. The Vosges is heavily forested, and was deep in snow at that time, it being the most severe

winter Europe had had for decades. The Germans held the valley towns and the roads which connected them, so we left the roads and climbed over the mountains under cover of darkness, and attacked the town at the bottom of the other side, at dawn. Moving a body of troops in darkness over unfamiliar and mountainous terrain is tricky, but we managed it, successfully, until the Germans changed their tactics. We'd attack, only to find that they had withdrawn to an already prepared position, and were waiting for us down the road. In one such town, shortly after we occupied it, the Germans started shelling us with 88mm cannon. Our Platoon Sgt., Sgt. Bynum, ordered us into the large hallway of a building, where we sat facing each other, our backs to the wall. The Sgt. took cover behind a 6x6 truck parked next to the building, just outside the hallway entrance. Suddenly, there was a terrific explosion, with terrible concussion, raising a cloud of dust in the hallway. When it cleared I saw the man next to me holding up his bloody left hand, with several fingers missing, looking at it with numb shock. Somehow, a piece of shrapnel had come in through the hallway entrance, and passing by myself and several others who were between him and the entrance, had found his left hand. We were lucky that morning, and he wasn't. When we stumbled outside, we saw Sgt. Bynum lying next to what was left of the truck, which had been loaded with explosives. He was dead, but did not have a mark on him. I will never forget his face, which was a ghastly gray color, like the blood had been drained out of him.

We gave up mountain climbing, and began to move down the roads,

but the Germans were waiting for us, and knowing the ranges and distances perfectly, they would wait for the right time, and open up with automatic weapons fire and an 88, which came down the road flat, about chest high. I saw what was left of a soldier who happened to get in the way of one of those 88 shells. We quickly learned to advance in two columns, one at either side of the road, so that we could dive for the ditches when the shooting started. This stopped the advance, until the German position could be out-flanked, by which time they had pulled stakes and moved to their next prepared position. This way, a few men and guns could hold up an advance all day long. Air support would have helped, but we never got any, why I don't know.

A great price was paid by the men put on point during these stop-and-go advances. The point platoon would put two men out in front, and when the inevitable firing started, one or both would often go down. It got so bad the platoons were rotated, and their squads would take turns sending men out to the front of the column.

If you were in reserve that day, it was not hard to read what had happened when you came up to that place in the road. First, there would be a dead American, or two, and then farther along, a dead German in a ditch, and maybe a horse.

I was sure I was going to be killed out on the point one day, and my chief worry was that I didn't know where I was, and I wouldn't know where I had died. Seems crazy now, but it didn't then. To this day I have a fear of not knowing where I am, and I have both a collection of maps and compasses.

After we cleared the valley, we went back into the mountains, where I was issued one of the early bazookas. For what reason I never fathomed. Where we were, jeeps couldn't operate, much less tanks. All supplies had to be carried in by hand, and it was a day's work for a man to carry in a case of rations or of ammo. But, I carried it anyway, with four rounds of bazooka shells, plus all my other gear, an M1 Garand, and bandoliers of ammo for it, and what I needed to survive in the bitter cold. I pleaded for smaller protection, like a carbine, or, better yet, a pistol, but never got either. The only guy who would switch off with me on long marches was the BAP man, whose gun was about the same weight as the bazooka, but rode much better on the shoulder. One night, on the march, my back went out. The Sergeant sent me to a first aid station, told me to get a night's rest, and join up in the morning. At the aid station, a medic put his knee in my back, and jerked me upright, and I was okay, but I took the Sgt.'s advice, and got a night's rest in a warm room, and a hot meal. It was wonderful.

When I got back to my outfit, I learned that they had stumbled into a hot firefight the night before, and the acting Platoon Sgt. and two others were gone. I felt an intense guilt over this, feeling that I had let a small ailment keep me from being with the platoon when it was in danger. I began to think I might be a coward, and this depressed me further.

On another night attack, shortly afterwards, I laid outside a town

and watched what was called a TOT barrage hit it just before we attacked at dawn. Watching the phosphorous shells burst was like watching a gala fireworks display. Entering the town I saw a dead German soldier lying in the street, whose body was still smoldering from bits of phosphorous shrapnel embedded in it. It was said the stuff would burn a hole right through you, if it wasn't picked out, piece by piece. When I see phosphorous shells in a war documentary now, the wisps of smoke and the smell come back to me.

Some days before Christmas, 1944, we were confronting a bunker on the Siegfried Line, with a deep tank trap dug along its front. The plan was for us to provide a distraction from the tank trap while a Sherman tank equipped with a bulldozer blade, filled in a path across the trap for some Shermans waiting in reserve. We got to the tank trap okay, and the dozer Sherman worked away at filling up a path for the tanks to cross and go into the attack with us. Just as the dozer tank had filled a path across the trap, the Germans knocked it out, blocking the path it had made. There we were, with no place to go, and the Germans started putting mortar shells precisely into that tank trap. One burst near two of us, and a piece of shrapnel went into my heel like a hot poker, knocking me off my feet. Another piece went into the other man's thigh, but luckily didn't hit an artery. My heel felt like hell, but no blood was coming out, so I wasn't about to take my boot and all those socks off down in the tank trap as long as I could walk, so I got a package of sulfa powder on the man's thigh wound, and a bandage. He was perfectly calm. He knew he had just bought his ticket home. The last I saw of him, as a medic worked on him, he was eating a can of C-rations.

For some reason no one explained to us, we were pulled back from the Siegfried Line to a little village, where we were suddenly celebrating Christmas a week early. We got our mail, including Christmas presents, and were fed the prescribed G.I. turkey dinner, and then, presents and all, we loaded onto 6x6's and drove north. We later found out that Patton's Third Army had been sent north to relieve Bastogne, and our Army had been ordered to stretch out to cover both army fronts. We ended up in the Saar somewhere, with about one squad to a town. I guess the Germans had thrown everything in the Bulge Battle, so it was relatively quiet where we were. When the Third Army came back to its own army front, we loaded up to go back south to our front. Along the way, we were suddenly diverted to a spot opposite to where the German army, under Hitler's orders, had launched a final last gasp attack. It was called the Little Bulge for awhile, and then largely forgotten. We were literally run through lines of supply people who tossed us bandoliers of ammo, rations, and--blessed day!-- down sleeping bags, which until then had only been a rumor on the front lines.

An officer briefed us on what was going to happen the next morning. We were going to start across about 500 yards of open ground between us and a village the Germans were holding, just before dawn. Just as we got to the village outskirts, an artillery barrage was going to hit the town, giving us cover to get in the town.

Well, it is hard to imagine how things could have gone more wrong. The open ground turned out to be about 1500 yards, not 500, and dawn came when we were about halfway across, and the barrage, scheduled for dawn opened up on the village. When the barrage ended, we were left out there like sitting ducks, with no place to hide. Also, a force of ~~six~~ ^{four} Sherman tanks had timed their arrival to coincide with our entry into the village, so their engines wouldn't give the attack away. They also showed up in the middle of the field. We got automatic fire, and I remember the tracers seemed to be gathering us in to the town, like herding cows. But, with the tanks with us, it seemed we might be able to do something. About two hundred yards out, three super Tiger tanks opened up on the Shermans, and they were dead or burning in a matter of seconds. Then they went quiet, and the tracers kept herding us in.

That was it. We had been outgunned and thoroughly outclassed, by a Panzer outfit that had fought from Africa all the way up the Italian boot, and were now fighting largely to keep their self respect. Hitler had ordered, as at the first Bulge, that no prisoners be taken, but these guys—luckily--knew better than that. They knew it was all over except for the haggling.

The first thing one of them cut off of me was my brand new down sleeping bag. I had slept in it exactly one night.

I heard later that the 103rd was pulled back and completely re-fitted and re-organized. The division ended up in Czechoslovakia at the end of the war.

The town where I was captured was Bitche-Wiler, in France just across the border from Germany. The date was Jan. 19th 1945.

As prisoners, we were marched on foot through the Black Forest of Germany, spending the first night in some kind of camp--perhaps a Nazi youth camp--on top of a mountain. The next day, we were marched through the streets of Baden-Baden, as evidence of German success in the new attacks on the Allies. I remember there was absolutely no show of enthusiasm among the sullen people gathered along the street, and there was certainly none among our hang-dog group. When we got to the railroad yards, we were locked in freight cars.

After capture, I went into some kind of shock. It occurred to me that the war was over for me, and I felt intense guilt for even thinking such a thing, when my outfit was probably still getting shot at. I also felt guilty for allowing myself to be captured in the first place. I felt I should have done more to prevent this. I felt like being tagged "out" in a game of tag, except this was war.

Anyhow I got myself over into a corner of the very crowded freight car and sort of passed out, for how long I don't know. I woke when a guy shook me and said we were being bombed by daylight B-17's along with the rest of the Nurnburg railroad yards. The guards had run away, leaving us locked in the freight cars. I noticed that our car had acquired a sheet of ice all over the inside, due to the condensation of all the POW's breaths. I also discovered, very painfully, that my feet were frozen.

The German railroads--particularly the yards, were being systematically bombed out of existence, so going from one place to another involved traveling by circuitous routes. But after being lodged for awhile in a stable in Ludwigshaven, where we were we were "processed", we finally ended up at Hammelburg, Stalag-13-C, a very large POW camp, also once stables, I think, probably for cavalry troops. We were assigned to one of the many three decker bunks in a very large--and very cold--barnlike place. Our rations were one slice of "Krautbrot" (war bread) and one bowl of thin soup a day. I would say the bread was about 25% sawdust--someone said that if you put a match to it, it would catch fire. The date it was baked was stamped in the top of the loaf. Some of our bread was stamped 1943. We were issued with POW dog-tags, and a number. I still have mine. I was still in pain from my feet, which had swollen a lot. After much effort, I finally traded my shoe-pacs off for a pair of GI combat boots that fit better, which helped.

The worst memory of Stalag 13-C I have, however (and there are many) is of the kid in the bunk above me, who traded his food for cigarettes, and finally starved to death in his bunk.

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Several nights later, however, the British came over at night, and got their attention with carpet bombing designed to level the whole place. We could hear the blasts clearly in Marktsteft, about 20 kilometers away. The next morning, the fields around Marktsteft looked like they were under snow. The bombing had created great firestorms in Wurzburg, and millions of pieces of paper had been carried at least as far as our town.

Later that day, we went in the truck to Wurzburg, to move the Professor back to Marktsteft, since he (and everyone else) had been bombed out. Wurzburg was a very old city, and the mortar between the bricks in most of the buildings was rotten. The bombblasts had caved in the buildings, so that the first and second floors were filled level with bricks, as were most of the streets, bricks piled from curb to curb up to the level of the second story windows.

Kitzengen had also been bombed, and--against the protests of our bosses, who were paying for our bread and board, under the Conventions--we were marched every day over to the railyards there, to clear out the damage. There were hundreds of Serbs also working in the yards. The Germans regarded them as a lower form of life, and one day I saw a German officer pull his P-38 revolver and shoot a Serb POW in the head, in a fit of Teutonic rage.

Some time later, in the night, there was a great deal of firing--cannon, machine-gun, the work -- in the town close to ours on the river. We had been hearing distant artillery fire for some days, and everyone knew that the dreaded Patton and the Third Army was on the way. The firing increased to major proportions, and we all assumed that the advance was at our doorstep. Next morning, the German army had pulled out of Marktsteft, and our guard, who we called Gus, told us that we needed to get ready to go with them. The Frenchman had been released to go his own way, but the Germans had decided to hold onto all American POW's as a bargaining piece at what everyone assumed would be the upcoming peace negotiations. Gus told us to be ready to go in two hours, and we would be walking.

We talked the situation over, and five of us decided to bug out and take our chances of linking up with the American forces. A sixth man decided to hide in the basement of the lady he worked for, until the Americans arrived in town. He and the lady, whose husband was missing on the Russian front, had gotten friendly.

Well about twenty of the guys started walking (all the way to Czechoslovakia as it turned out), the little Irishman went to ground in his ladyfriend's basement, and we took off toward the town where all the firing was coming from. When German soldiers, going the other way, stopped us, in our American uniforms, somewhat tattered by now, where we were going, one of us who could speak fair German told them that our guard had told us to start walking and catch up with the

and asked

Much later, I learned that all the commotion in the next town had been made by a group of volunteers from Patton's Third Army who thought the situation was so fluid that they might break through to Hammelburg, to liberate the POW's in the camp there, among whom was Patton's son.

I think the effort must have stalled at that town near Marktsteft.

It took a lot of clothes to keep from freezing to death out in the open, day after day, in the Vosges Mountains, that terrible winter of 1944-45.

I have listed what we wore, day and night:

Next to the skin cotton shorts (boxer type) and undershirt, and cotton socks. Next came wool long johns and wool socks. Then a GI O.D. wool shirt and trousers, and a GI wool sweater over the shirt.

Then heavy duty weather-resistant field pants and field jacket, with detachable hood.

A "Padar" type wool cap under the helmet liner and helmet. (We called them "fuck caps," for some reason; I think the term goes back to Old Army lingo.)

On the feet "shoe-pacs" with rubber bottoms and leather uppers, with several felt liners.

On the hands, leather gloves with wool inserts.

What I can't remember is how we met even the simplest call of nature, having to delve through all those layers.

And on top of that, we wore rifle belts with about 40 rounds of .30-'06 ammo, a bayonet, a canteen and first aid pouch, and heavy web suspenders to hold all of that up. In the small of the back we carried a folded-up poncho, for rain, and for a groundcover at night, draped over the belt. Carried over the shoulder rolled and tied with a tent rope, we carried a sleeping bag, made of GI blankets, with a poplin cover. Over the other shoulder, we slung our M1 Garand rifles. In a boot-top we carried a GI spoon.

In addition to this, I carried, on the other shoulder, somehow, along with the sleeping bag, a bazooka, while draped over every thing else was a canvas jerkin with four or six rounds of bazooka ammo. We were usually also given a bandolier or two of .30-'06 ammo, just in case.

Oh yes, the entrenching shovel also went on the rifle belt, where it flopped with every step. And, that folded up poncho on the back of the rifle belt also insulated the butt when there was a chance to sit down. The shovel was used to dig a slit trench every night. This was usually shallow, and two men used it, to keep warm together. The arrival of incoming fire always energized the slit trench occupants to dig much deeper.