

Across the Lech River

It was in the Spring of 1945 that the 103rd Division had crossed through the Siegfried Line and was racing through Bavaria, Germany, averaging about 35 miles a day.

I was a Platoon Medic with L Company, of the 411 Infantry Regiment, third battalion.

We arrived at the Lech River at dusk. Across the River was the town of Landsberg. Several years later I read that Adolph Hitler had been imprisoned there from Nov. 11, 1923 to Dec. 20, 1924. It was also the scene of six concentration camps where prisoners had died by the thousands of starvation, freezing, and brutal treatment by S.S. guards.

Our company was assigned the task of crossing the Lech at night through a tunnel which housed an electrical generator powered by the flow of the River. There was sporadic gunfire as the German guards fled back through the tunnel to the town. There were no casualties.

We emerged from the tunnel and were greeted with intense machine gun fire from the hills. One of our G.I.s was hit in the groin. I immediately applied pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding, and treated it with powdered sulfa to prevent infection. With the help of two infantrymen, I carried him to a house overlooking the River.

The house was inhabited by a University of Landsberg professor and his wife. They were very gracious and set-up a bed in the basement for the wounded soldier. After administering a new bandage with pressure, and a syrette of morphine, my patient became somewhat comfortable and was able to sleep.

I left him there with the German family and went out to see what was going on. To my surprise and dismay, I was told that the company had gone back across the River. After much thought, I decided to stay at the house with my wounded comrade until the morning.

Early the next day, sitting in a lavatory near an open window, I heard a conversation going on between two Germans. Cautiously look-

ing out of the window I could see a machine gun nest not twenty-five yards from where I sat.

Checking my patient I saw that he was weak from loss-of-blood, possibly going into shock. He needed to have medical attention, that was evident.

A woman having heard that there was a Medic at the house asked if she could surrender her two sons who were soldiers and hiding at her house. I assured her that they would be safe with me and asked her to send her sons to the house in which we were staying.

I had noticed a foot bridge near the house across the Lech River and decided with the help of the prisoners to get my wounded buddy back to our side of the River. My one worry was the machine gun nest near the house.

Deciding to rely on my Red Cross emblazoned helmet and a white flag to get by the machine gunners to the river, I asked my hosts for a white sheet and a pole and fashioned a crude white flag to carry. Then a really lucky thing occurred. The Professor volunteered that he had a stretcher in the house that he would let me use. So, utilizing the services of my two prisoners as stretcher-bearers, we left the house. There was conversation at the machine gun nest when they saw us emerge from the house, but no action.

Our little group marched to the River, crossed the foot bridge and deposited the wounded G.I. on a jeep to be taken to the Battalion Aid Station. I later learned that he was in good shape and shipped back to the States.

Later that day we recrossed the River with no opposition and found a Hungarian Major General with 400 of his troops lined-up waiting to surrender. The war was rapidly coming to a close!

Vincent Laura
Technician fifth grade-Retired
U.S. Army Medical Corps