

Taped Interview

Dallas Reunion 2006

Casimer Vokal, Co. I 411th

You know what was very interesting. After Bastogne, we got a new commander, the “nuts commander.” We got him as a General. So anyway, the next commander becomes our general and he greeted us. He reviewed our platoon and I marched along side of him and he said, “I Company 411th you were the first into Germany. Under my command, you will be first again.” And we all slumped down. We were first again and he kept his word because before I got hit I seen that he made a second star when he joined us after Bastogne. He was a brave general because we were going into Germany past the Siegfried Line and he pulled up in his jeep. I saw two stars so I went to salute him and he said, “What’s the holdup?” Our mortars and machine guns were right behind the platoon and so I saluted him and told him. He said, “What is the hold up?” I said, "There is German machine gun fire to the right, and we will get through.” He said, “Good” and he asked my name and all that and he shook my hand. That was brilliant. So, I was happy I met the guy and he put out his hand to me. I got memories.

One time, Col. Yeuell checked into my positions in the mortars. And I had them lined up three guns in a quarry. He comes right up to me and he says, "Sgt., where have you got these mortars firing?" I saluted him and said we are firing 325 yards. He said, "Sgt., don't you know we have a platoon there?" I says, "Yes sir, we are dug in." Sgt. Coe would be that kind of a guy to say "fire closer, fire closer." I had contact with the phones and I said, "Yes sir." I said, "I'm firing anyway." Yeuell, he says, "Soldier, I found a guy I could talk to and he is doing a good job." I showed him my machine guns. He walked with me to my machine guns. I showed him my machine guns had set up to crossfire. My mortars were in position. "I met a guy finally I could talk to," Col. Yeuell said. I think he is the guy that turned me in for my Bronze Medal. Later, I found we had piled up 150 Germans. I still can't find out what battle that was? I can't remember the name of the battle. Also, I was put in for the French National Honor, Croix-de-Guerre. So, I am wounded. So, I never got mine. And Sgt. Coe who was in charge of 3rd platoon that we were firing mortars over. He said, "I did not get one either." But I think we deserved it. I was in the hospital so I did not get those medals. The only thing that come with me when I transferred to the 45th was two Bronze Battle Star pins and a Purple Heart medal.

When you got hit in your right arm, was it shrapnel? Artillery? It was those screaming meemies. *Rockets?* Yes. The screaming meemies come over. We were crossing the hill and I hit the ground with my carbine 'cause McAuliffe said you got to have a T.O. weapon. So, I got me a carbine. I hit the ground and the explosion knocked the carbine out of my hands. My helmet went another way but I still made it. I was bleeding like heck out of my right arm. On my way back I stopped at a foxhole because I was bleeding so bad. But, I seen too many weapons with the bayonets stuck in the ground with helmets on them. So I moved out of there. But I was bleeding like heck. I reached the rear area. They gave you 3 a day rations on the jump off. Very unique, but then I seen a kitchen down by a tree. They were cleaning up the kitchen where they fed us. Then a guy came up to me and said, "Vokal, do you want a cup of coffee?" I said, "Sure." So he gave me a cup full of grounds. You know what I mean. But I drank that coffee and sharpened up. I "come back". It was strong coffee. *Who dressed your arm? A Medic?* Yes. They took me by a jeep. I barely hung on with my left arm and it was a bumpy ride. They took me down to the bottom of a hill. *Then they sent you back to the rest area?* No, I went to a hospital. It was the 21st or 22nd general hospital that was French. Then the war ended. *You were in the hospital when the war ended?* Yes, I come back out of the

hospital. Some of the 103rd guys after the war ended were going to Japan. So, they put me in the 45th Division. I had enough points and a purple heart, and all that good stuff, so they sent me home with the 45th. I got my purple heart and I earned two Bronze Battle Stars. The war ended and I was happy.

After you got back, did you go back to tool making? No, I worked for Chrysler. My seniority counted. So I got hired in 1940 so I went back to DeSoto mostly working on air conditions. I was a repairman, and ended up in the inspection department. I had 35 years at Chrysler. I have three kids. You met my daughter. Janet was the first one. When I was in combat on maneuvers, Janet was born. My wife was patriotic, too. Cause when I went in, she backed me up. I never seen Janet until the first time when she was five months old on a furlough. I never seen her again until I got out in '45. She was 2 ½ years old. That was the interesting part. Not been to many reunions. My wife and I had been married for 61 years when she passed away 2 months later. I got married February 14, 1942, Valentines' Day. I went into the army that same year in November of '42.

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Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

CASIMER L VOKAL

36549779 T SGT CO I ^{103 RD} 480TH INF

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
CAMP GRANT ILLINOIS

Date 9 NOVEMBER 1945

1889431

Arthur F. LaRouche

ARTHUR F LA ROUCHE
MAJOR AC

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**ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION
HONORABLE DISCHARGE**

484.3

1. LAST NAME - FIRST NAME - MIDDLE INITIAL VOKAL CASIMER L		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 36 549 779	3. GRADE T SGT	4. ARM OR SERVICE INF	5. COMPONENT AUS
6. ORGANIZATION CO 1 180TH INF		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 9 NOV 45	8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEPARATION CENTER CAMP GRANT ILLINOIS		
9. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES 4091 JUNCTION DETROIT MICH (10)		10. DATE OF BIRTH 13 FEB 16	11. PLACE OF BIRTH DETROIT MICH		
12. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT SEE 9		13. COLOR EYES BROWN	14. COLOR HAIR BLACK	15. HEIGHT 5 11	16. WEIGHT 185 LBS.
17. NO. DEPEND. 2	18. RACE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WHITE <input type="checkbox"/> NEGRO <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)	19. MARITAL STATUS <input type="checkbox"/> SINGLE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MARRIED <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (specify)	20. U.S. CITIZEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	21. CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND NO. MACHINIST 4-78.011	

MILITARY HISTORY


22. DATE OF INDUCTION 3 DEC 42	23. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 14 DEC 42	24. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE FT. CUSTER MICH	25. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE
26. SELECTIVE SERVICE DATA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	27. LOCAL S.S. BOARD NO. 36	28. COUNTY AND STATE WAYNE CO MICH	29. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE 4090 35TH ST DETROIT MICH
30. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND HQ. WEAPONS PLATOON SGT 1812		31. MILITARY QUALIFICATION AND DATE (I.e., infantry, aviation and marksmanship badges, etc.) SHARPSHOOTER WITH RIFLE COMBAT INF *	
32. BATTLES AND CAMPAIGNS RHINELAND CENTRAL EUROPE			
33. DECORATIONS AND CITATIONS 1 SERVICE BAR AMERICAN CAMPAIGN MEDAL EUROPEAN-AFRICAN- MIDDLE EASTERN RIBBON W/2 BRONZE BATTLE STARS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL WORLD WAR I VICTORY MEDAL PURPLE HEART GO 58 HQ 21 GEN HOSP 25 MAR 45			
34. WOUNDS RECEIVED IN ACTION GERMANY 21 MAR 45 SHELL FRAGMENT RIGHT ELBOW			
35. LATEST IMMUNIZATION DATES		36. SERVICE OUTSIDE CONTINENTAL U. S. AND RETURN	
SMALLPOX IM	TYPHOID ST	TETANUS ST	OTHER (specify)
DATE OF DEPARTURE JUL 45 FEB 45 JUL 44		DESTINATION ETO	DATE OF ARRIVAL 20 OCT 44
37. TOTAL LENGTH OF SERVICE		38. HIGHEST GRADE HELD	
CONTINENTAL SERVICE		FOREIGN SERVICE	
YEARS 1	MONTHS 11	DAYS 18	YEARS 0
MONTHS 11		DAYS 8	
39. PRIOR SERVICE NONE			
40. REASON AND AUTHORITY FOR SEPARATION CONV OF GOVT RR 1-1 (DEMOBILIZATION) AR615-365 DTD 15 DEC 44			
41. NONE			

PAY DATA VOU#13855

42. LONGEVITY FOR PAY PURPOSES YEARS 2 MONTHS 11 DAYS 7	43. MUSTERING OUT PAY TOTAL THIS PAYMENT \$ 300	44. BOLDIER DEPOSITS NONE	45. TRAVEL PAY \$ 18.60	46. TOTAL AMOUNT, NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER \$123.90 G F DOLBEAR CAPT FD
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INSURANCE NOTICE

48. KIND OF INSURANCE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nat. Serv. <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Govt. <input type="checkbox"/> Home	49. HOW PAID <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adjustment <input type="checkbox"/> Direct to V. A.	50. Effective Date of Allowance 30 NOV 45	51. Date of Next Premium Due (One month after 50) 31 DEC 45	52. PREMIUM DUE EACH MONTH \$ 6.90	53. INTENTION OF VETERAN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Continuous <input type="checkbox"/> Continuing <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinuous
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54. 	55. REMARKS (This space for completion of above items or entry of other items specified in W. D. Directive) LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE (2 SEP 45) INACTIVE STATUS ERC 3 DEC 42 TO 13 DEC 42 *BADGE
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56. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>Casimer L. Vokal</i>	57. PERSONNEL OFFICER (Type name, grade and organization) <i>William P. Gottlieb 2ND</i>	APPLICATION FOR READJUSTMENT BENEFIT PUBLIC LAW #363 MADE THROUGH <i>mucc</i>
WD AGO FORM 53-55 7 November 1944		STATE MI DATE 11-21-45

This form supersedes all previous editions of WD AGO Forms 53 and 55 for enlisted persons entitled to an Honorable Discharge, which will not be used after receipt of this revision.

103d INF DIV ASSN of WWII

FOR THE ARCHIVES

103d INF DIV WW II



GIVEN IN REMEMBRANCE

BIOGRAPHIC / PHOTOGRAPHIC Please Print!

Date: 7/26/2009

Last Name of Member: VOKAL Please attach a Photo.

First Name: Casimer Middle Name: Leopold DOB: 2/9/1916

Address: 16572 Woodbine Place of Birth: DETROIT, MI

City: Detroit State: MI Zip Code: 48219

Unit served with: 103d INF 411 Reg. CO. I 4th Platoon Phone No. (313) 255-6257

Place entered Service: FT. Custer, MI Date entered Army: 12/3/42 Date Discharged: 11/9/45

Email address: Wife's name: Adeline

If Member is deceased, please note the year of his death:

FOR ASSOCIATE, DESCENDANT OR OTHER MEMBERSHIP

Last Name: LUTHER First Name: JANET Middle: ANN

Address: 3202 Topanga Canyon Dr. Phone No. (940) 321 9987

City: CORINTH State: TX Zip Code: 76210

Email address: jaL19echarter.net Name of spouse:

Your relationship to Member or Sponsor: Son of Daughter Relative Friend

CHILDREN: Please include full names.

- JANET A. LUTHER DOB: 7/19/43
- Thomas Casimer Vokal DOB: 7/2/46
- Lorraine Kuehn DOB: 5/5/56
- DOB:

Please write clearly. When page 2 is completed, please mail this form to: Harold Branton, 2635 Roman Forest Blvd., New Caney, TX 77357.

103d INF DIV ASSN of WWII

FOR THE ARCHIVES

Member's Name: Leopold
Father's Name: Last: VOKAL First: ~~Leopold~~ Middle: _____
Mother's Name: Last: BRUSIK First: MARY Middle: _____

MOST MEMORABLE EVENT WHILE IN THE ARMY (Write in your own words. Use of additional paper is encouraged.)

Approximate DATE of EVENT: _____ LOCATION _____
Town (if you recall) & Country _____

Describe the Situation: See attached

Describe the Event: _____

What was the conclusion of the event? _____

Describe another event(s), if you will, on additional page(s).
Files in the Archives. Please mail to:
Harold Branton, 2635 Roman Forest Blvd., New C

* AD



Forward from Janet A. Luther, daughter of Casimer L. Vokal

The first memory that I have of my childhood is of my father coming home from the War. I was only two and one-half years old, so I'm surprised that I even remember it, but I do. I was at my Grandma's house when he walked in the door. I was shy, and I ran to hide in another room. Daddy came up to me, and he had brought me a six pack box of Hershey Bars and a six pack of Double-Mint gum. I guess I was "Daddy's girl" from that moment on!

My father never talked about the War when I was growing up. I think he was trying to forget the horrors he had seen. When I was an adult, and my mother was still alive, I still didn't hear much, because on the rare occasions that dad would start to talk about it, my mother would make him stop. She knew him very well, and she knew that if he brought up those memories, he would get very agitated and would not be able to sleep for several nights.

It wasn't until I accompanied him to a few of the 103^D reunions that I really began to understand just what he had been through. I met several men that my dad had served with when I went to my first reunion. One by one, they were pulling me aside to tell me what a great soldier my dad had been. It was obvious that they all respected him very much. That he was a brave, strong, loyal, and respected soldier did not surprise me. That's the kind of man he has always been in civilian life too. He has always been an example to his children of what a real man is. He loves his family, his Country and his God. He is a man of faith, high morals and integrity. My brother, Tom, my sister, Lori, and I feel blessed to have him for our father. He has made a great impression on his grandchildren also. When they are given an assignment at school to write about the person they most admire, somehow everyone picks Grandpa!!

As dad is getting older (he is 93 years old as I write this) I thought it would be good to get some insight on what daddy saw and did 66 years ago!

What follows here is not a history of WWII. What follows here are some personal memories of an infantry soldier who spent many months on the front lines of WWII fighting for our freedom.

So, here are some memories of WWII from my personal Hero—MY DAD!

WWII MEMORIES OF CASIMER L. VOKAL
as given to his daughter, Janet A. Vokal Luther

I was a Tech Sgt. in the 103^D Infantry, "Cactus" Division, 411th Regiment, Company I. 4th Platoon. We were part of the 7th Army.

I could have gotten out of going into the Army. I was doing War work at Chryslers, working as a milling machinist operator on Bofor Cannons, and I could have easily gotten a deferment. My wife, Adeline, was pregnant, but we were very patriotic, and after talking it over, we decided that I wouldn't try to get a deferment. So, I went in. Leo, my brother, was already in. I was already getting pretty old (26), and they only took up to 28, so I could have gotten out of the whole thing with a deferment. I would have missed going in completely, but everyone was really patriotic back then, so I went.

My training was at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and Camp Howze in Gainesville, Texas. I was in Camp Claiborne December of 1942 to September of 1943. Janet, my daughter, was born while I was there. One day, in July, I was on a long hike. We had a ten minute break, and I laid down on my back. My friend, Joe Crowe, was next to me. I'm looking in the sky, and Joe said he saw a pelican in the cloud formation. I said, "No, that's a stork!" I told him my *son* was going to be born that day! After the hike was over, we stopped, and I got a telegram from a jeep and it said, "Your *daughter* is born!" I said to Joe, "Here's my rifle, I'm going back to camp! I have to see my daughter." So, I hitched a ride back to camp and went to the office and asked for a pass to get home. I was really excited, but they said the Red Cross had to get me the pass. I couldn't wait to get the pass! They made me wait one day in camp, and then my mother-in-law called me, and she let me know that everything was fine. They made me wait another day, and then they denied my pass. They didn't consider it an emergency. So, I didn't get to see my

daughter until I got a furlough. By that time, she was five and a half months old. That's the Army for you!

I was trained to use a 45 pistol, a 60mm Mortar, a .30 Caliber Light Machine Gun and a Bayonet. I scored as a "Sharpshooter with my rifle, which was an M1.

When I first got to Camp Claiborne, I learned a good lesson. At chow time, I took a seat at the end of the table. By the time the plates of food got down to me, they were empty! After that, I made sure that I sat at the front of the table! I know the Army travels on their stomach, but I wanted to make sure mine was full!

One time I was supposed to get a 15-day furlough. I picked up a pine needle in my boot and got an infection in my foot. They sent me to Ft. Wayne. I spent 45 days home in Ft. Wayne. I had a write up in the Camp newspaper. It said, "Vokal stretches 15-day furlough into 45 days with infection." They used to call me "Pops." I was one of the older guys there. I wasn't a General, but I had lots of "General Knowledge" ha ha.

I'm lucky to have feet. First, I had that infection, and then, I had other foot problems. I was picked for glider training. We were jumping off these scaffolds with parachutes, and I hurt both of my ankles. So, I got sent back to my Infantry outfit. After I got home, it took a long time to clear up the problems with my feet that were caused from them always being wet and cold.

We left Camp Claiborne in September of 1943 and trained in Camp Howze, TX for a year. My brother, Leo, was training at Ft. Polk in TX. He was a Corporal in Field Artillery. He carried the Flag. Just before he was to be shipped overseas, I got a pass, so I was going to meet him in Fort Worth. I even booked us a room there. Then, he called and said he wanted to meet in Dallas instead. When we met, I told him that he better put

our Ma on as his beneficiary before he shipped out. I wasn't going to leave if he didn't sign the papers right then. A couple of his friends said, "You better listen to your brother! He's a Sergeant, he outranks you!" Leo did make Ma his beneficiary, but luckily, he survived the war and came home.

One time before we shipped out of Camp Howze, we went on maneuvers. We were doing a mock version of a battle, and I was camped up on a hill. I was out in the open, (I should have been hidden better) so they tagged me as "out of action" and told me, "You're hit in the right elbow. You're wounded, get to the back to the rear." I went to the rear and found an area where I could get some chow. Little did I know then that I would get my Purple Heart for a hit to my right elbow in a real battle! And, that I would find the cooks when I got to the rear then too!

I shipped out of New York harbor with the 103^D on October 5, 1944. The ship, the Monticello, was jam-packed. The Captain gave me the job of supplying candy for I Company. He gave me Company money to buy candy. Then, I was in charge of selling the candy. Everyone wanted the bars (5 cents a piece). No one bought the malted milk duds candy. No one wanted them. I pulled a good one. It got rough on the seas about the 3rd day out, and everyone was seasick. I missed one chow line. I got seasick. I threw up and then I was o.k. Guys were all lying in their bunks. English sailors were laughing at our guys— "Yanks can't take it". Next day, even **they** were sea sick, but I was feeling good. So, everyone asked why I wasn't seasick. I told them I was taking the malted milk duds. So, they all started buying them, and they all got better. It must have been in their minds. I tricked them and sold out the candy. I had \$40.00 worth of money from the candy sales when I landed on October 20, 1944. I told the Captain, "Here's 40 bucks that I made on the candy." He said, "The books are closed--- that is your money." So, I

treated the boys at a bar. The bartender was tipped. I gave him a 50 cent tip. He was happy. That was a lot of money then. I was enterprising. Anything for my guys!!!

We landed in Marseille, France. We went into combat in November. First combat, we were point of attack. First battle was near St. Die, France in the snowy Vosges Mountains. It was on November 17, 1944 and the Cactus Division was under Colonel Yeuell. He was a real "Soldier's soldier", a hands-on Commander.

On the night of Nov.16, we tried to sleep under artillery fire. I couldn't sleep at all that night. After getting into position, the 103^D went into action at 9:00 a.m. on November 17th. We had to cross the Taintrux River. The river was supposed to be two feet deep. When we crossed, I took the lead. There was a machine gun nest on the left-hand side of the river. I jumped in. I had to put my rifle over my head because the water was up to my chest. So, I went in, and the other platoon was also in the water. We starting getting fired on from the machine gun nest. So, one of the guys finally took out the machine gun nest, but he got killed there. We followed with the mortars a little bit later. There was a lot of fighting, and we took the city of Saulcy. At the end, we only had 45 left out of I Company.

That battle was my first action, and I found out that your Ma had prayed for me. I got a letter from her telling me that she went to Confession and Communion on the day of the battle. That was the first of several battles that I found out she was praying for me during battles where we had lost lots of men. I always felt that my wife's prayers got me through the war.

The weather was the coldest it had been since the turn of the century. I carried a raincoat on my back. I reported to the captain how many guys I lost (only a couple from my

platoon). I had my runner, he was a small guy, but he carried my Bunsen burner. I jumped in a hole there that had been left by the Germans; I was all wet and freezing cold. I put the Bunsen burner between my legs and my raincoat over the foxhole. I started heating up some water and making coffee. That was the only dry spot on my whole body. A couple of other guys came up and asked for coffee, I said, "Sure." The Captain came over and said, "Vokal, what the hell are you doing?" I said, "Making coffee, Sir." Captain said, "I'll never worry about you again!!" Then he said, "Make me a cup of coffee!" I had a couple ahead of him. I said, "Put your canteen over there. You're the 4th in line to get coffee from me." I should have brown nosed—I'd been a General by now!! Ha ha.

The next German strong point was Saulcy su Meurthe. The Meurthe River was the next natural barrier. We attacked at dawn and captured the City of St. Die.

We fought through several towns in the next ten days. The battles never let up from St. Die to the Mountain Exits at Selestat. We got to this town of Barr and went in to hunt the snipers. We went into town, and I took my platoon. I sent some guys to search the village. I had four or five guys with me up on the hill. We were prepared. I sent three guys to a higher level into the upper story of a building. I got in a building and slammed the door. There was an old French man in there. He didn't want to shout or anything. He whispered, "I'll show you something." He took me to a cabinet. He had an American Flag hidden. I saw it and said "Good man, Papa!" He said, "You want a drink?" I said, "I'll have a pear and a schnapps." I took the drink and was chomping on the pear by a window. The French guy started putting the American flag out the window. Then, a little while later, the old man asked me, "Krauts come back?" I said, "Papa, I don't know." So he started taking the flag back inside. Someone opened fire and started shooting right over my head into the ceiling. The old man was frantic! He was on his stomach. I hit

the floor too. Later on, I found out that it was our own Sgt. Murphy. He almost killed me! He was shooting because when he saw the American flag coming down, he figured it was the Germans in there. I found out all this later. I was SO mad, I could have killed him! We went down to a big brick wall. All at once a big round hand-grenade came. I yelled, "DOWN!" We all hit the ground, and it went over my head into the wall. Again, it was one of those days when Ma was praying for me. I was sure lucky I had her always praying for me. I was spared twice in the town of Barr.

The 103^D 4th Platoon, Company I was the FIRST to cross the German Frontier that December.

On December 15, 1944 at 1:05 p.m., our Company crossed the German border. No other American soldiers had yet to enter Germany. On December 17th Bobenthal fell to the 411th, but we paid with heavy losses for every foot of German soil we captured.

Later, we withdrew from the Siegfried Line and went back 75 miles. Troops were being moved north to beat back the Battle of the Bulge.

General George Patton was asked to help with the Battle of the Bulge at Bastogne. He said he could get there in three weeks. Everyone thought that was impossible. He was picking up help from the best troops along the way. He picked up the mortars and machine guns from my 4th Platoon. That is how I ended up marching to Bastogne, Belguim. Patton had us carry so much ammo that we looked like Poncho Villa! We had bad weather. We were on the right flank. The cold and snow were **so** bad. McAuliffe was in charge of Bastogne. The German's had asked for his surrender, but he answered their demand with his famous "NUTS." His men took a pounding. They were known as "THE BATTERED BASTARDS OF BASTOGNE." And, we were heading there. It was

nasty, nasty freezing cold weather. When the weather finally cleared, the planes came and dropped in food and ammo, and Bastogne was saved. So, Patton sent us back. We were only a day away from getting there, but we never made it.

General McAuliffe became our commander after Bastogne. When he came and joined our outfit, I was standing next to him as he reviewed my Platoon. We were the 4th Platoon, Co. I. He said, "You were first into Germany, and you will be first again under my Command." All our shoulders sunk down. Who wanted to go into Germany again? Cross the Siegfried Line again!? It was a bummer. Sgt. Safka from Chicago presented to McAuliffe a German burp gun. The General said, "What do you think of our machine pistol?" Safka said, "No God Damn Good, Sir." (I thought, "There goes my stripes! And his too!") "Why not?" the General said. Sgt Safka said, " By the time you get to fire one of ours, you are too damn close to the enemy." McAuliffe told him, "Carry your own T.O. weapon (Table of Organization weapon) under my command." Ours was a M1; they weighed about 8.5 pounds. I handed Safka my M1. As Platoon Sgt., I had to carry a carbine.

The Siegfried Line was named by Hitler himself. It stretched from the border of Switzerland to Belgium. It was a series of what we called "Pill Boxes." They were like concrete Forts or Bunkers. There were layers after layers of these defensive strong points. As the Germans moved back, the area given up was mined and booby trapped. The second time across the Siegfried Line, we had a hold up. There was a machine gun nest on the right. I saw McAuliffe in his jeep. I saw two stars so I went to salute him, and he said, "What's the hold up?" I told him, "Machine gun nest to the right, but we will get through." He said, "Good!" He asked my name and shook my hand. I was happy that I met the guy, and that he put out his hand to me. It was surprising to see a two star

General so close to the front lines. They usually stay in the back. He was a good General. He brought two or three of his own guys from the 101st.

One time, I heard shooting going on. I crept up, pointed my rifle, and then I saw that one of our guys had shot a German right there. He was sitting on the German, and eating the German soldier's bread. He took the German's watch and tossed it to me. It was encased in a watch holder. It was going to be a souvenir. But I lost it later.

Jan 19 - Town of Sessenheim, France held by the Germans—just across the Rhine River. Col. Yeuell was our Commander. (Ma went to church on this date too.) Our outfit went into Sessenheim. We had seven or eight tanks going with us. I had my guys in front of the tanks. These tanks were firing bullets and every fifth one was a tracer bullet. The tanks were going fast, and one of the tracers hit one of my guys in the back. He screamed like heck. When I saw that, I waved my guys away from the tanks, to the left of the tanks. Several of the tanks got knocked out. Some were throwing shells out of the tanks when they got hit, and my guys were right there. So I waved to them yelling, "Get over to the left, get over to the left! Get away from the tanks, they are taking too much action on them!" My guys reached a big house with a brick outhouse. I set up my mortars.

Harold Coe was the best soldier I ever saw. He was from Michigan. He ended up being made a Lieutenant right on the field. He goes in. His platoon, the 3rd, went in with my machine gun squad. He penetrated 75 yards into town. The tanks couldn't reach the town, but he did. I called in my mortar fire into the town. And he kept yelling, "Closer, closer....." I didn't want to knock him out, but I fired a few rounds, then a shell exploded. I was yelling for more fire, and no one was answering me, so I left the outhouse and I looked behind the building. My guys had gotten knocked out. One of my guys said before we went into action, "Vokal, give this watch to my girlfriend." I said,

“No, I don’t want the watch. You won’t get hit.” I looked, and I swear, he was standing against the brick building. Standing there, and he got hit right through the head. That’s why I have a queasy stomach. You know, I still have a queasy stomach. He stayed right there against the wall, but he was dead. I looked around at my mortar to the left of me, and yelled, “How come you’re not firing?” The kid there said, “I don’t know, I put a shell in, but it’s stuck.” Now, that’s a live shell. If it explodes, you’re dead. I went up to him and said, “You pick up the barrel and I’ll catch the round in my hands.” If something explodes, I’m done! I catch the shell and put a pin in it so it won’t explode. Then I looked at the barrel, and there’s a bullet hole. That’s why it didn’t go down. Holy Mackerel!!! Then, someone started shooting at me. I was going to go back to see what’s going on, but I looked back where I was before and the outhouse and everything was blown apart. So, I didn’t go back there. One guy got hit in the foot. I picked him up and put him through the window into the house. After the town, we were told to pull back. I took the site case and went back 800 yards. They were still firing at us. I saw a shell coming in, and the case I was carrying got nicked. I saw the shell land and blow up.

I counted my men. I only had 13 guys left. Sgt. Coe was still in town. We moved back; and Captain Himick yelled, “Dig in!” Then, the Captain got hit. He had a sleeping bag on his shoulders, and all I saw was feathers flying. So, I went up to him, and he said, “You’re in charge.” He was out of action. We only had 28 guys total left. We started with 45 in my platoon, but I only had 13 with me that withdrew. The Company had started with around 200 men.

Col. Yeuell turned me in for one of my bronze stars. He wanted to know what I would do if there were a counter attack. I said, “Well, I’d be firing 300 and some yards.” He said, “Don’t you know Sergeant, that the 3rd platoon is over there?” I said, “Yes, I’m in touch with them” (walkie talkies). I know the 3rd (Coe) was in front of me, and he kept

calling me closer to him. I said, "Well Sir, I know the 3rd Platoon's in front of us, but in case of gun attack, we're dug in and I'm going to fire." He said, "Sergeant, let me congratulate you. You are the first man I can talk to." Then, he went to look at my crossfire with my machine guns, and he praised me again. He liked my answers. He was a Mortarman in WWI, and he knew how things should be done.

Sgt. Wells from the 3rd Platoon and I had the most time in the field. They send us to R & R for three or four days. Wells had a 12 year old daughter that he talked about all the time. We slept and ate. It was beautiful. When we got back, they told us we were leaving for another attack at 5:30 a.m. We got ready. We went into the woods. I found a tree, and I hit the ground when they started firing. I put my helmet against the tree. So did Wells. A blast came between us. When it landed, the blast went his way instead of mine. We were close—like just across the street. That's how close we were, and the blast went his way, and he got hit right in the head. The medic came running over to him. I said, "How is he?" The medic shook his head. He was dead. I was spared. At the reunion, they had Wells as Missing in Action. I told them, "No, he's dead, I saw it." I listed him as dead.

A Sergeant from the 3rd Platoon was in a foxhole right ahead of me. He had been in the hospital. When you're in the hospital, you get two grenades on your lapel and a hat that you wore on your head under the helmet. This guy dove into the foxhole, and there were some roots sticking out of the dirt. When he dove in, the grenades went off right in his stomach. The roots had pulled the grenades off of his collar. I dashed up there, and the guy said, "Tell my wife I love her." Then, he died. No wonder I have such a bum stomach.

One time, my guys and I took cover in a building in Germany that had been a doll shop. There were some beautiful dolls in there, so I thought I would take one for my baby girl. I stuck it in my ammo bag. When the shelling stopped, we ran out in the road, but we couldn't get away because the shelling started up again. We ran back into the shop. This happened several times. Finally, I thought, "I promised that I would only take one souvenir from the war, and I have a silver letter opener." So, I put the doll back. The next attempt, we made it out. (I ended up losing the letter opener in the Rhine River!)

The second time into Germany was under General McAuliffe. I got hit across the Siegfried Line on March 21 by a Screaming Meemie rocket. They were called that because they made a loud, shrill, howling noise as they came in. I hit the ground and the explosion knocked the carbine out of my hands. My helmet went another way, but I made it. I was bleeding like heck out of the right arm. I reached the rear area and saw a kitchen area. I was ready to pass out, but they gave me a cup of coffee (which was mostly grounds) and I "came back." It was strong coffee. A Medic dressed my arm. This was the second time into Germany, and they took me back on a jeep to a Field Hospital in Bobenthal! (This was the same place where I crossed the Rhine the first time into Germany!) I hung on with my left hand for my dear life. Next, they took me to the hospital in Nancy, France for a few weeks to recuperate.

The guy that took my place got the French National Honor, the Croix-de-Guerre. I didn't get it because I was in the hospital, but I deserved it. We killed 150 Germans in that counter attack. I was in the hospital when they passed out the battle stars. I know I got two bronze stars, but I wasn't there when they passed those out. They are on my record, but I can't be sure who put me in for them. I think Col. Yeuell must have done one of them.

Got out of hospital, and joined my outfit at Brenner Pass in northern Italy. I wasn't even on the roster yet, and the first three grades and officers were supposed to go see General Patton. The Company Commander said I didn't have to go because I wasn't on the roster. When the guys came back, they all had sad faces because Patton had busted them all! They were sitting on their helmets to wait to hear him talk. Everyone was sitting on their helmet, and Patton got mad and busted all of them!! Our captain said, "We will wait another month or so and then put these guys back on their rank." I was a Tech Sgt., but I didn't get busted.

On my first hike after I joined my outfit at Brenner Pass, we got word that President Roosevelt had died on April 12th. It was raining hard, and everyone said, "The World is crying!"

After the war had ended, I saw Dachau, one of the Concentration Camps where the Germans killed thousands of Jews and Poles. I saw the wooden benches where they stripped them down for "showers" and gave them a bar of soap. Once naked and in the "shower", the Jews and Poles were gassed. The Germans dug trenches and threw the bodies in. They threw lime on them when the Crematorium couldn't keep up. When I was there, I saw 3,500 bodies lined up in the trenches. The bodies were like skeletons. They probably only weighed 50 or 60 pounds. Some people today try to deny the Holocaust ever happened. I know it happened, I was an eyewitness. I saw the Gas Chambers and the Crematorium. I saw the bodies. I saw it all.

Somewhere near Bavaria or the Black Forest, as we were clearing out buildings, we found a building where Hitler's high officers had been stationed. I quartered my troops there, and we got to sleep in nice feather ticked beds! Sure beat the hard ground we were used to! There were uniforms from Hitler's officer's there. I cut off two armbands. One

of them said, ADOLPH HITLER, and the other one was from the number two man in the SS, REINHARD HEYDRICH. These are the only souvenirs I brought home from the war.

After I got to Paris, and the war was over, I was going home with the 45th because I had over 85 points with my service time and my Purple Heart. I didn't have to go to Japan. I was discharged. My record showed I had two bronze battle stars.

Came home with the 45th Infantry on the ship Aquatania, sister ship of the Titanic. A Desk Jockey messed up and put down 180 infantry on my papers, but I was with the 103^D. He made some other mistakes too. He had my color of eyes as brown instead of blue. I was a Weapons Platoon Sergeant, combat Infantry-Sharpshooter with rifle. I had a Purple Heart and two Bronze Battle Stars, an American Campaign Medal, a European Ribbon, a Good Conduct Medal, a WWII Victory Medal, and one Service Bar for time in Rhineland Central Europe. Each Service Bar was for six months in combat. I was just short of getting a second bar. I was there almost a year.

I traveled 500 miles in Europe from Bruyeres to Brenner Pass. We hit France, Germany, Austria and Italy in 1945. We lost 135 officers. Three thousand two hundred twenty-one enlisted men from the 411th Regiment had fallen during our six months of fighting. I was one of the wounded.

Went I got home, I saw Dr. Mellinger at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, MI. Besides my elbow and my foot problems, I had two matted disks (Lumbar five and six) in my back. The doctor wouldn't operate. He said, "I wouldn't operate if you were my own son. It could permanently disable you." Instead, I had to wear a back support for many years. Now I know why they called those electronically fired rockets "Screaming Meemies."

They sent out ten rounds at a time and they were not only loud, but had high explosive powerful war heads that made the earth shake. Many guys had "shell shock" from them. I got a bum elbow and a bum back from them.

People call us "Heroes." Well, I think the real Heroes are the guys who gave up their lives in the war. I was lucky. I was lucky to survive the war. I was lucky to have a good wife, Adeline, for almost 62 years. Today, I'm lucky to have three children, Janet, Tom and Lori, 10 beautiful grandkids, and 11 great-grandkids. God has been good to me.

