



ORLA EDISON “BILL” WILLIAMS

Feb 2, 1917 - Jan 21, 2005

By LTC Donald E. Gross, Jr.

Bill is my Father-in-Law. I first met SFC Williams in August 1962 when I walked into his ROTC Department at Sylvan Hills High School in Atlanta Georgia. There was Bill, big as life. He was the first Sergeant to have a piece of me and he never let go.

He was born in Ogdensburg, New York, on Feb 2, 1917. His father died in 1918 of the World Wide Flu Pandemic. In 1935, at 18, he joined Company M of the 27th Infantry Division, New York Army National Guard, where he attained the rank of Sergeant. On Oct 16, 1940 the 27th Infantry Division was ordered to Active Duty, at Ft. McClelland, Alabama. On April 7, 1942, the 27th Infantry Division was ordered to Hawaii for its Defense.

Bill reports to Camp Howze, Texas, on Feb 22, 1944, and is assigned to the 103rd Infantry Division. On Mar 17, 1944, Bill marries Doris Virginia Ragsdale at the 409th Infantry Regimental Chapel, Camp Howze, Texas. On May 12, 1944, he is promoted to Technical Sergeant and is assigned to D Company, 1st Battalion, 409th Infantry Regiment, 103rd Infantry Division. Company D was the heavy weapons company that directly supported other Infantry units. Bill was the 2nd Section Leader in the 2nd Platoon which supported A,B&C Rifle Company with 30 caliber machine guns.

1944 - 1945 European Theater of Operations

On October 20th the 103rd Cactus Infantry Division lands at Marseille, France. Bill always took care of his men. He always looked after the wounded and saved many lives. As with Ed Schwinn, he immediately applied digital pressure to a femoral artery wound. He then carried Ed to the aid station while maintaining pressure on the wound. Had it not been for Bill, Ed would have bled to death in a matter of seconds. (Story by Ed and

Bill)

On Nov 22nd the 409th Infantry Regiment liberates St. Die, France. On November 24th, 1st Battalion, 409th Infantry Regiment was sent 18 miles behind enemy lines and across the Vosges Mountains into a town called Steige.

Story 1: - Max Irwin

The mission was to raid a German Headquarters and capture German officers for interrogation. Bill and Max were in the 2nd Platoon and in direct support of the Rifle Companies. They captured a German officer who said “I want to talk to your officers”. Bill replied, “We are the officers”. The German officer said, “No, you are enlisted men. I want to talk to your officers”. Bill and Max said “We do not allow our officers in the front lines”.

Max on Bill:

He was afraid of nobody.

He was always dependable.

You always felt safe around him.

He watched your back

When the 1st Platoon was captured at Selestat, Bill was sent to rebuild it.

During November 29-30, the 103rd Division was part of an effort to cutoff the German retreat toward the Siegfried Line. During the period December 1 – 4 the Division’s mission was to cut the German Supply lines in the Colmar Pocket, south of Strasbourg. To do so, Selestat was the next 409th Regimental objective.

Story 2: - Herb Morgan who was in Bill’s Section

The 1st Battalion moved to the Northwest outskirts of Selestat. B Company supported by the 1st Platoon of D Company was ordered into the first 6 houses. The battle for Selestat was mostly house to house fighting. B Company was attrited to about 15% strength. While fighting house to house a German tank came up on them. From a window along the street they fired a Bazooka at the tank, but the round was a dud and bounced off the tank. It then became urgent for them to get out of there. Bill was covering the retreat of his team of 8 to 10 guys. Bill spotted a German in a second floor window with a machine gun about to open up on them. Bill hit the German with 2 or 3 rounds and saved their lives. During the period December 12 – 15, the 1st

Battalion liberated Lobsann, Memmelshoffen, Drachenbronn and Cleebourg.

Story 3: - Herb Morgan

Somewhere in a graveyard after Selestat they came under heavy mortar fire. Bill and another guy were behind a couple of tombstones. A mortar round landed between them and I said I think we just lost Bill. I just got the words out of my mouth when Bill emerged from the smoke with his clothes still smoldering. There wasn't a scratch on him. They ran up to help the other guy, but there wasn't much left of him. On December 15th according to Lieutenant Hollis, Company D, 409th Infantry, Technical Sergeant Williams of D Company was leading a machine gun platoon near the Alsace-German border at the town of Weiller. While on a reconnaissance patrol, they were the first doughboys to cross the German border on the Seventh Army front.

On December 16th the 1st Battalion entered Germany near Weiller. The Siegfried Line was straight ahead. On December 20th the 1st Battalion continued to secure their position in the Siegfried Line.

Story 4: - Herb Morgan

At the Siegfried Line they were going through enemy entanglements when the Germans spotted them and shot Bill. The round went completely through his helmet. The front of Bill's helmet had a hole about the size of your small finger and the back had a hole about the size of a quarter. Bill put his helmet back on his head, charged the German position while throwing hand grenades and killing both Germans. Bill continued to wear his lucky helmet.

Herb on Bill:

- He was an excellent Leader.
- He had 9 lives.
- Best Soldier he has ever seen.
- He had no fear.
- He was put in for the Silver Star at Selestat

Story 5: - Bill Williams

While his platoon was in a bunker in the Siegfried Line, his unit was cut off from friendly units and they were surrounded by the Germans. Bill went out

from the protection of the bunker to get drinking water for the wounded men in his platoon. At one point he had to roll hand grenades down on top of a couple of Germans that blocked his route back to the bunker. When he got back to the bunker, the Lieutenant was inside of the bunker burning the maps in front of the wounded. Bill asked what he was doing and the lieutenant told Bill that they were going to surrender. Bill told the LT that he could surrender if he wanted to, but he and his men were going to stay where they were. The argument became heated and Bill escorted the lieutenant outside and relieved him of his sidearm by pistol whipping him.

Years later when I was teaching for the Command and General Staff College, I would have Bill as a guest speaker when I got to the Battle of the Bulge. When Bill was talking to a class of Field Grade Officers he always said that he convinced the Lieutenant to take an alternate course of action.

On December 21st, 1st Battalion repulsed a German attack in the vicinity of Bollenborn and Dorrenbach. The enemy used flame throwers and Molotov cocktails. “The German activity was vicious”.

Bronze Star Medal Citation:

“While serving with the 409th Infantry Regiment in the vicinity of ***, Germany, on December 21st, 1944, Sergeant Williams was in command of a machine gun section supporting an Infantry company in the attack. The Infantry Company at this point was located in pill boxes when the enemy launched a strong counterattack supported with flame throwers. Sergeant Williams observing that immediate action was imperative, he turned over his section to an assistant and dashed forth courageously, armed with hand grenades. He jumped into a trench in front of our infantry and boldly threw grenades in the midst of the attacking enemy. His rapidity of judgment and utter disregard for his life in the face of the onrushing enemy materially assisted the infantry troops in throwing the enemy into a complete rout.”

During the period January 1- 14 the 103rd Infantry Division took up Defensive Holding Position around St. Jean-Rohrbach in preparation for the great German offensive in the Ardennes. (“The Battle of the Bulge”) During the period January 14 – 21, the 409th Infantry Regiment conducted Combat Patrols in the vicinity Lampertsloch. On January 21st the 409th Infantry completed a withdrawal to the vicinity of Pfaffenhofen with the 1st Battalion at LaWalck. This withdrawal from Lampertsloch was accomplished over 14 miles during extremely difficult weather conditions.

Story 6: - Bill Williams

On May 2nd, near the end of the war, the 1st Bn was liberating Innsbruck. They were unopposed. Bill was in one jeep and the Bn Commander was in another that was pulling a trailer. It was a great honor to be the first American into a newly liberated City. Bill and the Colonel were racing their jeeps toward Innsbruck. All the while the Colonel was motioning Bill to fall back so that the Colonel could be the first into Innsbruck. Bill ignored the Colonel and without a trailer was able to out distance the Colonel. Bill was the first American into Innsbruck.

On October 2, 1945, at Fort Dix, New Jersey, First Sergeant Williams was mustered out of Army.

On March 4, 1949, at Fort McPherson, Georgia, Sergeant Williams re-enlists.

On October 31, 1966, with the United States Army Instructor Group (Jr. ROTC), Third US Army, Ft. McPherson, Bill retires after 22 years, 6 months and 11 days of Active Duty & 5 years with the New York Army National Guard. He spent 13 years teaching Jr. ROTC.

After retirement, he worked for the Atlanta School System and taught ROTC for another 20 years. He had competition Rifle and Drill teams that routinely won first place in the Atlanta City School System and did National competitions. His Color Guard participated at Football Games and many other Public Events.

At 18 he became a patriot when he joined the National Guard. When his country called him at 23, he became a soldier's soldier. At 27 he was an exceptional Combat Leader and in the eyes of Herb Morgan, "The Best Soldier he as ever seen".

From the end of a poem by S/Sgt Robert G. Tessmer (100th Infantry Division)

"If we can't do him honor, While he's here to hear the praise, Then at least let's give him homage, At the ending of his days. Perhaps a simple

headline In the paper that might say,

Our County is in Mourning For a Veteran died today.