

6/22/00

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Dear Luke

I am so thankful you have taken the job of doing this wonderful thing for the Vets of the 103rd, Division. I am honored you allowed me to add to the other fellows who may be doing the same.

I do trust I have not gone too far here on this but there is a lot to say about almost a year of almost Continuous Combat in war. I did get to meet with some of the 384 FA Bn in Indiana in May 2000. It sure was nice to see some of the fellows I served with. I would sure like to hear from others I was with. Thank's you so much for this opportunity.

To:

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My name is James Wilson. I am married to a wonderful person I was lucky enough to meet in 1940 in the town of Panhandle, Texas. We were married on May 18, 1941 in Claude, Texas. We celebrated our 58th wedding anniversary in May 1999.

We were blessed with three wonderful children. The oldest is our daughter Sharron. Our second child is our son Larry and our third is our son Kevin. All three of our children live within 35 minutes of our home.

Our first child kept me from going into the service for a while as the Draft Board said they would wait until the baby was born to draft me and that is exactly what they did. Our daughter was born on October 28, 1942 and I was sworn in December 7, 1942. I was shipped by bus shortly after that, maybe about three or four days, to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for a lot of shots and two nights and days of KP duty in the officer's mess and was pulled out of the kitchen's dirty clutches and put on a truck and taken to the railroad station with other draftees and shipped to Ft. Lewis, Washington to replace some Idaho National Guard person or retiree. I don't remember which. I spent about three weeks in the hospital. The time we arrived in Ft. Lewis was Christmas Day and I was a sick soldier. I was unlucky enough to wind up in a ward where the first night someone stole my carton of cigarettes, my writing things and shaving supplies. The next morning a nurse came into the ward and informed us we were not to leave or to send out anything as the patient in the bed next to me had died during the night with spinal meningitis. We were quarantined for twenty-one days. Boy, that was a long twenty-one days.

The outfit I was assigned to was "A" Brigade artillery if my memory serves me right. I was surely confused when I was told to fall out and fall in ranks the first time when all the others there had been training for over three weeks. I do remember that the only good thing about coming into training late was that I got a pass with one week of training while the others were there four weeks before they got a pass.

We were there until about April 1943. We maneuvered up and down the Snoqualmie Pass all winter and in the spring we were sent to the Mojave Desert in California. The train, train track and sand were all there was where they put us off. It was a hot, hot day at about 2:00 p.m. if my memory serves me right and 120 degrees. We were wearing our OD woolen uniforms and had no summer uniforms to wear and we bailed off the train, fell in and started putting up tents to call home for the next several months. The stay in the desert was a rough one. A number of the men didn't make it. Our physical training exercises came before sun up but it was still hot and some would pass out and have to be carried away. We never saw them anymore. We got a canteen of water issued each day. That water was to do us for all purposes until the next morning. The canteen of water was a precious commodity. It was for drinking, washing, shaving, etc. I do mean it was a rough time there for the entire group. We were told we were going to go get Rommel, the German tank commander. There were the largest scorpions and most rattlesnakes there than anywhere else in the world, I believe.

When we finished our desert stay we went to Muskogee, Oklahoma to Camp Gruber for our port of mobilization. In the time there and during desert training I was a lineman, switchboard operator and radio operator. I was rolling up and loading wire by myself and handling one mile spools of wire or piggy backing a fellow soldier for about a hundred yards. I ruptured myself and was sent directly to the hospital for surgery and a six-week stay. During this time the unit shipped out and I never heard from or about any of the men. I would like to some day.

I was sent to Camp Howze at Gainesville, Texas when I recovered from my surgery. I joined the 384 FA. Hq. Battery of the 103rd infantry Division. There I went through the whole nine yards of basic training again. That included cross country marches, forced marches, cannoneers hop and then to radio school. I came out of radio school with a high-speed operator's code certificate and was shipped out to Southern France with all of the 103rd. It was a long rough trip across from N.Y. to Marseilles. They say about fifteen days but it sure seemed longer to me. I remember several times we were told to help roll depth charges over the side and we did. We were on a liberty ship. We were up on deck half the time and half the time we

would be below. Trying to stay below was not worth it. I did not get sick like some did but I felt so sorry for one of our fellows. I can't remember his name now but I know a lot of us tried to get him to take food to no avail. The nearest I came to getting really sick was when we were experiencing a heavy storm. The waves were very high and our ship would rise very high in front then come crashing down only to rise up again and again. The restroom was located in the forward part of the ship. I was sitting on the John when suddenly some soldier shoved the swinging door open and let me have it full blast all over. I just ducked my head and sat there saying nothing. In a moment he uttered something and backed out of the stall. I waited a little while before I got up and walked over to the shower stall. I turned on the water full blast. I washed my face and hair first then I undressed and showered and washed out my clothes, redressed and went back up on deck and watched the high waves come in as we traveled toward Marseilles, France. We came to the harbor, landed and started unloading. We were climbing down the net or rope nets on the side of the ship. The anti-aircraft guns were going crazy on the enemy aircraft overhead. It was, I think, about 4:00 p.m. We landed on shore about ¼ mile from the ship and walked and walked all night with people putting their hands out trying to hand us bottles of wine. The going was very rough. We walked all night to reach our staging area. We spent the next few days getting all the equipment from port to our sight, assembled and working properly. I then was assigned to a forward observer as radio operator and/or jeep driver. The 384FABN headed up through France and Germany then into Austria where the war ended in Innsbruck, Austria. I do remember some very close encounters as well as days without anything to eat but some C rations, crackers and anchovies. I would like to hear from or see the officer whose name I don't remember, that shared his case of anchovies with all of us that his family had sent to him. They sure came in handy.

While in Innsbruck we did go out for field trips and we also helped to set up some military governments in a few outlying small towns. We did this until time to ship out for the United States.

We sailed from Camp Lucky Strike, France to New York in 1945. It was a lot more relaxed trip even though we were double loaded. As we came into the harbor in New York a large yacht came out to meet us with an orchestra on deck. They played one song I have never forgotten. It was "Sentimental Journey". I remember noticing some of the fellows were wiping away tears.

When I arrived in the U.S. in 1945 I landed ashore in New York. The old statue sure looked good to me. We were served a steak dinner then put on the train of converted cattle cars. We were sent on our way to Ft. Sam Houston. We were processed out there to our destinations according to where we were to live and in my case that was Panhandle, Texas by way of Amarillo, Texas. I arrived by bus in Amarillo in late afternoon. I tried to call but the phone companies were on strike. No buses were available at the time and all I could think about was getting home. I got a taxi to my brother's place in Amarillo and borrowed a car and went to Panhandle to my wife and our two children. We had a daughter and a son. Our son was only nine months old and I had never seen him. I didn't even have a picture of him.

I am proud to say I did serve my country and I know there were many of our troops that did not make it back home to the States and many came home with all types of injuries. I can't say I came home without a scratch as I was injured by shrapnel while in combat, but not seriously. Thanks be to God for watching over us as He did.

My thoughts and feelings go out to all those who have served their country and to those who have served since I did and those who are serving now. I do thank each one who has ever had to go and defend our freedom. May God bless and keep you.

James V. Wilson

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