

Leonard Eischens, Pvt  
424 INF/B

***He Bravely Fought in the Bulge***

*This is an interview of Leonard EISCHENS. The author who did the interview on Leonard and wrote the book is Tom MELCHIOR. The book he wrote is called "Never Forgotten: Stories by Scott County, Minnesota, WWII Veterans".*



I got my rifle on Christmas Day 1944. In the dark we had to zero in on the 1,000-inch range. I had a good rifle in basic training, I knew where I was shooting with it, and here I get a brand new gun and I'm supposed to fight the enemy. I didn't know if the bullet comes out here or there. Then I get up there, they were short in the mortar and the machine gun sections. They gave me a choice, I said, "I'll take the mortars." They said, "They're

*full up. You're a machine gunner."* From that day on I was ammo bearer, till the first couple of guys got killed, and then I got to be first gunner.



*Leonard Eischens is on the left. (Photo Lisa Bachman)*

**The action described below took place in the hamlet of Coulee, Belgium.**

(Between Wanne and Grand-Halleux)

I was ammo-bearer on the 13th January 1945 and first Jones, then Troy R Turner got killed. They were first and second gunners. The trees from here to the shop doorway (20-25 feet) were six feet tall and "gaboing" they went down to about three feet. They got their legs shot off. A shell landed right between them. Jones wanted a drink, so I gave him a drink. There was nothing I could do, though. He was one of these tough guys. He never went to church. He didn't believe in that, but he was talking to them up there that day. That's a hard one to take.

Most people don't like to hear about combat, but we got most of us killed off by our own artillery. That don't sound good to the higher-ups. Somebody screwed up. We were supposed to go and get this hill. It isn't much of a hill, but we just are advancing. In the morning they softened the hill up with artillery fire. About three o'clock in the afternoon, we got It.

A lot of the shells detonated up in the trees. A lot of them come through on the ground. It was tall trees, about six, eight, ten, twelve inches in diameter. The biggest ones were in the higher parts and then like brush on the lower parts, even a bunch of cedar trees. There was trail through this. The Second Platoon was ahead of us, and they cleared it out.

There were a couple of machine gun nests, but them (German) kids were probably 14, 15-year olds. They sure looked young to me and I was only 20 (years old) at the time. That was the end of them; they were dead. Jones threw a grenade at one of them and the other one give up or did something; there was nobody there, anyhow. Jones was from the Second Platoon. I didn't know him, but they said he snuck up and threw a grenade in there.

The snow was deep. You want to dig a hole in it and stay the night. They decided, "*Why don't we just try and take that town down there and we can sleep indoors.*" Somebody must have called back for artillery fire because that's when we got it. We were on the hill. The first shots got the radio guy. It must have been a concussion. He was just blue, real dark blue.

There went the radio. We were cut off. It took a least an hour to call the shelling off. Somebody had to go back at least three miles to call it off. It's not like now where they got walkie-talkies. My luck was that I was on the German side of the hill and I knew it was our artillery and the further I went that way, the better off I was. We got shelled for about an hour and a half.

My first and second gunner and sergeant were dead. I could see that, and I was carrying ammunition. I wasn't going to carry that around no more, so I dropped that. Then when I got out, it kind of let up a little bit. There was guys yelling for medics here and there. The first sergeant was down there and he said, "*Everybody that's able, get back on the other side of the hill.*" I saw that there was a gully going over there. I headed for it and the sergeant said, "*Where (are) you going?*" I said, "*I'm going through that gully. I'm not going over the hill.*" I took off, and I don't know if anybody followed me or not. There were probably three or four guys there. I know Cisco was one. Walter Kamp had shrapnel, and he laid down until they carried him out.

When I got back behind the hill, it is getting dark now, and there is brush about waist high. There's a soldier standing there. I ambled up to him and he said, "*Are you hurt?*" I said, "*I don't think so.*"

He says, "*Come with me.*" He opened up his lapel and he's a gol darned colonel. He don't tell me where we're going or why. I just followed him like a puppy. We get back

to the town where we started out in the morning and here's the Second Battalion all lined up. What the heck is it? Two hundred and some guys, and he says, "*here you are, soldier. Take them back up there.*" Then he disappeared. I think he's the guy that called the artillery fire on us and got half his battalion killed off. I can see why he'd want to be gone.

Anyhow, here's a major, a couple of captains, and a lieutenant. One says, "*Do you know the way back up?*" I says, "*I'm not sure.*" "Well, what kind of a deal is this? He says. "*He told me to follow him*" I says. "*Had he told me I was supposed to go back, I 'da paid a little more attention.*" "Well, which way do you want to go?" he asks. I says, "*We go to this sign here and do a right.*" "Are you sure?" He says. I says, "*No, but I think that's the way I came.*" He got the maps out but he couldn't make too much on the maps, and it's dark anyhow and they didn't want light. "O.K., if you see something you recognize, let us know."

We went, I would say, a mile and here's a burned-out German troop carrier still smoldering. I says, "*We're right. It was there when I come.*" "Are you sure?" he says. I says, "*No, I'm not sure, but I will go this way.*" He says, "*Give him the password.*" I says, "*Oh, I don't have no password.*" It was the outpost for the Second Platoon. They did something, and we got up there alright. Then I was off the hook.

Those guys up there dug in on the hill. I run into a couple of guys from my squad or the other squad and we went back to that town again and found ourselves a room in a house that was pretty well dilapidated. We boarded it up and laid down and spent the night here.

The next day the Second Battalion that walked on the hill where we got "*killed*" walked into town without firing a shot. If there were any soldiers in town, they pulled out.

We went back and nosed around and got from one place to the other until they got a bunch of us together again. Then they got replacements in and then we went back up to holding positions because the Germans were making a big pincher movement around us.

The reason the Germans started this whole sheband was because at that time of the year, December and January, it was so cloudy and foggy you couldn't see anything. Our air power couldn't do anything. I don't know what day it cleared up, maybe the 20th of January 1945 or the 25th.

Then we could see the aircraft coming. I saw two 38's (P-38 Lightning) and two 47's (P-47 Thunderbolt) going forth and back. The planes got the Germans in some big cut in the woods. The planes got the front ones and they got the back one. They had the Germans in there and they burned every one of them up.

I went through there about a month later and they were all there, skeletons-troop carriers artillery, you name it. Some tanks tried to get away. They drove off the road and they sank out of sight, just the turret sticking out, kind of like a blod. If you got off

the road in that spot, you were done. Then the war ended and then we got on stockade guard duty.

*Source: Letter received from Lisa Bachman, niece of Leonard Eischens, December 6, 2011*  
<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/672-he-bravely-fought-in-the-bulge.html>  
*Henri ROGISTER, webmaster*