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October 5, 2000

Dear Royce,

I received your letter a couple of days ago and it really came as a total surprise. Yes, I was one of the third platoon that your company rescued that day. I don't know why but for many years I thought that it was I company that pulled us out. I guess it was the confusion of the day. I do remember a Lt. McKay as one who seemed to be in command. I assume that he was an officer of your company. I certainly owe a debt of gratitude to all of Company C for their actions that day. I would like to give you some background regarding the days prior to December 16th. We replaced one of the 2nd Division's Cannon Companies, about four days before the attack. We had about 110 men in the company with six 105mm howitzers. They were smaller than the artillery guns and with a shorter range. However they were parked back in Winterspelt with all of the company vehicles and under guard by our headquarters platoon.

Most of the company were armed with carbines and each had three 15 round magazines while a few had M-1s with 5 clips of ammo. Each platoon had a 50-caliber machine gun with but one box of ammo for each. These had been taken off the jeeps that were used by the forward observer teams and I think that we got tripod mounts from the second division as we relieved them. Cannon company straddled the road from Pronsfeld, Germany to St. Vith. Our first platoon was positioned on the north side of the road with a squad from Anti-tank Company and one 57mm antitank gun. The second platoon was just to the south of the road and we in the third platoon were south of them. We must have had a front of well over a mile because we could not find anyone to either flank. As you probably remember, we were on the forward slope in front of the heavily wooded area that you came through. In front of us was a valley with several farms and behind them, to the east was another wooded ridge. I can visualize it as if it was just yesterday.

I was a member of the forward observer team and on the Friday before the attack, we were sent out to one of the farms in the middle of the valley. We left before dawn and we spent the entire day up in the hayloft of a barn. We could not see any movement but we heard heavy engines running, as they were probably positioning tanks and vehicles for the assault. We radioed back to our company and reported what we were hearing. About a half-hour later we got a response and this is what we were told. "The Germans know that there is a new division on the line and what you are hearing are recorded sounds. They are trying to unnerve us." After sunset we returned to the company position, had dinner and then I had outpost guard duty from ten to midnight. At that time there was not a sound to be heard and I will admit that I could not see a thing. I was told that one of 424th patrols would be crossing in front of our position during my tour but nothing happened. They were either too far in front of me to be recognized or they never moved through our area. I will never know. I was relieved at midnight and being cold and tired I sacked out for the night.

I guess it was about 5:30 in the morning when our company area started to take artillery fire for about fifteen or twenty minutes and then our outposts said that there was a German patrol heading towards us. We had been sleeping in a log-covered dugout and at that we all headed for foxholes out in front. The fact that we suspected that it was only a harassing patrol, most of us only wore our field jackets, leaving our coats in the dugout along with our snowshoes. We were able to keep them out of our position and then when dawn broke we saw what looked like the entire German army coming down the road. It was a combination of tanks, armored personnel carriers, motorized and horse drawn artillery, infantry on foot and in trucks. It was not a happy moment.

We kept the column back for a period of time and the antitank gun with the first platoon disabled a couple of tanks and personnel carriers, which blocked the road and slowed their advance. However, we did take some casualties and then we started to run out of ammunition. I remember that I was in a two-man foxhole on the left flank of my platoon and the fellow with me ran out of ammo for his carbine and at that time I had about two rounds left in my M-1. We could see a small German patrol heading in our direction. We agreed that we had better move back to the main platoon area. There was a shallow trench that connected all of the foxholes except for the one that we were in. It was about six feet from us. I told him to crawl out to the trench and that I would cover him and that as soon as he got there and then I would pass my rifle to him and that he would cover me as I moved over to the trench. We made it without incident and then we rejoined the rest of the platoon.

When we got back to the platoon, we knew that we were in trouble. We had a few wounded, our platoon leader, Lt. Barnaby, a really great fellow, had been killed and the rest of us were out of ammo and we were surrounded. We spoke about surrendering but no one had anything white that could be used. At that time we heard rifle shots and we looked at each other with the feeling that they were not taking prisoners and that we were finished. This was not to be. At that moment, C Company came through the woods and it was like a Hollywood movie, only this time it was the infantry to the rescue. It was such a great moment for us. We did not have time to get our coats or other belongings as we moved back with you immediately.

I remember during the move back I lost my helmet when I slipped on some ice and the helmet fell into a creek. We got to one of the battalion headquarters area where we were able to pick up ammo and a K rations. I have no idea which battalion it was but I remember that we were joined by other troops at that time. I recall that the battalion C.O. left in a jeep. It was dark by that time and shortly afterwards a barrage of screaming meemies hit the area. We were ordered to leave and again I believe that Lt. McKay was leading the column. I remember that it was so dark in this heavily wooded area and the visibility just about non-existent that we were forming a chain by holding on to the man in front of us.

If my memory serves me, we were on the move for at least two days and on the second night we had to cross a bombed out railroad bridge over a small river. I recall that there was a log laid across a gap in the bridge and there was a rope or cable overhead and that we crossed one man at a time walking on the log and holding on to the cable for balance. It took several hours for every one to cross and just after we had completed the passage, a German tank moved up destroyed the bridge. At least, that is what I recall. We next moved into an abandoned village and we were ordered to get into the houses and keep out of sight.

I made the mistake of taking off my boots to massage my feet and just then we were ordered out to evacuate the place as German troops had been spotted coming toward us. Unfortunately, my feet were so swollen that it took me several minutes to pull my boots on and even then I could not lace them. However we did make it out of town safely and that night I rejoined Cannon Company which was set up in a field with 591⁸¹ Field Artillery and a unit of the 7th Armored and the guns were facing in three directions and all towards the enemy. I was immediately sent out on an ammo run with three others and we were cut off by a German breakthrough at the town of St. Hubert. It took us nine days to rejoin the company.

I just returned from my first reunion with the 106th in St. Louis and it was a wonderful experience for me. There was so much camaraderie and warmth extended by everyone. It is unfortunate that your letter did not reach me before the reunion as I made the mistake of looking for people from I Company; there were none present, instead of C Company for I really wanted to thank them and share our experience. Incidentally, I also belong to the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge Organization and we have a local chapter in the Long Island area. There are about four members of the 106th in addition to me, however they were members of the other two regiments and were POWs. The membership consists of people who served in any unit that fought in the Bulge, airborne, infantry, armored and etc. They publish a monthly magazine with interesting letters from people who served during that period. If you are interested in joining, I have included an application for your convenience.

Again I want to thank you for letter and most of all I want to thank you again for what you and the rest of your company did to save my platoon as well as myself. Words cannot express my gratitude today and it is impossible to the feelings that we experienced on that fateful day. I know that this is quite a long letter and you must forgive me if I have been too wordy. If you have other recollections or could offer any corrections of my memories of those days, I would very much like to hear from you.

Source: Letter from self



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