

Aloysius J. Menke
589th Field Artillery
106th Infantry Division

December 16, 2005 - Manchester man recalls Battle of the Bulge

MANCHESTER, Ohio -- Despite the more than six decades that have passed since World War II, the Battle of the Bulge is fresh in the mind of Aloysius J. Menke of Manchester.

The Battle of the Bulge, often called the greatest land battle ever fought by U.S. forces, left 19,000 American soldiers dead and more than 23,000 captured.

The area of the German-Belgian border known as the Ardennes Forest was considered to be a quiet area where the [589th Field Artillery Battalion, an attachment of the 106th Infantry Division](#), was spread thin over an area normally protected by five times the number of troops at hand, said Menke.

"We were relieving a unit that was being moved closer to Holland," Menke recalled.

A deep blanket of snow concealed the first wave of attackers on Dec. 16, 1944; four days later Menke was a prisoner of war headed to a prison camp in Germany.

Now 85 years old, Menke remembers seeing the white snowsuits of the German soldiers, nearly invisible against the two to three feet of snow throughout the forest.

[Menke was captain of the "A" Battery of the 589th FAB at the time.](#)

"Units would fight, fall back, walk some more then fall back again," said Menke. "The German tanks cut through us like cheese."

In the four days following the beginning of the battle, Menke and his men traveled from Bith to Auw where they became surrounded by German tanks and were forced to surrender.

"We were marched to Prum where we were put into railroad box cars and taken to Hammelburg, Germany to a place called [Officers Laug 13B](#), the same camp the son-in-law of Gen. (George) Patton, Maj. John K. Waters, was being held at," said Menke.

On March 25, 1945, Patton sent a battalion of rescuers to the camp, tearing down the fencing with a tank to the cheers of the prisoners.

Ironically, Waters had been shot during a negotiation with what Menke called fledgling SS officers and was unable to leave the camp with his rescuers. The freed prisoners were given the option of staying at the camp or making their own way to a safer location. Menke opted to leave.

"For eight days we would sleep in hiding during the day and walk at night until we reached the lines of the 7th Army," said Menke. "They transported us to Darmstadt. We arrived on April 7."

Asked why Patton had not transported the POWs or provided them with weapons, Menke recalled Patton as an exceptional general.

"He had his quirks. We were able to pick up some weapons along the way. They (the rescue unit) had to abandon some tanks along the way and were low on ammunition." said Menke.

Menke credits the recent military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq with increasing the interest in historic battles.

"Before they hardly ever mentioned more than D-Day or Pearl Harbor in relation to the war; it is nice to see the renewed interest in the other battles. There are things to be learned from all of them," said Menke.

Menke left the military in February, 1946. He simply came home.

"Back then, we just came home to our families; no big fanfare like they do now," he said.

Retired since 1978 from a career as a grocery salesman for Proctor & Gamble, today Menke enjoys time with his wife and family on the property they own overlooking the Ohio River.

"It is an extraordinary view from three miles away," said Menke.

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