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Forward Observers

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Forward Observers



Our ship carried the entire 106th Division, which consisted of 15,000 troops, vehicles, guns and all equipment. Upon arrival they started to unload immediately. The personnel waited for their vehicles to be gassed then got in a convoy to St Vith, Belgium. Bill Shand and I followed a GMC which had two Piper Cubs that had to be assembled at an English Airport and have radios installed to be used by us as forward Observers. Bill Shand went to school to be a forward observer with another fellow from our section. Two of our men were assigned to the planes to observe and direct gun fire. We were there about 3 days and then we were driven to St Vith and given a furnished house to live in. It was small for 16 guys, but very nice. We all slept on the floor. First we set up our communications system on the kitchen table and then installed our radios in our two jeeps along with caliber machine guns.

The weather was snow about a foot deep. The kitchen was in a garage up the road and the wire section in a house next to us. The houses were located on the main street, with the road facing a farm field valley and up the far side was a very narrow road coming down a hill to our main road. All the houses had an outhouse. When we had to use them we went out in pairs for protection since we could see the Germans in white uniforms on top of the hill on the other side. There was no action that night. The next day a call from our Captain Richmond for the wire section to go down the road to repair some wires. They did so and ran into some Germans and they were all killed.

The Captain then called me and said "*Sergeant, there are two tanks coming down the road on the other side of the valley, stop them.*" I said to the captain, "*Stop them with what? I have two rounds of bazooka and two clips for my carbine. I do have four cans of ammo for my caliber.*" I turned to my guys and said, "*you heard the Captain, since yesterday we all agreed to stick together and all go home. Who wants to go with me?*" All 16 guys raised their hands, so I said that I would take Al Singoni, who was a little guy and a barber from Brooklyn in civilian life, but an excellent shot and the other guy I selected was Corporal Matoon, a bus driver back home on Springfield Avenue, in Newark, NJ and one of the best machine gunners in the army. The rest stood by the

house with their carbines to keep the Germans in the tanks. They wouldn't be able to get out and fire at us so out we went to our jeep.

I told Matoon to make sure be aimed for the cannon and not the tank. If he got it in the cannon it would stop their fire otherwise we could not stop the tank. Matoon was the best machine gunner I ever saw and he got caliber shells in both tank cannons and stopped them firing at us. We had a little advantage by being down in the valley and all of the shells that they got off went over our heads. When we got out there, Al and I and Matoon kept firing. We were about 100' from the tanks and I held the bazooka and Al fired and missed the first round, but the 2nd round was a direct track hit and we stopped both of the tanks and Matoon knocked out the cannons. Our other guys kept firing over their heads and the Germans could not get out of the tanks. We drove like Hell and got out of there. Later that day the Captain called again and told us to bust up the communication system and get out of there with the mobile radios and follow the big cannons. As we were following the big cannons, the Germans made a direct hit and blew up one of the cannons and the vehicle, rolling it over with the whole cannon crew inside.

The night I sat on the Colonel's Command Car running board, freezing in the snow and kept his radio going. We could actually see the Germans about 500 yards away. The next day the funs were set up and the Captain called us to set up the wiring and I was running wire under a Howitzer when a "Joker" pulled the trigger. My men pulled me out, unconscious, from under the gun. They worked on me for about an hour slapping my face and putting show on it to get me to come to. That is the reason that I now have a 100% disability due to hearing loss. We moved further in the morning since we were now surrounded and had no foot and little ammunition. Five days we took refuge in a house and planes came over on Christmas Eve when they could fly again and dropped food and ammo and guess what? The 101st dropped in with their little pea shooters right behind our 155 howitzers. Did we laugh! We could then, since we finally had food. We had one K ration for the previous 5 days that lasted a long time.

One of our men who was assigned as a Caller to one of the Piper Cubs got sick so I took over for him. I did O.K. for my first time and then we got our wing shot off and the crazy Pilot would not leave until we gave our gunners the position of the Germans and then we landed on a highway. One time I saw a church and when I went in the Germans had shot all of our guys who were kneeling at the altar. We found a cow and one of the boys milked her. We could not kill her for meat.

Christmas Day, word came that we had won and the War was over. We got sent to a Ball Field, which was fenced off for a Prison Camp and we had to watch over the men there. After that all of the Sergeants got sent to Metz, France which was a large French Garrison. We could sleep 15,000 troops a night. I got put in charge of billeting. This consisted of 500 troops on their way home each night including officers. The officers were billeted in hotels in town and the rest were in the French Garrison. This is where I met Lloyd Boyce, my 1st Sergeant. We were both offered 2nd Lieutenant promotions with 1st Lieutenant in 6 months if we signed up to stay. We both said "*no thanks, we're going home.*"

I was in Metz about a year until my number came up and I was put on a very small ship with 50 other guys. The ship split in half during a bad storm at sea on the way home and we had to help out while the guys welded patches on the side, enough to keep the ship together and get us to New York Harbor. After we got off, the ship was towed a little way out and it sank. This is a small part of what I went through and how I lost my hearing and also got a knee injury diving into a foxhole to get out of the way of the Germans.

Source: The Bulge Bugle August 2013

<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/899-forward-observers.html>

Henri ROGISTER, webmaster

Died 01/13/2013 Buried Frelinghuysen