

Earl Scott, Colonel

*589th FABN/HQ
L-4 "Piper Cub" Liaison plane*

To begin with, I'm no hero, I won no medals and I'm certain that many of you were involved in much more dangerous assignments than me. My weapon, the Piper Cub airplane, was a fragile machine when confronting a world of hostile gunfire, foul weather, and unfriendly terrain. What I will describe here will be my activities between 16 Dec 1944 to 1 Jan 1945 as the Ardennes Offensive raged.

The Ardennes Offensive was Hitler's grand plan, "WACHT AM RHEIN" (Watch on the Rhine) to destroy 20-30 Allied divisions by slicing through the western front, capturing Liege, Belgium, securing the Meuse River bridges, then on to the port of Antwerp - thus destroying the Allied Alliance and gaining the initiative in the war. In a statement to his Commanders upon ordering the attack, Hitler said, "Never in history was there a coalition like our enemies. If we deliver a few more heavy blows, this artificially bolstered common front may collapse with a clap of thunder." (The Bitter Woods, by John Eisenhower)

Six hundred thousand Americans fought in what came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge, the most decisive battle on the Western Front during World War II and the greatest ever fought by the U. S. Army. A desperate gamble by Hitler that caught Allied forces off guard and he nearly succeeded. (A Time for Trumpets, by Charles MacDonald)

It all began in the pre-dawn hours of 16 Dec 1944 as massive artillery barrages fell on American troops in the Schnee Eifel area along the German-Belgium boundary. Three German armies consisting of 12 divisions launched an assault against a sector held by an estimated 4 and one half U. S. divisions. In addition, held out four division sized units as reserves. A focal point was St. Vith, Belgium where the 106th Infantry Division Headquarters was located. Its elements stretched out across a front of more than twenty miles.

The German offensive drove to just short of the Meuse River and crunched to a halt on Dec. 26th. By 16 January, exactly one month from its beginnings, the First and Third Armies linked up and Hitler's Grand Plan died.

Among 600,000 Americans eventually involved in the fighting were three American armies, six corps, the equivalent of 31 divisions. Total American casualties were 81,000, including 23,554 captured and 19,000 killed. Among the 55,000 British, consisting of three divisions, were contingents of Belgian, Canadian and French troops. Their casualties totaled 1,400, of which just over 200 were killed. The Germans employed close to 500,000 men consisting of three German armies, 10 corps, the equivalent of 29 divisions. German losses numbered at least 100,000 killed, wounded or captured.

When I reported for duty to the [106th Inf. Div.](#) at Fort Jackson on Oct. 12, 1943, I believed the job of pilot in the Field Artillery was the best job in the Army. They gave me a plane and an additional 50% of my base pay to fly it. My first encounter with Div Arty's Executive Officer, Col. Malin Craig, Jr., put me on solid footing. My prime function was to be an artilleryman first and a pilot second. When I reported to Headquarters Battery, Captain Beans of the 589th FA, set me straight. My shiny new 2nd Lieutenant bars didn't take with him. He addressed me as Mr. Scott, he hated pilots, especially 2nd Lieutenants, because one had stolen his girl in Texas. I was to get frequent duties like Mess Officer,

supply officer, etc., and my first night aboard I was assigned as duty officer and slept in the orderly room.

The 106th Div. shipped to England and I arrived with my Battalion in Gloucester, 18 Nov 44. The DivArty Air Section began immediately to assemble our planes which had arrived in crates at a bomber factory earlier. Leaving Gloucester on Dec. 4, we flew to an English airdrome at Cheltenham for clearance for our flight across the English Channel. Here's where I nearly tangled with a British four-engine bomber. Portable control tower gave the wrong signal for my landing and I cut the bomber out of his landing approach. The bomber bounced along in the weeds and grass and my Piper Cub rolled down the concrete runway. Probably would have been court martialed except the tower operator admitted that he gave me the wrong signal. The rest of the flight was uneventful as we spanned a 50 mile stretch of the English Channel and landed at LeHavre, France.

We arrived at St. Vith on 14 Dec. and occupied the air strip vacated by the 2d Div. Arty Air Section. The 106th Inf. Div. was relieving the 2d Div. My Battalion took over the position of the 15th FA Battalion on Dec. 9. We were assured that this was a "quiet" sector and nothing ever happened.



l/r - Pilot's name unknown; Lt. Earl Scott, Lt. Joe McKenzie and Lt. Jack Grey in front of an L-4 "Piper Cub" Liaison plane.

Foul weather prevailed on the 15th and I visited my Battalion located in Auw, Germany. The 16th of December 1944 came in with a great blast. Artillery barrages hit St. Vith and my Battalion position, The weather still foul, I headed back to the Battalion with my other pilot. He never got there. Lt. Graham Cassibry intercepted us with a message from the Air Officer to return to the strip. He needed a plane up for observation and Cassibry was to be my observer. We returned to the airstrip and took off. Flying toward the Battalion at about 1,500 feet altitude we received MG fire, tracers and the zip of bullets just a few feet out in front of the plane. What to do? The evasive action taught at Fort Sill was to execute a diving turn and come out over trees or ground with hedgehopping. Pilots of the 2d Div. said this maneuver was useless, the Germans were on to it, but they didn't tell what to us in it's place. I did some rather tricky flying at that point and finally got out of danger. Neither of us was hit but the plane sustained multiple bullet holes. What a birthday celebration - I turned 26 on that day.

The next day was barely flyable but we did fly missions that morning. In the afternoon of the 17th we received orders to move and evacuated to a VIII Corps airstrip to the rear. The next day, due to small arms and MG fire around the strip, we were ordered to fly

to Bastogne. The ceiling was zero and the time was 1530. Two planes were without pilots and Cassibry, my observer volunteered to fly one of them out.

He had never flown an L-4 but had some flying training at an Army Training School until he cranked a plane with no one in it. It took off and crashed over the end of the runway. The school sent him back to us. He flew this plane out.

I followed him into the air and quickly flew into a solid fog bank. Tried a lower level but the fog was very heavy. I decided to gain altitude and return to the airstrip but the fog was there also. In the process of climbing, Cassibry suddenly flew across my front - I barely missed him. At this point, I decided that he would not make it and I gave myself a very slim chance. The parachute was on a shelf behind me else it would have been my first jump. Fortunately that summer I had taken a three weeks course in instrument and night flying. With this knowledge I decided to spiral down and hopefully come out of the fog before crashing. This I did and at 100 feet "indicated" on my altimeter, I was out of the fog and over a field large enough to land. There at the edge of the field along a concrete highway stood a lone American soldier. I taxied up to the road, the soldier came over and I saw he was a Chaplain. Just what I needed !

He told me that Bastogne was just four miles down the highway, he had just come from there and it wasn't too foggy. I proceeded to fly down the highway and very shortly was over Bastogne. Couldn't find the VIII Corps airstrip because of heavy fog and then realized that darkness was setting in. I landed a mile west of Bastogne in a field next to an anti-aircraft unit. They fed me and provided a bunk in a barn but at midnight the evacuated the position.

They dropped me off at the edge of Bastogne where MPs picked me up and took me to Corps HQs. Here I was told by a Colonel to find a place on the floor and get some sleep. He woke me up before daybreak and said they were moving out. The 101st Air Borne was going to move in and they would take me out to my plane. Then I was left alone in darkness.

I decided to walk out to my plane. As daylight came the 101st was moving into Bastogne. The fog was as heavy as ever. Civilians were streaming down the road to the West as trucks and other vehicles sent their eerie sounds through the fog. German shelling was continuous with small arms and MG fire keeping up their chatter. It was a strange and lonely feeling as I sat there at the wheel of my plane hoping the fog would lift. I prayed that God would let me get out of this situation. Suddenly I saw the end of the field and the trees. I was able to sly out.

Forty-five minutes later I landed in Neuchateau - VIII Corps new HQs and airstrip. I had lunch and went into the Corps war room and they told me that Bastogne was now encircled by the Germans.

I came out of the street and a jeep pulls up and out steps Cassibry. He had landed in the front of an Armored Arty Battalion, asked the Commander to destroy the airplane if he had to evacuate. He told a strange tale of spending the night in a Nunnery at Bastogne and then hitching a ride to Neuchateau. Two days later we were ordered to Namur. Forced down twice on the way, Cassibry and I spent the night on a mountain top above the village of Willerzie, France.

A French girls who spoke English took us to her house and two American soldiers led us up to an Engineering Battalion on top of the mountain. They were building a POW enclosure. The Colonel took us in, fed us and provided bunks for the night. His enlisted men thought we were spies.

The Colonel thought I was lying because he knew Lieutenants didn't fly the liaison planes - that was a Staff Sgt's job. At breakfast the Col. wasn't sure until he questioned us again. He gave us 5 gals of truck gasoline for the plane and sent us back down to the village.

We flew into Namur and next day was ordered to Liege to assemble the Div. Arty air sections. I spent Christmas Eve in a Liege hotel but slept very little because of German Buzz bombs. The Germans declared that Liege would be devastated or leveled by these bombs on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

On December 31, the 106th Div Air Section was attached to the **30th Div Arty** located near Spa, Belgium., We set up in a vacant house. I sent Cassibry to find a stove. Several hours into the night he returned running on a flat tire and bullet holes in the back canvas. Said he had been ambushed. He had a stove.

The next day, New Year's Day, the air strip was strafed by German ME-109s and my gunner shot one down. That afternoon we returned to the 106th Div and settled into a regular routine of patrols, reconnaissance and administrative flights.

During the period 16 December 1944 until just before the decimated units were pulled out to be reconstituted at Rheims, the Div Arty Air sections had 29 days of flyable weather and performed 100 artillery registrations, 32 adjustments on targets, 90 reconnaissance flights and 29 administrative flights which included weather checks, displacements, road net checks, etc. Total missions flown - 251.

Perhaps some have wondered whatever happened to Graham Cassibry. So have I wondered. More than a year after coming home Graham's mother called me from Mississippi, and said that he had run away from home. Had he come to see me for she knew I was one of his best buddies Of course I had not seen nor heard from him. I wonder if she ever found him?

<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/895-my-activities-between-16-december-1944-to-1-january-1945.html>
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