

Joseph Seanor

*106th Infantry Division
Unknown Unit & Unknown POW Camp*

Seanor was drafted in February 1943, and bounced around various training programs until he was assigned to the [106th Infantry Division](#), which would prove to be ill-fated in the Battle of the Bulge. Sailing to Britain on the Queen Elizabeth, Seanor had a less impressive vessel--a fishing boat that held 35 men--to cross the English Channel to France.

Once ashore, Seanor said they "just started to walk inland. And we walked the whole way into Belgium and the Ardennes Forest area.

"At dusk we'd go out on patrol and return at daylight. We holed up in a little cement block creamery. From there we looked into a valley at the bunkers and tank traps of the Siegfried Line. We could see the Krauts coming around for chow. They were about a thousand yards away, and too far for any of us to take a shot at them.

"A lot of guys from the front needed a rest area, a quiet zone. The 2nd Division had taken a lot, so they pulled them back for rest and put the 106th up front on the second line. Everyone figured the Krauts didn't have much fight left in them, anyway. Ours was a green bunch, and never suspected otherwise. We didn't know what was in store for us."

Schaller remembers seeing suspicious civilians in the area of Luxembourg right before the Battle of the Bulge, but when German shells started landing at 5 a.m. Dec. 16, 1944, he knew his suspicions were real. "They were sending over incendiary shells to light fires," he remembers. "For a split second, I saw one of those shells coming right at me. It looked like a ball of Mercurochrome, with different colors swirling around in it." He was ready to jump out of his farmhouse hiding place, "but the damn thing landed outside and burned harmlessly in the snow."

Five Americans became trapped in the farmhouse as the Germans moved through, and the five had almost no ammunition. They stayed there all night, until a German discovered them the next morning. Schaller remembers his words, "Good morning, gentlemen. For you the war is over." Later he learned the officer had been educated at the University of Pennsylvania.

Seanor was trapped in the German attack for two days, until they ran out of ammunition. For those two days, "I was too busy to be scared," he remembered. "I got scared later. I still get scared today when I talk about it." They were taken prisoner by "a kid, like me. He was a blond, blue eyed, nice looking kid. He could speak a little English. "Do what I way, and you will be alright."

Placed temporarily in a prison camp, Seanor was bombed accidentally by British planes that killed a number of Allied prisoners, including two of his officers. Then they were shipped by train all the way across Germany and into Poland during the worst winter in Europe in years.

When he reached the next prison camp, "my feet were frostbitten; I couldn't eat. I also had hepatitis; I was all yellow. I was down to 120 pounds from 185." He credited a British

doctor, a fellow prisoner, with saving his life. "The doctor had to use bandages that looked like crepe paper. He had no sedatives, nothing."

Schaller began marching on the night of Dec. 18, and was not fed again by his captors until Christmas night. The Germans stole anything useful from the prisoners, including shoes.

Finally after a brutal train trip they arrived in prison camp, where "our regular diet consisted mainly of a kind of watery soup and ersatz tea in the morning. Really it was just warm water."

Schaller recalls, "Everybody had diarrhea. With nothing to wash with, everybody had lice, fleas and bed bugs. We slept on floors covered with straw. Even the straw quickly disappeared, because we used it as toilet paper."

As time passed, "We got weaker and weaker, and more and more communicable diseases developed." One man died of spinal meningitis, but the Germans did nothing to treat the sick.

Schaller's story is even more dramatic than those of the other veterans, because he makes no bones about the reality that he suffered from what would now be called post-traumatic shock syndrome.

When he finally arrived home after the war, "I didn't know how to face (his parents) because of what I had been through. When I got to the railroad station at home, I saw something in my mother's face. Later she told me, 'You didn't look at us, you looked through us.'

"And I was aware of it. I had the 'Thousand Yard Stare.' "



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