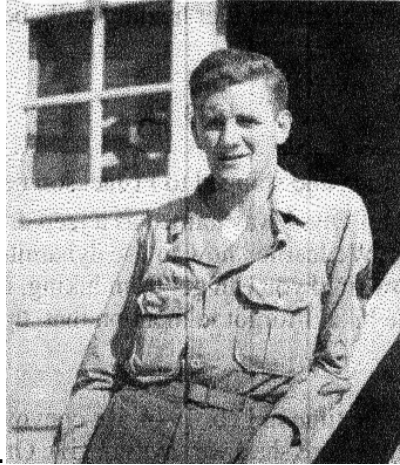


## Robert L. Stevenson

*Hq Co, 81st Combat Engineers Battalion,  
106th Infantry Division*



This story is dedicated to my wonderful wife *Dorothy*, happily married 55 years, and all of our family. Also to all of the individuals that contributed to the shaping of this soul's presence on our planet Earth.

Every human action has a spiritual impact on the world!

If this statement is true, then I guess I have placed some impact on our world. My life's experiences as of this date, that helped shaped me, are set forth as my memory will allow, at this present age of 77.

My war experiences will not reflect the killing, or those killed around me, because war is hell, as I'm sure everyone reading this, will realize, that I prefer not to talk about such things.

Born Aug. 15, 1923 in Vandalia, Illinois. Blessed with a mother and father, that were NON drinkers or smokers, who *tried* to teach me right from wrong,. It wasn't hard to learn which was which, as wrong meant a warm behind, no matter what the season.

I survived high school, and graduated in 1941 with sufficient knowledge that I could conquer the world. My first job after graduation was working in the greenhouse business for my grandfather, for .05 cents and hour, and a work week was 60 hours, which gave you a pay day on Saturday of \$3.00.

Before you go into shock, you must realize that at that time, to go to a movie was .10 cents, and a large bag of popcorn was .05 cents. Also a large milk shake, served in the large metal container that it was made in, so thick that it had to be eaten with a spoon was .10 cents.

My next job was milkman (delivering milk in glass bottles door' to door), and deliveries to the hotels and restaurants. Part of that job was driving tractor/trailer hauling milk, beer and sometimes a refrigerated truck full of ice cream.

Drafted into the army at Chicago Illinois, and shipped to Ft Jackson near Columbia, SC. Assigned to the [Hq Co. 81 Combat Engrs. Bn. 106th Inf Div.](#) I was trained as a jeep driver ( no tractor/trailers here), radio operator, and a demolition man. We learned how to use dynamite and nitro starch by playing catch with that stuff. We also found out how tired you can get from hiking, day one 5 mile hike, day 2 a 10 mile hike, one day off, then a 20 mile hike. I forgot to mention that, this was always with a full field pack, and about 90 degrees.

If my memory serves me correctly some time in Feb. 1944, we convoyed to Term. For maneuvers Sometimes I did things in the army that were shall we say (not GI). One form of corrective discipline, was after you had put in your full day at doing what they wanted you to do, then you were instructed to go dig a 6 X 6. For those of you reading MY MEMORIES, and not familiar with this term, it meant that you dig a hole in the ground 6 feet square and 6 feet deep, then your commanding officer would come and measure the hole in the ground, so that you could fill it back in, usually by about midnight.

I don't feel compelled to elaborate on how many, or why I was requested to perform these tasks, but it was for varied reasons.



Part of the training on maneuvers was building foot bridges, both in the daylight and at night. If not completed in the proper amount of time, then you torn it down, loaded all of the parts back on trailers, then you could start all over again and build it again.

While some of the men and equipment were being ferried across the Cumberland river in the dark of night and the river at flood level, there were some men lost (drowned) when the open boats hit floating trees or debris in the river, some of the men had mortar bases strapped to their back, as well as full field packs and overcoats.

I believe that I was the only one in our outfit, that had rigged a variable condenser to the jeep mounted 2-way radio, so I could get the local radio stations in Nashville. This was one of the early models of a CONVERTIBLE with the radio music blaring.

We also acquired a working knowledge of the proper way to dig slit trenches, and how DEEP they should be dug. We were instructed to dig one every evening after we had moved into a new location. A certain individual (with authority), criticized the depth and made everyone dig new ones. Someone in the outfit later dug a real deep one in the path to the latrine (latrine is a slit trench one shovel width about 10 ft long and 3 or 4 ft deep) That's the size I usually dug them, when I was on company punishment.

During, the night (this person with authority) while on his middle of the night trip to the latrine iN THE DARK, inspected and measured a 2 ft by 6 ft hole, 3 ft deep in the ground with his body. The noise of the thump woke a few of those nearby. The next morning the whole company was called to attention, for a lecture about the proper way to dig a trench. He good naturally complemented ( whoever) dug that trench, it was found to be of sufficient size.

After the maneuvers were finished and we repaired fences, graded roads back to usable condition, we then convoyed on to [Camp Atterbury](#), Indiana. South of Indianapolis.



Hubert K. Lincoln

While stationed there, I was able to go back home and bring my motorcycle (Indian Daytona Racing machine) to camp. My good buddy and the most wonderful friend that anyone could ask for in any one lifetime, was Hubert K. Lincoln, a very distant relative of President Lincoln. The motorcycle gave "Hub" and I a chance to use a local pass and go into Indianapolis , on our off time.

In our company "Hub" on the shooting range beat me with the MI rifle, but I beat him with the Thompson Sub-machine gun. At drinking we were EQUAL.

You should realize while reading this, you really can't become a heavy drinker on the army's pay of \$15. A month.

I only got into trouble with the motorcycle once. It is proper to salute the base guard shack, when entering the base, which I did give the proper salute. What the officer didn't like was, I came through the gate, saluting, standing up at attention on the seat of my motorcycle at a proper speed. The MP's came after me and took me to the Officer of the day, for not having my vehicle under control! I offered to take him for a ride and prove that I had it under control. He didn't take kindly to my offer, and assigned me to one week cleaning the grease pits of the mess halls.

One night while on guard duty at the motor pool, one of the guys failed to show up for his shift, I had already had my shift, but when I noticed that he wasn't on duty, and the officer of the day was approaching, and in order to save his buns, I grabbed a rifle and took his position. I only got one extra day of KP (kitchen police) for being out of uniform. You see I was in my underwear, barefooted etc.

We were shipped by rail to Mass., and boarded a ship some time in Oct. 1944. After arriving in some cow pasture in England with our trusty shelter half, which is only a half of a tent, which means you need a good buddy like "Hub" to have your canvas home complete.

I have memories of that Thanksgiving dinner in a cold mess kit. You would understand the term MESS KIT, if you could see the turkey, dressing, gravy, cranberry, dessert etc., all in one 6 inch oval pan. in our outfit you learned to drink coffee, because you often couldn't find a good drink of water.

We were then reassigned to our original vehicles and boarded an old LST with our vehicles to cross the English channel to Reuion, France. The LST that we were aboard had made so many crossings, that when the bow would go up over a wave, the top deck plate would gap open 3 or 4 inches, so bad, that stripes were painted on each side of the break, so you wouldn't step there when it opened up.

After landing in Reuion France, we convoyed to St Vith Belgium, and had one hot meal on the trek to Belgium.

I must comment for the benefit of my fellow comrades who served over seas, and who are familiar with "C" rations. This being the month of November, you would remember that a cold "C" ration lacks a certain amount of satisfaction to the palette.

We were advised that we were going to get a "hot meal" while enrouté on this trek to Belgium. We were all looking forward to the "hot meal" with great anticipation. Our convoy was directed off the main road into a field, and as we drove slowly through the field, the convoy drove past a row of 55 gal. Drums full of boiling water. When we stopped our vehicles at the drums, the troops in charge would dip into the boiling water and throw into our vehicles, the "hot meal", which was boiling hot "C" rations cans.

This was not a thrilling moment in my Army life, because, I was a jeep driver and I had hot "C" rations all the time. You see I wired the cans fast to the manifold of the jeep motor until they were warm enough to eat.



We arrived in St Vith to replace the units stationed there. The next 6 days were spent trying to keep warm, clear mine fields, mark off mine fields, and lay mine fields. 0 yes there was the so called screaming memies 88's, and two Buss Bombs ( which would fly as

long as they had fuel), and thank God each one had enough fuel to get a couple of miles behind us. The sound of that jet engine that close to you on the ground still can strike terror in your mind. I might mention at this time, that none of us had rubber boots, so wet leather shoes could cause frost bit, so when I would get a chance ( usually at night) I would take my dry pair of socks, which I carried under my "T" shirt and put the wet ones next to my body to let my body heat dry them for the next day. Something else that came to memory just the other day, when talking with my son and daughter in law about surviving in the snow and cold, was the fact that I carried a sufficient amount of folded toilet paper between my helmet liner and the steel helmet. This took care of necessities and also deadened the sound of the steel helmet.

In the early morning fog The battle of the Bulge started with shelling from their 88's and what might have been a railroad 14" gun.

There could be a book written about the time (between the 16th and the 19th of Dec.), however on one of these days, while in my jeep I was going to blow up the water purifying unit's equipment to avoid the German's getting it in tack. I came to a group of houses ( maybe 6 or 7, which might have had a name (not known). The *Germans* had reached the house *at* the far end of this group of houses. I made it *back* out of that area but got the back end of my jeep shot up.

On my way back to Hq, I picked up a wounded soldier, however some of the Germans had our uniforms, and spoke good English so I had my buddy that was with me, get into the back seat, but take the safety off and shoot the guy if he proved to be German. When he got in the jeep, he kneeled down in the front seat, facing the muzzle of my 45 machine gun. You have to realize that he had been shot through his rear end (both cheeks). His only remark was " I had my head down".

I remember that I had to report to G2 (I think), that the Germans had advanced that far, and big deal, he put a thumb tack on the map with the time and date.

Another day we had to cut some large pine trees (with nitro-starch wrapped around each tree). We set the explosive on one side of the trees to make the trees fall across the narrow road where the trees were the thickest. This was done to make the Tiger tanks slow up to climb up over them, thus giving our guys a chance to try and blow the track on the lead tank. One of our fellows (forgot his name) jumped upon the back of the lead tank and got a grenade into their vent pipe, even while the second Tiger tank was throwing machine gun fire all over the back of the lead tank. The disabled Tiger tank made a real good road block. I learned many years later that this fellow never got shot, that he lived through the war, and received a medal for his action. He is in a nursing home, someplace in Georgia.

I'll tell also about the time I was pinned down between two stone buildings and the rifle fire, as well as the shrapnel from the 88's, and mortars were ricocheting off the two buildings. I was laying in the snow and the hot pieces of shrapnel were hitting my helmet and melting in the snow, well as burning my field jacket.

I looked around for better protection, but this walkway went behind the two homes, and each had a wooden fence that I could only reach the top with my finger tips. I was loaded down with my Thompson Sub-Machine, two clips, both field jacket pockets were full of nitro-starch (explosive), with one hand grenade hanging in the lapel of my jacket, and

very heavy water soaked leather boots. The caps that are used to set off the nitro starch I always carried in my shirt pocket, next to my heart.

The wooden fence was finger tip high, I tried to get over the fence to get into a basement of one of the houses, after trying for some time, with no success. At this point I would like to explain what fear and your adrenaline can do for you. As I was making another attempt to scale this fence, the sound of a screaming memmie that was coming in near me was enough, the next thing I knew, I was on the other side of the fence without a scratch, and all of my gear in tack. I was also very fortunate that the Belgium people in the basement were friendly. When the shelling let up, these nice people offered to go out in their manure pile and get a potato, and make me some soup. After this shelling, I made another attempt to secure some supplies. I think this was the same day when I got hit with the hand grenade.

I was still in St Vith to try and secure some ammo, gas, and food, in this order of importance.

A German potato masher (hand grenade) exploded behind me, and I was struck in the back of the head. The steel helmet, helmet liner and a wool knit hat, saved my life,, as a part of my skull was crushed. This rendered me unconscious and totally blind.

One of my buddies Oakley E. Utter got the medics for me. Retrieved my steel helmet, reformed the helmet and wore it the rest of the Battle of The Bulge. Let me pause here a moment, and explain that Oakley was taken prisoner, escaped once and recaptured, and he swore my helmet did the trick. He went by the old rule (lightning never strikes twice in the same place).

Oakley not only used my helmet till he got out of service, but was able to bring it back to the states, and presented it to me at the first reunion of our outfit in New Jersey in 1947. There were approx. 1600 men in our Combat Engr. Bn., and at the time of the reunion we were only able to locate 118 men. There were about 24 fellows present at this first reunion. The thing that made this reunion so special to me, was the doctor and the two medics who sewed me up in Belgium were there, and they got to check me over (checking their handy work with their stitching). This also gave me the opportunity to thank each of them for saving my life.

Somewhere between Belgium and France, if my memory serves me well enough, I was on a stretcher with other wounded and the guy next to me was in worse shape than me, and I can remember laying my hand on his chest, and would holler for a medic when he stopped breathing. What happened next I don't recall.

While I was being tested by a doctor, and being blind I ask the doctor if everything else on me was working and he assured me, that I still had everything attached. I remember asking for the chaplain. The doctor told me that I wasn't dying, and he assured me again of my condition.

After the chaplain got there and kneeled next to me on the floor (I was still on a stretcher ), and while I held the cross in his lapel, the chaplain reassured me that when the doctor said something moved, all of my parts were in tack. I was then satisfied that I only had a hole in my head, and blind.

On Christmas eve the doctors and nurses advised me that I was in Paris France, and the only thing that I could tell for sure was that I was in a bed (not on a stretcher).

The Lord has blessed me many times, *and prayer works*. I will remember that day, and to my dying day, THAT CHRISTMAS morning when I saw that beautiful shade of GRAY, this meant to me, at that time, that from the total darkness, I could now tell which side of the room had windows ( and daylight). I never saw Paris, but it was a most glorious day for me.

55 Years has not diminished that feeling of seeing the *gray* that *CHRISTMAS* morning.

I was shipped back to a hospital in England, how long I was there I have no idea, I was then put aboard a hospital ship, that I think the name was (something like Meeny ), With all of the hand rails on the ship, I did learn how to get around with very little eye sight, and I could practice coordination between my hands and what I thought I was seeing by doing embroidery.

After arriving in the United States, I was shipped to a hospital in Memphis, Tenn. Where they operated on me, and installed a metal plate (tantalum, I think ) to replace the lost portion of the skull from the hand grenade. This was sometime before June the 22, 1945, because that is when they sent me home from the hospital. I was never sent to an Army base for separation from the Army or given proper medical care.

My brother was in the navy, and was in Kennedy's outfit (RO9 I think).. Anyway, my brother was shipped to the Phila. Navy Yard, at about the same time my best buddy had been released from a prison camp, and was back home in Royersford, Pa.

This gave me the opportunity to travel from my home in Illinois to visit both of them, you see it was very safe to hitch hike in those days.

When I got to the navy yard, my brother was on duty, so some seaman let me wait in my brother's quarters. Guess what, I was napping in his bunk, when two SP's pinned me to the bunk, thinking I was one of their prisoners of war that they had working on the base. Because I was still in my khakis, and bald head ( the hair had not grown out from my operation). They released me, after they took my brother off duty to acknowledge who I was.

While visiting my buddy Hub, we decided to go see New York City. We were both dressed in the khaki uniform, and I must add, everyone received us well. We took in Times Square, and happened to be in front of a theater featuring Charlie Barnett and his band. We were invited in to see the show, and enjoyed the music for free. We then went to Radio City Music Hall, and were invited into see Fred Waring and his band, on his radio broadcast. While sitting up front in the audience, Fred had a quest on stage, that happened to have been in our same division (- 106 - Inf.). While on the air Fred ask for our names, and ask us to join him, his staff, as his quest, to go to lunch.

He took us to Toot Shoor (spell?), where we were introduced to Ed Sullivan (TV star), and others that I cant remember. We were also invited to go to his summer home at some beach.

Since Hub and I only had the clothes on our backs, we felt it proper not to take up Fred's offer.

I was staying at my buddies home in Royersford, when he and some 4 others were going to Harry's drive inn ( soft drinks and juke box dancing). This was the first time that I met Dorothy S. Christman, After a very wonderful time I made a date with Dorothy, to go to Willow Grove amusement park near Phila.



We had a wonderful day at the park, and the next day I returned to Illinois, and found out from my parents that my brother was planning on getting married in Phila., so I went back out to visit my buddy and attend my brothers wedding. I should add at this point, that all of this traveling was done by thumbing it ( hitch hiking).

Of course I also went back to see *Dorothy*. To make this a real short story, my second date that *I* had with Dorothy, was to go to Elkton Md. And get married.

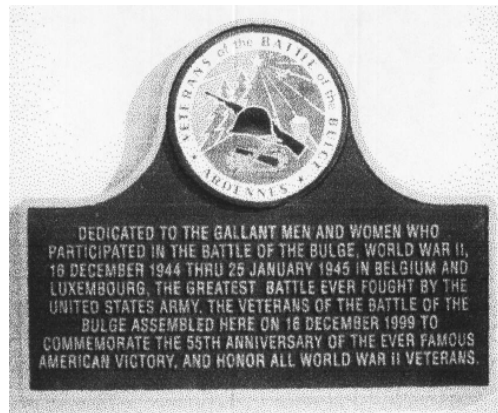
My brother's paper work was fouled up, that he was unable to get married in Phila, so I ask him and his: girl friend to join Dorothy and I, and go by train to Elkton MD, which they joined us, and we had a double wedding. The Lord has blessed us, from having two dates, and have a loving marriage from that day of August 9, 1945, and still happily Married, (by the way my brother is still married also).

We have been blessed with three children (2 daughters Dianne Kern, and Gail Phelps), one son ( Robert Lynn Stevenson). Seven grandchildren, and 4 great grandchildren.





I was part of a committee that got together and built a life size bronze statue in Eola Park, located in Orlando, Florida. This memorial was dedicated Dec. 16, 1999, which was the 55th anniversary of the Veterans Of Battle Of The Bulge, and was the first one like it in the United States.



This plaque and the picture above show how the division patches were embed into the base of the monument. An engraved brick (as pictured) was placed in the CIRCLE OF HONOR, which is the first three rows nearest the monument. This was done to honor those MEN and WOMEN who served in that great battle.





November 2000

Thank you for reading our story, and our hope for all of you to have a Merry Holiday season, and with the approaching of 2001, a very Happy Healthy new year.

**INDIANA**  
**MILITARY**  
*Organization*

*Page last revised*  
James D. West

[www.IndianaMilitary.org](http://www.IndianaMilitary.org)  
[jjmdwest@centurylink.net](mailto:jjmdwest@centurylink.net)