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Sweating It Out The Battle of The Bulge

Chapter 1 -- European Theater of Operations

I was sworn into the army at Fort Leavenworth, KS. March 1, 1943. I sold my transport truck during my subsequent seven-day furlough. I reported back the 7th and the night of the 12th, found myself getting off the Pullman train at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. At that time I didn't know Khaki's from OD's, a howitzer from a carbine or a General from a Sergeant and didn't care, now I know the difference and still don't care.

I was assigned to [HQ, Battery, 589 Field Artillery Battalion, 106th Infantry Division](#) and started to get used to such things as close order drill, reveille, retreat and being bossed around by some Non-com or Officer. On the fourth or fifth day at Jackson, I sprained my ankle and was told to help the supply Sergeant because I couldn't get around very well but could help him by typing, etc. The supply Sergeant was Sgt. Collins and was a nice guy. He later made Warrant Officer and was killed in a truck accident in France.

Nearly eleven months rolled by in Jackson, our outfit was getting pretty sharp with the 105 MM Howitzers, as for myself, I was still working in supply, had finally made T/5 and was carried on the T/O as a truck driver. Fort Jackson was close to Columbia, the capital of South Carolina. There wasn't much to do in that southern city, I guess the best part of my stay in Fort Jackson was the two furloughs that I drew.

In the latter part of January, 1944, we loaded all our belongings into our trucks and headed for Tennessee to pull maneuvers. For two months the red army fought the blue army all over those hills and no one ever seemed to win, sometimes we were red and sometimes we were blue. Out of those sixty days, I think it rained fifty-nine and was cloudy the remaining one. The principle thing we learned was how to be wet, hungry and miserable. I didn't think it could get any worse, but it did. The 26th and 78th Divisions were on the maneuvers with us.

On or about March 28, 1944, the Golden Lion Division, as we were called because of our shoulder patch, moved into barracks at [Camp Atterbury](#), Indiana, thirty-five miles southwest of Indianapolis. To most of us, it was just like coming back to the United States. If a man must be in the army, he should try to get stationed near Indianapolis, as that is really a soldier's town. Indianapolis took to the 106th and the 106th took to Indianapolis. Another nice feature about Atterbury, you could make Chicago on a weekend pass.

I got two furloughs at Atterbury, the last one for fifteen days, so didn't feel too badly when we were told we were going overseas. The last two weeks were a nightmare for supply, turning in property, drawing new clothes, packing and crating our equipment for overseas shipment and in general going mad in a maze of confusion, which seems to be S.O.P. (Standard Operating Procedure) in the army. We finished at last however and marched across camp to the railroad and boarded a army troop carrier for the journey to a secret destination, which turned out to be Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts,

between Boston and Providence, Rhode Island. We got off the train October 11, 1944, after coming through Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York.

We stayed at Camp Miles Standish a little over a month. Supply as usual was going crazy trying to keep a bunch of guys outfitted with the exact items of clothing and equipment required by the T/E (Table of Equipment). Seems like a soldier can lose everything but his head and he might lose that in combat. (That pun should have been lost also). With all the work however we found time for passes to Boston and Providence. The boys covered Boston like a blanket, from Scollay Square to the Old North Church and from the Latin Quarter to the Crawford House with Sally Keith appearing nightly.

Our stay in Standish came to an end on November 10th, we stepped off a train at Boston Harbor and after a lot of waiting, some coffee and doughnuts from the Red Cross and many apprehensive glances at a couple of big ships docked there. We walked up the gangplank of the S.S. Wakefield, or rather staggered up the gangplank. Did you ever try to walk carrying everything the army issued you?

The Wakefield, which was the converted former luxury liner, the S.S. Manhattan, was big to anyone and plenty big to me, a guy from the Midwest, who had never been in anything larger than a rowboat. My outfit was billeted on deck 4E, which was below the waterline; it was hot, stuffy, crowded and disagreeable. The ship pulled out about 4 o'clock. Many of the fellows were worrying about being seasick, I maintained that was a lot of foolishness, just a state of mind. Chow time came, I had to wait in line for nearly two hours, and the sea was rough. I finally got into the galley or kitchen. I had felt a little dizzy in the chow line but thought nothing of it. The galley was hot, the food smelled greasy. I looked around, saw several GI's leaning over a garbage barrel, that was all brother, I was seasick. The next day I was nearly normal and rather enjoyed the rest of the trip. The old Wakefield was fast and she was big, we went far south, I think we were as far south as the Carolina's before we really put out to sea. The ship was running entirely alone and of course in total darkness at night. I stayed on deck or topside, as the sailors would say, as much as possible. Quite a feeling to be way out there with nothing but water and more water to look at. At night the stars and black sea were beautiful. In the daytime I was impressed how slick and glassy the water looked except where the waves broke into giant white caps, sometimes the water looked blue and sometimes greenish black. We sailed for seven days and seven nights. On the seventh morning, the sister ship of the Wakefield, the Amsterdam caught up with us and ran off our port side for a long ways. Next thing that we knew, several British Korbetts came out to meet us and escort us into the Irish Sea. Soon we were sailing with Ireland on our left and Wales on our right. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief that we had encountered no submarines and were coming safely into our port of Liverpool, England.

We saw very little of Liverpool, darkness had set in before we disembarked and of course there was a total blackout everywhere. We were hustled onto an English train, (it was a dinky little rattler) and rode until early morning, arriving at Camp Reservoir, just outside of Gloucester, England. We spent ten days at Camp Reservoir. Once again, supply had its hands full because we had to receive and open all our equipment that we had packed so carefully at Camp Atterbury. I had time for only one pass in Gloucester, I liked the English people quite well, but thought they were a little reserved, a lot different from the French as we found out later on.

On November 29th, we drove across England to Weymouth on the coast and drove right into a L.S.T. type ship that was waiting for us. We were on the L.S.T. five days and

nights. We stood off shore at LaHarve, France for a long time, waiting for our turn to go in. When we did enter the harbor we sailed up the Seine River to Ruoen, docked on the beach and drove the trucks off, from then on we really made time. We drove across France, across Belgium and into position about twelve miles east of St. Vith, Belgium, to fire out on the Siegfried line. We were just inside the German border, near Schonberg. The night of December 9th, 1944, our howitzers put their opening rounds into the German positions. We had come from the United States to Germany and opened fire in twenty-nine days.

Having been assigned to the U.S. First Army, we relieved the 2nd Division in what was supposed to be a "quiet" holding sector. The weather was getting cold, we bedded down in some German houses and dugouts built by the 2nd Division. We had a log kitchen to eat in and in general were about to decide that combat wasn't so bad after all. Of course we had a little counter battery fire from the Germans now and then, but nothing very close. We thought we had this war made.

On the morning of December 16th, I was standing guard, gazing out toward Germany, thinking I'd be off shift at six o'clock. At 5:40, the eastern sky suddenly turned red and I could hear a tremendous artillery barrage shaping up but heard no incoming "mail" as yet. During this week we'd had a steady flow of buzz bombs coming over us. The Germans were trying to hit our supply dumps at Liege, Belgium, also you could see a few V-2's taking off for England. The buzz bomb or flying bomb sounds exactly like a heavy tractor motor in the air and at night you can see a stream of flame traveling across the sky at about the speed of an airplane. In the daytime when one comes over, it looks like an awkward little airplane roaring along. The V-2, taking off at night, looks like a shooting star in reverse. If you are real close you hear a loud swishing sound, so I am told. The artillery barrage that morning was the Germans jumping off on what is now called the "Belgium Bulge". Our division was thinly spread out along a twenty- seven mile front. The Germans spearheaded about twenty divisions through this area and soon overran our infantry. The 28th Division on our right flank suffered about the same fate.

After our infantry (the 422nd) was lost, we (the artillery) started giving ground, holding as long as we could, doing all the damage we could, fighting a delaying action. One of our firing batteries was cut off and captured in the first position. We were finally down to three howitzers out of the original twelve in the battalion. We were fighting more like infantry now, with carbines from foxholes. Near Vielsalm we were split up, part of us took the three howitzers and stayed to hold a vital crossroads as long as possible. As driver of the C.P. truck, I was with this bunch. We dug in at the "Crossroads" or "**Parker's Crossroads**", as it became known. We didn't have to wait very long until the Germans struck. With machine gun fire from prepared positions, we slaughtered them. Daylight found about fifteen running in, begging for mercy. The field that they had tried to cross had dead bodies laying everywhere. We held that crossroads for four days, those dopey Krauts would just keep coming in and our .50 caliber machineguns would mow them down. One came up real close to my foxhole with drawn gun in the morning fog and I nailed him with my carbine.

Shortly before the "Crossroads" had to be abandoned, I volunteered to drive a load of wounded men out of there so they could be cared for at a medical station. While I was getting my truck started and the snow cleaned off the windshield, it was struck with a mortar shell and put out of commission. I managed to get another one started, loaded the wounded and although under enemy fire, made it out of there. Because of this episode, I was later awarded the "Bronze Star".

Right after the crossroads affair, the weather turned fair and out came our air force, that was a sight to see. Thousands of planes in the sky, so many vapor trails that a clear, cold sky actually became cloudy. The Germans hit some with anti-aircraft fire, I think I saw five big planes come down. It is a matter of history now that the Germans timed their push while bad weather was forecast. The stormy weather came all right, but it didn't last long enough for their purpose. When the sky cleared on that December 24th, our air force caught them out in the open and really gave them the works. They smashed gun positions, knocked out tanks, and wrecked whole columns of trucks, guns and horse drawn equipment. They made those Krauts sorry they had ever left the protection of the Siegfried line.

The tide started to turn, the 106th was badly shattered. Official figures tell us 8663 persons were lost or over half of the entire division. Two regiments of our Infantry were gone, the 422nd and 423rd. The 589th Field Artillery had about 150 men left out of 500. The 591st and the 592nd Field Artillery, also the 424th Infantry weren't so badly hurt. We joined up with them and got back into the fight. What was left of the 589th and 590th stayed at a large Belgium chateau until we were assigned to our new jobs. This chateau was built like a fortress, it was as large as a big hotel and was extensively furnished. A Count and Countess lived there, I have forgotten their names. Buzz bombs were hitting in this area, some really close ones really shook this old chateau.

I was sent to the 592nd Field Artillery Battalion, and was assigned to the ammunition section of Battery "C". The 592nd was a 155 MM Howitzer outfit. The 155 is a big gun and a mighty fine one. The weather was bitter cold, I think I suffered more from the weather all through this winter than I did from the Germans. The ammunition or 5th section had the job of keeping the howitzers supplied with ammunition. We often got up two or three times at night to haul more out from the dumps to the guns. The projectile for a 155 weighs 95 pounds. When you load and unload a truck with these babies, you know you've done something.

I am not sure where the first position was with the 592nd, there was no town. I called it the "courtyard" because of some buildings laid out in that shape. We managed to live in one of these buildings and picked up a small stove that we carried everywhere we went. It seemed to put out more smoke than heat however. At this time we were moving back across Belgium towards Germany and rolling the Krauts ahead of us. Our next position was Fosse, Belgium. We had been called on to fire for the 82nd Airborne Division. They had just cleaned out Fosse and when the 82nd cleans out a town, it is clean. German soldiers were laying everywhere, frozen stiff in the snow, some were lying in the road, and our trucks smashed them to pieces. The 82nd added an ironic touch by standing one up against a fence in the position of a route marker. He had fallen with an arm outstretched and had hair a foot long, frozen as if the wind were blowing it straight out. These things are not very nice to write about but I see no reason to hide the facts of warfare. There were no buildings that we could get into at Fosse. In nearly zero weather, we dug holes in the ground, covered them over with logs, hay and dirt, then with plenty of hay and blankets inside, managed to sleep fairly warm.

From Fosse, we moved in succession to Grand Halleux, Petit Thier, and Elvange, all in Belgium and always driving toward Germany. We would fire from those positions until the Germans moved back out of range and then move up to a new spot. The maximum effective range of the 155 MM howitzer is about 15 miles. Our fire direction and gun crews were so good they could lay the shells in a doorway at that distance (so they

claimed). At Elvange we were told the situation was so well in hand that the 106th was going back to Ville-Aux-Tours, Belgium, to rest and reorganize. Ville-Aux-Tours turned out to be a nice little town, not far from Liege. We were assigned to live in houses as guests of the Belgium's, about four or five to a house. We arrived there on February 2nd, where I lived we called the folks, Pop and Mom. They treated us swell. Two granddaughters lived with them, about 15 and 18 years old, we had a lot of fun trying to talk to them, took the whole family to the GI movies and also threw a dance at the city hall. After five days at Ville-Aux-Tours, we were suddenly ordered back on line, without getting anything done about reorganizing.

We proceeded to Muringen, Belgium, arriving there February 7th. Muringen is just outside of Germany. We were again in a position to fire on the Siegfried line. We really dug in this time and were grouped close, not taking chances of a repetition of what happened December 16th, above St. Vith. We pounded away with our guns from Muringen, a month before the Germans finally broke and pulled out, then we rolled through the cement pill boxes and dragon teeth that comprised the vaunted Siegfried line. We had only gotten a short distance when we were again told to turn around and go back for the long awaited reorganization.

Our destination turned out to be St. Quentin, France. We arrived there March 16th. I was still with the 592nd. We were billeted in a shut down garment factory, right near the center of town. St. Quentin is a city of 50,000-75,000, I would judge. We had a fairly pleasant stay of two weeks but didn't accomplish anything. Next we made a long trip to an airfield near Rennes, France, arriving there April 3rd. I was returned to the 589th Field Artillery Battalion and we started to reorganize in earnest. I made T/4 and later S/Sgt. in supply. Rennes is a large city and we had quite a few passes, sampled their wine and champagne and forgot the war for awhile. For no apparent reason that I could see, we moved about 35 miles to an old French army camp, called Camp Coetquidan, near the village of Beignon. We had drawn pyramidal tents at Rennes, wherever we went, we set up a tent city. The tents, a portable generator, a radio or two in the battery and canvas cots to sleep on, made us feel we were at home in any forest or field that we cared to set up in-well, almost at home.

While at Camp Coetquidan, I was sent out with my 2 ½ ton G.M.C. truck and trailer to do some hauling for Division. I got to see more of France on my eight-day trip than I had seen in all my previous time in the E.T.O., traveled 1200 miles. I went from Rennes to Cherbourg on the coast, then to Ruoen, crossed the Seine River and followed it back up to the Signal Depot near LeHarve, from there I drove to Conde, near the Belgium border, just beyond Valenciennes, France. On the way back, I routed myself through Paris and took nearly two days off. Paris is big and Paris is gay, even with the war on. I took a sight-seeing bus tour around the city. The main spots of interest we viewed were L'Arc de Triomphe, Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame of Paris, Napoleon's Tomb and the Concorde. I left Paris on V-E Day, could hardly get out of town because of people dancing in the streets. On the way out, I drove through the historic city of Versailles.

When I got back to Camp Coetquidan, I found the outfit had moved. They had been called to Lorient, France, as the war was drawing to a close, to help the 66th Division clean out a pocket of Germans that was holding out in a large area and at St. Nazaire, in case they didn't heed the "give up" order when it came. I don't think this is commonly known, but several thousand Germans had been by-passed there. The Allies were content to let them alone as long as they didn't try to break out or start anything. When Germany quit, they gave up without any trouble to speak of and we were sent back to the same

spot at the Rennes airport that we had occupied previously. We were given credit for our third campaign star (The Battle of the Northern France) because of this little episode near Lorient. It was more or less a gift, especially for me, being in Paris part of the time. I figured we suffered enough in the "Bulge" to make up for it.

The other two stars were for the "Battle of the Rhineland" and the "Battle of the Ardennes". We hadn't been at the airport but a few days until we loaded up and took off for Germany. Highlights of the trip were coming through Rheims, passing by the famous cathedral located there, also passing through Luxembourg in the little country of Luxumbourg. Trier, Germany was the first big town that I had seen in Germany, it was badly wrecked by bombing and artillery fire. Since then I have seen Mayen and Coblenz, both flattened. When I remember the ruined cities in Belgium and France, I only feel regret that there is anything left standing in any part of Germany.

Our new "home" in Germany turns out to be a patch of woods about ten miles from Mayen. We had visions of living in houses or barracks, to cap it off, we are not allowed to live in our pyramidal tents. We are considered a new outfit now because of our numerous replacements and are supposed to need field training, so we store the large tents and live in pup tents. This is mighty hard for the ones of us who came through the "Bulge" to swallow, but we are sleeping on the ground in pup tents anyway. Did I hear something about the "Victorious Allied Armies"?

Anyway, right now, June 27th 1945, I am living in the woods of Germany, wondering what we are going to do, trying to figure out which rumor is true as to what category we are in and in general "Just Sweating It Out".

Chapter 2-Southwest Pacific

As above stated, I was training out in the woods of Germany in the early summer of 1945. We got out of the woods later and moved about in some small towns, checking civilian German homes for war materials, Nazi sympathizers, etc. We were at Mingleheim, July 16th, and at Sollinge from August 8th until September 11th .

Harry Truman became President of the United States on April 12th, 1945. He ordered the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6th, 1945 and on Nagasaki, August 9th. The Japanese saw the error of their ways and capitulated September 2nd, 1945.

THE WAR WAS OVER!!! We were ordered to Camp Lucky Strike, that was a camp to prepare for embarkation home. We arrived at Camp Lucky Strike September 13th, moved to LeHarve and boarded the USS Westpoint September 26th . The Westpoint was the peacetime luxury liner, America. We crossed the ocean and disembarked at New Port News ,Virginia on October 2nd, from there we went directly to Camp Patrick Henry. I left on October 5th and arrived at Camp Grant, Illinois on October 7th. I received a furlough October 8th to November 25th, returned to Camp Grant and received my discharge, November 27th at 10:30 A.M.

After nearly three years in the Army, I was a civilian again and it felt great. As I look back on that period of time, I have no regrets and I am proud that I was able to be of service to my country.

The End



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