

Robert K. Wineland

592 FA Medic

Breakthrough at the Schnee Eifel

Created on Wednesday, 10 April 2019 10:33 | Last Updated on Wednesday, 10 April 2019 11:04 | Written by Cpl Robert K WINELAND |

Breakthrough at the Schnee Eifel

The time is December 15, 1944. I am 20 years old, a first aid man with the 106th Infantry Division. We are just now taking up positions along the Siegfried Line - some of us are on the Belgian border, others are dug in amongst the dragon's teeth. We are in rugged mountainous terrain, and snowy grey clouds hang low- It is very cold. Ours is a young, untested division composed mostly of college kids. We have never been in combat.

December 16th was our first day on the line. The captain tells us: "*A German patrol has slipped through our lines-let's get them*". I was standing talking with two young soldiers. I left them saying I needed to get my hat: One minute later a Tiger Tank came over the hill and fired point blank at them. They were blasted to pieces and I put identification tags on each of them. Then the war really started for me.

December 17th, one day later. There was terrible fighting all yesterday and all last night there were flares floating out of the sky and artillery shells coming in. I learn that our Golden Lion Division, the brave 106th Infantry Division has been wiped out and most of my comrades have been killed or captured. Survivors are wandering, lost like me in the snowy ridges of the Schnee Eifel hiding by day, moving by night. Von Rundstedt's Wehrmacht has overrun our thinly held lines and now after just one day of battle my division no longer exists as a fighting unit!

Three days later: I am alone, lost in deep woods somewhere in the mountains. Cold, hungry, feet frozen, I wander into a small clearing in the evergreen forest of the Schnee Eifel. I am so tired and hungry, I am thinking about lying down in the snow and resting a while. I suddenly I see a most wonderful sight. Here are two paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne; submachine guns in their hands and fragmentation grenades hanging about their belts. These guys could stop anything and anybody. The top guy is a colonel. Looking at me, he tells his Sergeant. "*This soldier needs a lift - give him the bottle from the jeep*".

The Sergeant reaches into a canvas bag, hands me a tall bottle of green liquid. I take a long pull, and then several more. It bums all the way down and when I return the bottle it is more than half empty. But I am no longer cold or tired. I study a map with the colonel, then turn and head off alone into the woods. Several days later I link-up with some of my comrades. Together we make our way back to the lines just as General Patton's Armored Division, comes up to stop Von Rundstedt.

Ever since that meeting deep in the forest of the Ardennes, I have kept a borne of green chartreuse in my closet in memory of that snowy encounter and the two paratroopers who helped me keep going.

Source: The Bulge Bugle May 2013

<http://www.battleofthebulgememories.be/stories26/us-army25/931-breakthrough-at-the-schnee-eifel.html>
Henri REGISTER, webmaster