

Donald B. Prell

*2nd Platoon, Anti-Tank Company
422nd Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division*

July 7, 2005 There are already too many personal memoirs about World War II. So why another? I guess because my children have asked: "Dad tell us about what you did in WWII?" So, for what it's worth, here I go.....

When I was age 17 (June 1942), I started summer school at UCLA. On November 27, 1942 I enlisted as a Private in the Army Reserves Corps (ARC Advanced Course CAC, ROTC). (See Appendix [i]) My Medical Examination showed I was 69" tall and weighed 146 pounds. (See Appendix [ii]) It had me as 20/20 in both sight and hearing. There was a notation on the Physical Examination describing my "Flat Feet". The examiner chose to disclose the condition on the report, which later on was to come home to haunt me. He could have added, "Balding Head, Yes.", but he didn't.

On May 10th, 1943, I reported to Ft. Mac Arthur, California (SCU No. 1959, Reception Center) for active duty in the Army of the United States. Serial Number 19 131 821. (See Appendix [iii]) On May 14th, 1943 I reported to Camp Callan, California (just North of La Jolla) for Coast Artillery basic training. My Medical Record of that date made me one year older (incorrect year of birth was shown) and 1 & 1/2 inches taller 70 1/2".

This report showed: Feet Pes Planus 1st degree. Everything else on the report was NORMAL. (See Appendix [iv]) At Camp Callan I was assigned to B-53 AA TNG BN CA. (That's an Anti-Aircraft Training Battalion, Coast Artillery) Record indicates I was admitted to the Station Hospital on June 10th 1943, with a temperature of 101.2. After lots of Sulfa drugs, I was discharged from the hospital on June 17th. On June 18th, I was ordered to report to Orthopedic Out Patient Treatment Clinic for "flat feet, if necessary." (See Appendix [v] and [vi])

My "Return to Duty" report now stated: "Nasopharyngitis acute catarrhal" and "Pes Planus bilateral 2nd degree, non-symptomatic". (See Appendix [vii]).

At Camp Callan, privates in basic training were given an offer to take a competitive exam to attend West Point (through the West Point Prep School (USMAPS) at Amherst College in Massachusetts. I took the exam, and on July 1st, I was notified of my acceptance to attend the school. Arriving at the USMAPS in August (now a Corporal) I was given a "final" physical exam. During the physical exam, the Doctor asked me to jump up and down several times. While doing so, he looked at my feet. He then asked me to show him my shoes. I went to get them, but he followed me to where my clothes were. As I picked up my shoes he took one from me, reached into it and removed my arch support.

At that point, he knew and I knew, what was to come. The doctor told me I had "flat feet"

and therefore could not attend West Point.

I was sent to an ASTP center at City College of New York (CCNY).

The interviewer said he had never before faced the problem of reassigning a Corporal headed for West Point and asked me what I thought I would like to do. I suggested sending me to UCLA, which they did, August 30, 1943.

I entered school at UCLA in September. Although I don't have any records of that time, I believe it was in the ASTP. I was in the Army, and lived on Campus.



Could it have been that I was somehow back in the Coast Artillery ROTC?.

At the end of the semester at UCLA (March of 1944), our whole class (about 30 of us) boarded a train in downtown Los Angeles, and headed East to attend Coast Artillery Officer's Candidate School (OCS) at Camp Davis, North Carolina.

After several days, the train arrived in New Orleans, where we were informed the OCS at Camp Davis was being closed (too many Coast Artillery Officers --- no more were needed) so we were being re-routed to OCS at Fort Benning, Georgia (The Infantry School). As soon as we arrived, we were assigned to Class 333.

The next 90 days is another story (all to itself). About one-third of Class 333 graduated OCS on June 20, 1944. I now had a new set of "dog-tags" and a new serial number: O-551 911. After a two-week furlough (See Photograph of me in Appendix [viii]), I reported to the [106th Division, at Camp Atterbury, Indiana](#).

Because I had 90mm gun training, I was assigned to command the [2nd Platoon, Anti-Tank Company, 422nd Infantry Regiment](#).

Quoting from the 106th Division's web site: "The Division was activated in Fort Jackson, South Carolina on March 15, 1943.

After completing Tennessee Maneuvers in late March 1944 the Division was transferred to [Camp Atterbury](#) Indiana, near Columbus just south of Indianapolis, Indiana. While there the Division lost over 7,000 enlisted men and 600 officers who were sent to replacement depots. Many of the 106th men were sent to the Fort Meade, Maryland Replacement Depot and ended up in divisions that became a part of the invasion of Europe in June of 1944.

Over the summer of 1944 the Division was filled with replacements from other training units, the Army Air Corps, Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), Coast Artillery and AAA Artillery units and others." (End of quote.) On October 21, 1944 the 422nd and the 424th sailed from New York aboard the R.M.S Aquitania (See Appendix [ix]). (She was the sister ship of the "Mauritania", the ship on which my mother and dad sailed to Europe, in 1927.) This Cunard Liner had been converted from a passenger ship to a troop ship on November 21, 1939. With a displacement of 45,647 tons and a speed of 23 knots, she did not need an escort while sailing across the Atlantic (3600 miles) in less than seven days. In peacetime the ship accommodated 597 1st class, 614 2nd class, and 2,052 third class passengers. In October of 1944, there were over 6,000 of us aboard on our way to Scotland.

At the end of the first day at sea, I joined my fellow junior officers in the ship's dining room. White tablecloths, "Cunard" china, glassware, and flatware. We were even provided a glass of wine with the meal. The word "Posh" comes to mind. After dining, I went below to see how the men in my platoon were faring.

The outpouring of "gripes" was immediate. "We had the food slopped into our mess kit, all mixed together, and then with no place to sit, we had to stand at elevated thin benches, to eat our meal." I went to Captain Vitz, my Company Commander, to ask permission to take my meals with my men. "Lt. Prell, we are guests of the British navy, and we will accept their hospitality and not act in any way, which might embarrass them, Permission denied."

From the time we left New York, until we arrived in Greenock, Scotland (October 28th) the Division was one "Gigantic Poker (Crap) Game". I wouldn't doubt that several of our troops retired on the earnings made during that crossing.

After disembarking, the 422nd boarded trains in Glasgow and were taken to the Cotswold area of England. I was billeted in a Manor House in the village of Fairford. We spent the next several weeks in training and two days before Thanksgiving, I was given leave to travel to London to spend the holiday weekend. Needless to say, war and all, I immediately feel in love with London! (I know that is a whole other story.) The Division crossed over to France on December 6th, landing in Le Harve and then going directly the small Village of Yerville (population 2,000). Our bivouac area was nothing more than open fields, deep in mud, with cold drizzling rain.

That evening as my Platoon Sergeant and I sat talking, he asked me, "Lieutenant, how old are you?" (I was 20 and he was 32). I replied, "Not too far from you, Sergeant." He said, "I thought you were about my age, some of the men think you're a lot younger." At that time, I was already balding, which no doubt added a number of years to my age.

After a few days, as we were readying our units for the move to front, I was ordered to report to Regimental Headquarters, for a special assignment.

"Lt. Prell, your platoon is to place road guards at a number of critical points along the route from the town of Givet (France) to St. Vith (Belgium)." The route we were to take to get from Yerville to Givet was N29 to the N28 to Neufchatel. Then the N29 to Amiens.....Cambrai and Valenciennes. Then the N49 to Maubeuge and into Belgium to Philippeville. The regiment was to spend the night in the vicinity of Philippeville, and then move out at daybreak, headed for St. Vith. However, my platoon was not to stop in Philippeville, but was to go directly to Givet (which was back in a sliver of France) where I was to start placing road guards to be sure the troops went down the correct roads (and in the right direction). So with map in hand, I led my platoon on the road to Givet.

The rain had stopped, so the men would be able to set up pup tents (for the night) at each location along the route to St. Vith. Instructions were given for the men to be in place at sunrise, and to direct the column along the correct route.

They were told to wait to be picked up by us, after the last of the column passed their checkpoint.

Since the route went straight through Givet, I put out two men (who linked up with road guards from another unit) and instructed them to wave the troops straight ahead toward Wellin.

Then about 32km East of Givet, at the road junction at Wellin, a sergeant and two privates were instructed to direct the troops north toward Rochefort. Two more men were dropped off in Rochefort and three more in Marche, where the column was to be turned 90-degrees to the right on a road that went directly to La Roche-en-Ardenne.

In La Roche as we dropped off three more members of my platoon on the south side of the bridge over the Ourthe River, I said to my Platoon Sergeant, "This is where we will return and spend the night after we have dropped off the last of our road guards in St. Vith". I can't begin to describe the beauty of La Roche -- picture perfect -- a travel agent's dream. There were three of us in my jeep.....my driver, Tec 5 Ken Fielen (from Chicago), Sergeant Roger Phillips (from West Union, West Virginia) and me. We were making good time and the prospect of spending the end of the day in La Roche was enticing.

Another two men were dropped off on the north side of the bridge and another three where the road turned and led out of town toward Vielsalm. Two more men at the crossroads about 17km east of La Roche (the road goes straight through, but could cause trouble) and another two at the T-junction just south of Vielsalm to direct the troops north to Vielsalm. Then three more in Vielsalm to handle the 90-degree turn east to St. Vith.

In St. Vith we met up with the advance party and reported that the road guards were in place. I had one of 1-1/2-ton trucks return to Givet with a driver and one other man, with instructions to follow up after the last of the troops had cleared Givet and to pick up our men at the locations I had marked on a map. The remaining members of my platoon (with the other 1-1/2 -ton truck) were to remain in St. Vith until the next morning, when they were to return to La Roche and meet me at the bridge over the Ourthe River.

With all the road guards in place, we three happy tourists headed back to La Roche to find accommodations for the night -- hopefully to include a real bath and a good meal as well.

In the center of town, overlooking the river, we found a charming small hotel, where I booked us in for the night. We had our first hot bath in over a week...a fine meal, including wine, and real beds, with comforters to keep us warm.

The next morning, we got up and headed back along the route to check on how our road guards were doing. Everyone was up and in place, that is until we got to Marche, where we found the column was headed northeast toward the

village of Hotton. Sgt. Phillips jumped out and woke up a corporal and two privates who had overslept, and got them to direct the following units toward La Roche.

Meanwhile my driver and I raced ahead of the column (only a few units had actually passed the checkpoint) and turned them toward La Roche at Hotton.

By the time they arrived in La Roche, it was no problem for them to meld into the column crossing the bridge; and although they might have been questioning the fact that they were meeting other units coming in from the right, the distances were such that they were still very near the head of the column. When, the next day, I was called to Regimental Headquarters, I knew it was to arrange for my Court's Martial. Instead it was to congratulate me on the fine job my platoon accomplished! In 1948 I again visited La Roche-en-Ardenne. The charming village was no more.

Although rebuilding had begun, the place was a mess. I learned that early in January of 1945, American intelligence had found a number of German tanks in La Roche, so a flight of bombers was sent to eliminate them.....which was accomplished, but in doing so, the center of La Roche was almost completely destroyed. In 1994, Bette and I attended services in Bastogne commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Bulge. Again visiting La Roche, I found much of the charm had returned, but nowhere near what existed early in December of 1944.

So, on December 10th, with Lt. Prell leading the way, the men of the 106th arrived at the front to replace the U.S. 2nd Division on the line. This was the Schnee Eifel area of the German/Belgium border east of St.Vith, Belgium, and the 2nd Division was replaced man for man and gun for gun by the 106th. The normal coverage, for a Division on the front line, was approximately five miles. The 106th's positions extended for 21 miles and jutted out, like a thumb, into Germany in a salient extending approximately seven miles.

Quoting from the 106th Division's web site: "At that time, the average age of the men of the 106th was 22 years. On 16 December, 1944 the Germans launched their **ARDENNES OFFENSIVE**.

The 106th positioned in the Schnee Eifel salient was hit with their full force.

After three days the 422nd and 423rd Regiments were surrounded and completely cut off from the rest of the U.S. Army. The 424th Regiment, whose position was south of the 422nd and 423rd, were able to fight and withdraw. They joined the 112th Regiment of the 28th Division, who was in position just south of the them. The two regiments, the 424th of the 106th and the 112th of the 28th, formed a Regimental Combat Team. They were successful during the oncoming days of January to help repel the German forces from the former Allied positions. The battle which lasted from 16 December 1944 to 25 January 1945 was known in the U.S. Forces journals and history books as The Battle of the Bulge. European historians refer to the same battle as The ARDENNES OFFENSIVE.

The 106th Infantry Division, when they caught the brunt of the German Offensive on 16 December 1944: · Had been on the Continent only 15 days.

Had been in place in a "quiet" sector for orientation.

- Had the youngest troops (average age - 22) of any American Division on line.
- Had been in their new positions only five days.
- Had no prior warning that the Germans were going to attack.
- Occupied a front line that covered over three times the normal distance."

When my Regiment (the 422nd) replaced the regiment of the 2nd Division, my Platoon replaced the 2nd Platoon of the corresponding Regimental Anti-Tank Company. That put my platoon on the northern most position of any unit in our division. Looking out from where my 57mm guns were dug in, the ground fell away, and then rose again to a ridge about 1,500 yards away. Two of my guns pointed forward, the third was facing about 45 degrees to the left. The gun emplacements and the log-bunkers where we slept had been prepared by the men of the 2nd Division, and they were a work of art. There was a gap, between the 106th and the closest unit on our north, which was the 14th Cavalry Regiment.

The 14th was the northern most unit of the VIII Corps. Between the VIII and the V Corps was an area called the Losheim Gap, which turned out to be where the German Army chose to make their strongest attack.

This area is described by Colonel D. J. Judge: "Along the border between Germany and Belgium, there is only one region conducive to military movement.

It is 5 mile wide area known as the Losheim Gap, named for the Belgium town of Losheim. The area contains numerous valleys and steep hills supported by a limited road network. During World War I, German horse cavalry advanced westward through the gap and quickly reached the Meuse River. The same thing happened in 1940; Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's division sped through the Losheim Gap to gain the Meuse River and then push on to the English Channel."

So again, the German high command chose this area as the most likely to produce the results that had been achieved in the past. It seemed as if the allies had not read their history books. I certainly hadn't, and here I was, at the pivotal point, in both geography and in time.

What happened during the next few days? From the records of the division: Killed in Action: 417, Wounded in Action: 1,278, Died of Wounds: 53, POWs: 6,697(of which 6,500 eventually returned to military control after being captured in the ARDENNES OFFENSIVE).

There have been many accounts written about those few days. I doubt if any single one of them can adequately describe the events in a way that might carry the horrific impact we of the 106th Division experienced. I choose the following, because it was written by someone who, when the battle began, was only a short distance from me. When you read this account and you see references to the 422nd Inf, the Schnee Eifel, and Schoenberg, he is talking about me.

divisions with over 500 tanks and 1900 other guns (werfers) were moved in complete secrecy into this "quiet" front extending from Losheim on the border of Germany and Belgium on the north, then south along the Schnee Eifel and Our River to Ecternach in Luxembourg.

The U.S. had only one Corps (the VIIIth) with three divisions along this line - 106 Inf. Div with the 14th Cavalry Recon Regt attached, the 28 Inf. Div and Combat Command.

The VIII Corps on Dec. 16, with Headquarters at Bastogne, Belgium, was resting up and refitting after the surrender and capture of Brest, and the long march across France. The Corps had only a defensive mission of holding the "quiet front" while the main Allied fighting was occurring to the north.

We had been there for about two weeks when I was ordered to St. Vith, some 45 miles northeast of Bastogne, which was the HQ of the newly arrived 106th Infantry Division. As a supposed combat experienced staff officer, I was given the special duty to advise and consult with the 106th Division in its initial entry into the line of battle. The Div was to take over man for man the positions held by the Div it was replacing. The 14th Cavalry Regt, attached to the 106th, was on the left (north flank of VIII Corps), and held the sector of the Losheim Gap between the 99th Inf. Div and the 106th. Then came the 422nd, 423rd and 424th Inf. Regts. in that order on the Schnee Eifel, a snow covered ridge along the German border.

These three regiments occupied the same locations as their predecessors, which were German bunkers in the old Siegfried Line. Some of the supply roads along this high ground were subject to observation by the enemy and were fired on occasionally. I had visited these positions when occupied by the 2nd Div and realized the exposed position they were in.

South of the 106 Div was the 28th Inf. Div with the 110th, 111th, and 112th Regts, and then CCA of the 9th Armored Div along the west side of the Our River.

Some 60 - 70 miles of front thinly held.

The Battle of the Bulge started on the early morning of Saturday December 16th, 1944. On that day my Diary has this entry: "The Germans started shelling St. Vith at about 0400 this morning, and attacked all along our front at daylight. During the morning it appeared that the action was only a reconnaissance in force, but about noon we captured a series of orders from Rundstedt, through Modell to the 62nd Volksgrenadier Division, a new division on our front, indicating that the attack was a general offensive all along our line. The 116th Panzer Division was identified on the 106's right flank by the U.S. 28th Inf. Div. By 1430 hours the 14th Cav Group on our left was in general retreat. I went out to Andler (a strong point on the front manned by the 14th Cav Group in the Losheim Gap) to check the situation. It was discovered that the units of the 14th Cav were badly disorganized and in confused retreat as result of considerable pressure being put on them by the German 18th Grenadier Div reinforced with tanks. Andler fell later in the afternoon and Schoenberg is threatened. (Schoenberg is a key road junction on the supply route for the 422nd and 423rd Regts and the approach to St. Vith).

Gen Jones (commanding the 106th Inf. Div) debated whether to withdraw the 422nd and 423rd Regts from their positions in the Siegfried Line (on the Schnee Eifel) as their only line of retreat or withdrawal was through Schoenberg. VIII Corps promised that the 7th U.S. Armored Div would be here in the morning for reinforcement so he (Gen Jones) decided to hold.

VIII Corps also promised CCB of 9th Armored Div. "That was the entry in my diary, but I recall much more detail of the day's events.

During my visit to Andler it was discovered that our front along the Losheim Gap was falling apart. The strong points protecting the Gap had lost contact with each other and were in retreat. Death and destruction of equipment from the surprise attack by enemy tanks was evident everywhere and was still going on.

I was almost captured myself. The area east of Schoenberg was "crawling with Krauts" as we called them. The left flank of the 106th Div and the Corps was now exposed to attack by enemy forces, and we were out of contact with

U.S. First Army units on the north. But the center of the division, the two regiments on the Eifel and occupying the German Siegfried Line bunkers, had held firm and even repulsed one or two attacks.

Upon return to St. Vith after discovery of the breakthrough at Andler, reports from the 14th Cavalry confirmed that the Group was in full retreat and had abandoned its headquarters in the village of Manderfeld. The Colonel commanding the 14th Cav, (I won't mention his name because he was later relieved and court-martialed because of his unauthorized retreat), came to me seeking information of enemy forces and locations of elements of his own scattered forces. He described the bitter fighting in the border villages, Roth, Kobsheid, Auw, etc., the sudden appearance without warning of enemy tanks and infantry in a smashing attack early in the morning, and their confusion and retreat with what few vehicles they could get going on the icy and snow covered roads. Many troops were captured or left behind as the command structure was cut off, communication lost and men and equipment scattered in the cold and snow covered forest.

This utter confusion in the front ranks was participated in by me during my Andler trip, and it was real. Casualties were heavy, both in personnel and equipment, due to the suddenness and overwhelming force of the attack. The Colonel commanding, not having had any experience in combat and enjoying the "quiet front" positions for several days which he took over from his predecessor, to be suddenly awakened by an artillery barrage and then a tremendous tank and infantry attack on his entire front was at least unnerving, and the cause of what I concluded to be his "shell shocked" condition.

When the Col. made his report to Gen. Jones he was immediately sent to the rear, and Gen Jones called a meeting of his staff to decide what to do as a result of the collapse of his left flank.

From the information gained from the enemy that first day, however, and the captured documents from Genfeldmarshal Gerd Von Runstedt to Genfeldmarshal Walter Modell and the 62nd VG Div on our front, it was obvious that this was no reconnaissance in force but a general offensive all along the American line. The captured order was immediately sent back to VIII Corps and then on to SHAEF Headquarters. Gen. Eisenhower was as surprised as the front line soldier of the 106th, as it took him a while to accept the factualness of the Runstedt order, and have his staff confirm the order. But that's the way it was, and now the whole world knew that the Battle of the Bulge was on.

The collapse of the 14th Cav. on the left flank of the 106th Division left Gen. Jones in a precarious position. The division must have immediate reinforcement to protect the strong defensive positions of the regiments on the Eifel and to restore the situation on the left.

Gen. Jones had called a meeting of his staff, or a "council of war" to decide what to do about the collapse of the 14th Cavalry and the Schoenberg situation. With the information I had gained on my visit to the front, I was called upon to give a detailed briefing on the enemy situation and capabilities. The breakthrough of the 14th Cav positions in the Losheim Gap exposed the left flank of the division to a penetration from the northeast along the road from Manderfeld to Schoenberg, and the area to the north of St. Vith was uncertain, as we had no contact with front line units of the First Army to the north of us. The fall of the villages of Roth and Auw along the "Skyline Drive" behind the 422nd and 423rd Regts occupying the bunkers on the Schnee Eifel would allow the Germans to penetrate from the east to Schoenberg. Since Schoenberg was behind (to the west of) the two Regts it was a key road junction for their withdrawal. The terrain and road network was such that they could not be withdrawn except through Schoenberg.

Although we did not know the identities of the attacking enemy units at that time we did know from Modell's order that the Germans had massive tank forces and could capture Schoenberg as we had no defending force there.

The decision to hold the defensive positions on the Eifel or withdraw in face of the threat to Schoenberg was up to Gen. Jones. The day's standing order to all units had been to hold their positions. Reinforcements had already been requested and Corps Hqs was aware of the situation.

Before making his decision, Gen. Jones decided to call his boss, Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton, VIII Corps Commander, who, incidentally, was my boss also, and who had ordered me to St. Vith in the first place. In their phone conversation, which I was privy to, Gen. Middleton said that the 7th Armored Div. would be there (at St. Vith) by 0700 hours, and for Gen. Jones to hold his positions if possible.

After some further discussion Gen. Jones then turned to me and his G-3, a Lt. Col. Brock, and asked what we recommended. Now, the boy from Waverly and Humphreys County, Tennessee was on the spot. I was there because I had had more experience in combat than the others, and certainly had more knowledge of the present disastrous situation, both friendly and enemy, because of my earlier reconnaissance around Andler and Manderfeld. He wanted my opinion, and there I was about to help in making a history making decision, but I didn't know it at the time.

I was positive in my advice to Gen. Jones that if Schoenberg was overrun in tomorrow's fighting the two regiments would be cut off. The supply roads for the two regiments passed through Schoenberg and then west to St. Vith. If Schoenberg fell, and it most certainly would as there was no force there to defend it, the enemy would be behind the two regiments on the Eifel and they would have to fight their way out.

With regard to the 7th Armored Div being in St. Vith by 0700 hours tomorrow, I was really on the spot. The 7th Armd Div had recently been withdrawn from the Ninth Army and was somewhere to the north en-route to VIII Corps, perhaps around Vielsalm and Salmchateau some ten or twelve miles northwest of St. Vith which was some six or seven miles west of Schoenberg. And it was well known to any soldier with combat experience the difficulty of movement of military equipment at night with no lights in the Ardennes. The treacherous condition of the muddy, ice and snow covered roads in the area, and above all the confusion which now existed in the heat of battle among retreating and withdrawing forces, those trying to hold their positions, and remnants of those wiped out by the attack, made movement almost impossible. I told Gen. Jones that I doubted if the 7th Armd Div with its tanks and heavy equipment could move through this area under the present blackout conditions, in the dark of night and confused road situation existing as a result of the breakthrough to the north, to arrive at St. Vith by 0700 hours.

But Gen. Jones, in view of Gen. Middleton's promise of reinforcement by 0700 hours and order to "hold his positions if possible", decided to hold.

In retrospect I should have insisted that Gen. Jones at least start the movement of the 422nd and 423rd Regts back from the Eifel right now while we still were in communication with them, and be prepared to defend Schoenberg as a route of retreat if necessary. I was sure that the 7th Armd Div would not be in St. Vith by 0700 hours much less be able to stop the two pronged attack on Schoenberg from the northeast and east. Schoenberg had no defending forces, was the junction of roads coming from the northeast, east and south, then crossing the Our River and on west to St. Vith. But I would have had to disbelieve my own Commanding General and disregard his orders. That is one of the things you just don't do when at war.

Little did I know then that Gen. Jones' fateful decision to hold those positions would result in the loss of the two regiments.

The next day, Sunday December the 17th, the second day of the battle, dawned cold and cloudy with snow flurries occasionally. The weather was so bad that the Allied Air Forces were ineffective. The following entry was made in my Diary: "Sunday Dec. 17, 1944.

"The 7th Armored did not show up this morning and word was received that it would be noon before the first elements arrived. The Germans exerted pressure from the south (village of Bleialf) and took Schoenberg, thus surrounding and cutting off the 422nd and 423rd Regts. Since we had no communication with the regiments, I went out to check the situation at 0930 hours and discovered everyone in retreat west of Schoenberg. There were no infantry forces between Schoenberg and St. Vith. I communicated with Gen. Jones and gave him the situation. He said delay them as much as possible as Lt. Col. Riggs with the 81st and 168th Engineer Battalions was coming out to block the road to St. Vith. I took charge of an armored car with a 50-caliber machine gun and several jeeps with 30 caliber machine guns, and with this little force delayed the advancing tanks and infantry for the next 4 - 5 miles until Riggs came into position about 1530 or 1600 hours. We were face to face with the enemy as they came around bends in the road, placed as much fire on them as we could, and then retreated to the next bend. This would cause them to stop and reconnoiter before proceeding. On one occasion a German infantryman in a snowsuit stepped around a corner in the road just as I was easing around it myself.

He was as surprised as I and jumped back." "When we finally stopped them about I mile east of St. Vith on the other side of a hill they had 4 tanks at a bend in the road in plain view of my OP.

But we had no tank destroyers or tanks until it was dark and too late to take a shot. Our meager air support, because of the weather, strafed them after we gave the exact location and description, which disrupted them to some extent. Our Air reported 60 vehicles in the column, 10 of which were tanks." "After dark and the action subsided, I returned to HQ, made my report, and got some much needed food and sleep." The details of this second day of the Battle of the Bulge are very vivid in my memory. It was the day I came face to face with the enemy and acted like any other soldier would act under the circumstances to keep from being killed or captured.

When it was realized that the 7th Armored Div could not get to St. Vith that morning and reinforce the 106th, and our communications with the two regiments on the Eifel were cutoff, disaster was about to happen. Gen. Jones had no idea what the situation was on the Schoenberg front, nor did any one else at HQ.

Contact had been lost with the two regiments. They had strong positions and could defend themselves for a couple of days, but the troops had to have supplies and reinforcements to hold out for any length of time.

It was my job to keep the division advised of the enemy situation, and that was when I decided to go to Schoenberg myself and find out. I got in my Jeep with the driver at the wheel and we headed out toward Schoenberg. The road was frozen, snow was on the ground, but it was fairly clear. No troops were on the road as we left St. Vith, but soon I noticed some scattered stragglers and vehicles in retreat. It was obvious the enemy was only a few miles ahead. As we came to a sharp turn to the left the driver slowed down, stopped, and said, "Col, its awfully quiet around here and this looks suspicious. Maybe you better take a look around this curve before we go barging on." I got out and hugging the bank on the left side of the road I was easing myself around the curve when suddenly I saw a German soldier clad in a white cape or snow suit hugging the same bank and easing himself around the curve in my direction. We recognized each other immediately, and were so startled that we both turned and ran like hell. He was armed with a rifle but didn't use it. I was armed with a pistol but didn't try to shoot until after I shouted at my driver to turn the Jeep around and let's get out of here.

As we raced for cover, all hell seemed to break loose. The Germans now figured they had run into the enemy retreating from Schoenberg and laid down a heavy fire. Every fifth bullet in machine gun fire was a tracer and you could see where it was coming from and where it was going to. Soon we ran into some of our retreating forces and together we returned their fire as best we could.

Now I knew what the situation was. Schoenberg was captured and this was the point man of a German panzer force moving toward St. Vith. There was nothing to stop them. The 422nd and 423rd Regts were now surrounded and cut off Gen Jones must be advised. The Division Headquarters was exposed and subject to attack.

Among the forces we ran into as we moved back toward St. Vith seeking cover from that encounter at the curve, were some Signal Corps troops felling trees and retrieving telephone wire along side the road. We joined up with these forces and placed as much fire on the enemy as we could, knowing all the time that he was coming around our flanks - we could see an occasional white robed German soldier jump from cover to cover - and that we could not hold out for long.

Unbeknownst to me at the time of my encounter with the German soldier on the Schoenberg road, however, was that the division signal officer had been in Schoenberg early that morning as the German tank attack came down the Andler Road, and had pulled back to west of Heuem when Schoenberg fell.

In the book- ST VITH, Lion in the Way, by Col. R. Ernest Dupuy, published by The Infantry Journal Press, which reports all the action of the 106th Inf. Div in the Battle of The Bulge, there is a short article at page 66-67 which makes mention of this action on the Schoenberg Road, and is quoted as follows: "TWO LIEUTENANT COLONELS ON THE ST. VITH ROAD" "Up at Division forward switching central at Schoenberg early that morning was Lt. Col. Earle Williams, Division Signal Officer; with him was Master Sgt. Clyde F. Foster, wire chief. Enemy fire was falling in the village; the switchboard was frantically trying to clear traffic. Down the valley of the Our River from Andler came the German tanks.

"Williams ordered the board destroyed and its crew to clear out, then took off on the road with Sgt. Foster --- to Heuem. West of Heuem, --- (they) started felling trees for a road block.

"In the meantime another lieutenant colonel was reconnoitering along the Schoenberg Road. This was Slayden, Asst Corps G-2, mentioned previously, who at 10:00 AM started for the front to see for himself how matters were going.

"Slayden worked his way up through the west bound traffic, past the driven-in cavalrymen to near Heuem, began to receive hostile fire and turned back. At 11:45 he tapped the line, 1500 yards west of Heuem and told G-3: 'I'm the last man between St. Vith and Schoenberg. German infantry has reached the point where the road from Schoenberg turns north from the Our River. Artillery has one scout car and five jeeps here.

Could delay the enemy if we could get artillery fire.

"Division told Slayden the 81st Engrs. were coming up the road to prepare close in defense, and asked him to establish any delaying tactics he could." That was a pretty tall order for a staff officer who was used to telling others how to fight the enemy instead of doing it himself. But the whole command was in immediate danger if this enemy advance was not opposed.

***** Let me now interrupt Col. Slayden's story and come back to my own recollection of what happened the middle of December, 1944.

Note: To read the balance of Slayden's report log onto:

<http://www.grunts.net/wars/20thcentury/wwii/slayden/slayden1.html> The 106th had moved into position on December the 11th.

Here I was in a log bunker, warm and quite comfortable. The Lieutenant (of the 2nd Div. I had replaced), told me that we were the farthest, northernmost unit of the Division. He said: "there is a "Recon" outfit just over there (pointing), but I haven't met any of them, they seem to stay put." His men had built the log bunkers and gun emplacements, and he hoped I would enjoy them. Two of my guns pointed forward, the third was facing about 45 degrees to the left.

From our Company Headquarters back in Schlausenbach (see Map 1), hot meals were sent forwarded every day. It was cold, but it hadn't been snowing since we arrived. After all, we were relatively safe; this was to be a quiet part of the front. That is why they spread us out (side-by-side, and not the usual two regiments forward and one in reserve) across a front of over 21 miles. As was stated before "the normal coverage, for a Division on the front line, was approximately five miles. The 106th's positions extended for 21 miles and jugged out, like a thumb, into Germany in a salient extending approximately seven miles." What did I command? The Second Platoon of the Anti-tank Company of the 422nd had a compliment of 32 enlisted men and one officer (me). Three 57mm Anti-tank guns, three 1-1/2 ton trucks, and one Jeep (my command vehicle).

(The complete roster of my platoon is in Appendix [x] of this record.)

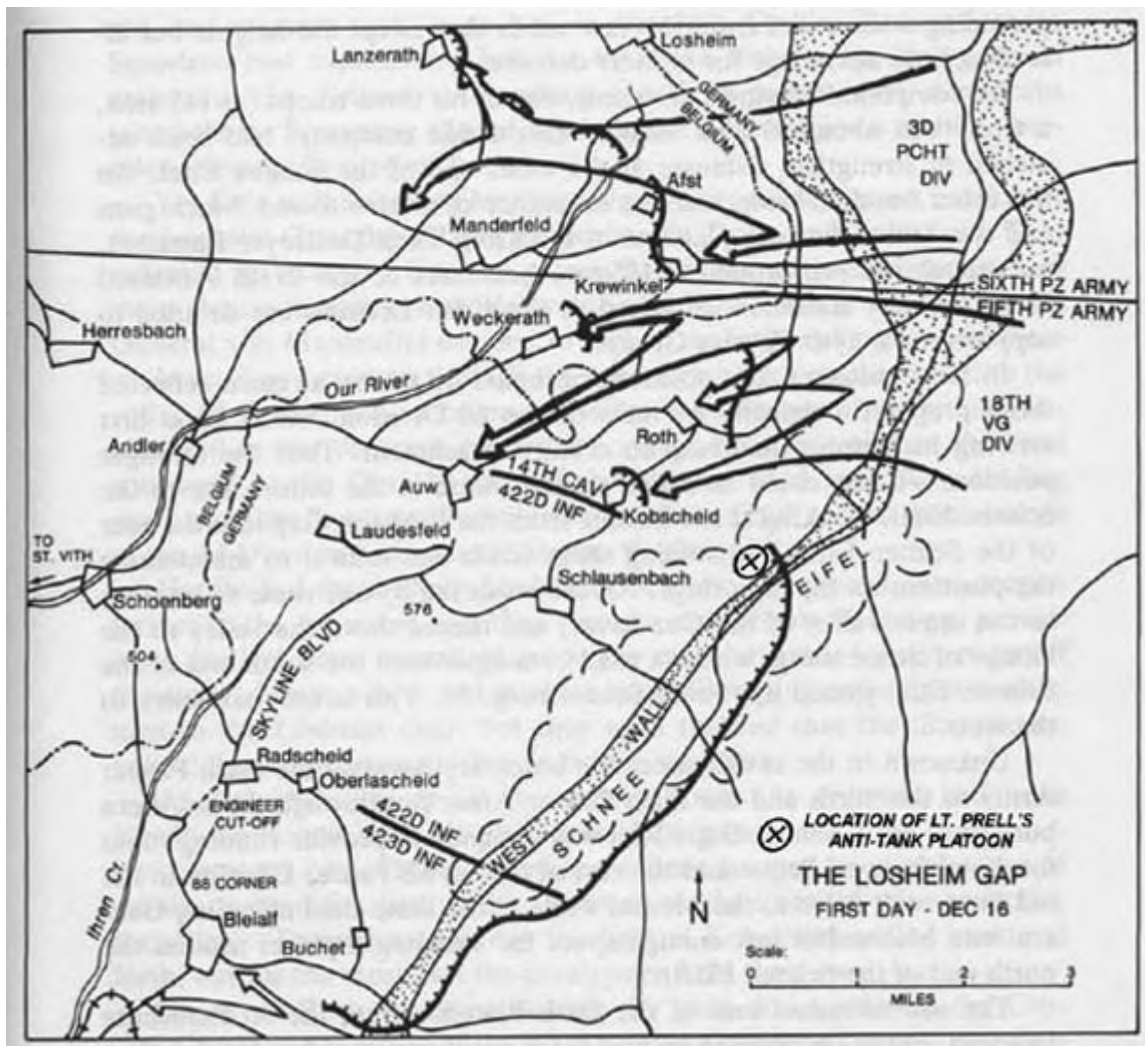
What did I know about our position and that of the enemy? Not very much! I had led our Division to St. Vith, so I had a pretty good idea of the town's size and location. We had passed through Schoenberg and Schlausenbach on our way up to the Schnee Eifel, but not more than that was known to me. I asked the officer I had replaced if he had any maps of the minefields in front of us, and he replied they had been laid sometime before he got into the line, and he was never given anything as to their location.

I got to know the officers of Company G, Second Battalion, 422nd as we had them dug in around us (see Map 1). The day was spent in cleaning our Anti-Tank guns and individual weapons; and estimating the distance to potential targets, in the event we had to use HE Shells (High Explosive) instead of APC Shells (Armor Piercing Cap). APC Shells were not too bad against heavy German Armor (Tigers and Panthers) if fired from an angle (See Report of 776 Tank Destroyer Battalion in Appendix [xi]). As I have pointed out, we were armed with three 57mm Guns. A muzzle diameter of 57mm is a little less than 2-1/2 inches.

(See Appendix [xii]). It is a small bore, compared to the 90mm the German's used. The British version of the 57mm was called the "6-Pounder AT Gun" (it had a "Crown" etched into the top of the gun's Breach). We did not bring our own guns from the states, we were supplied with the British ones when we arrived in England.

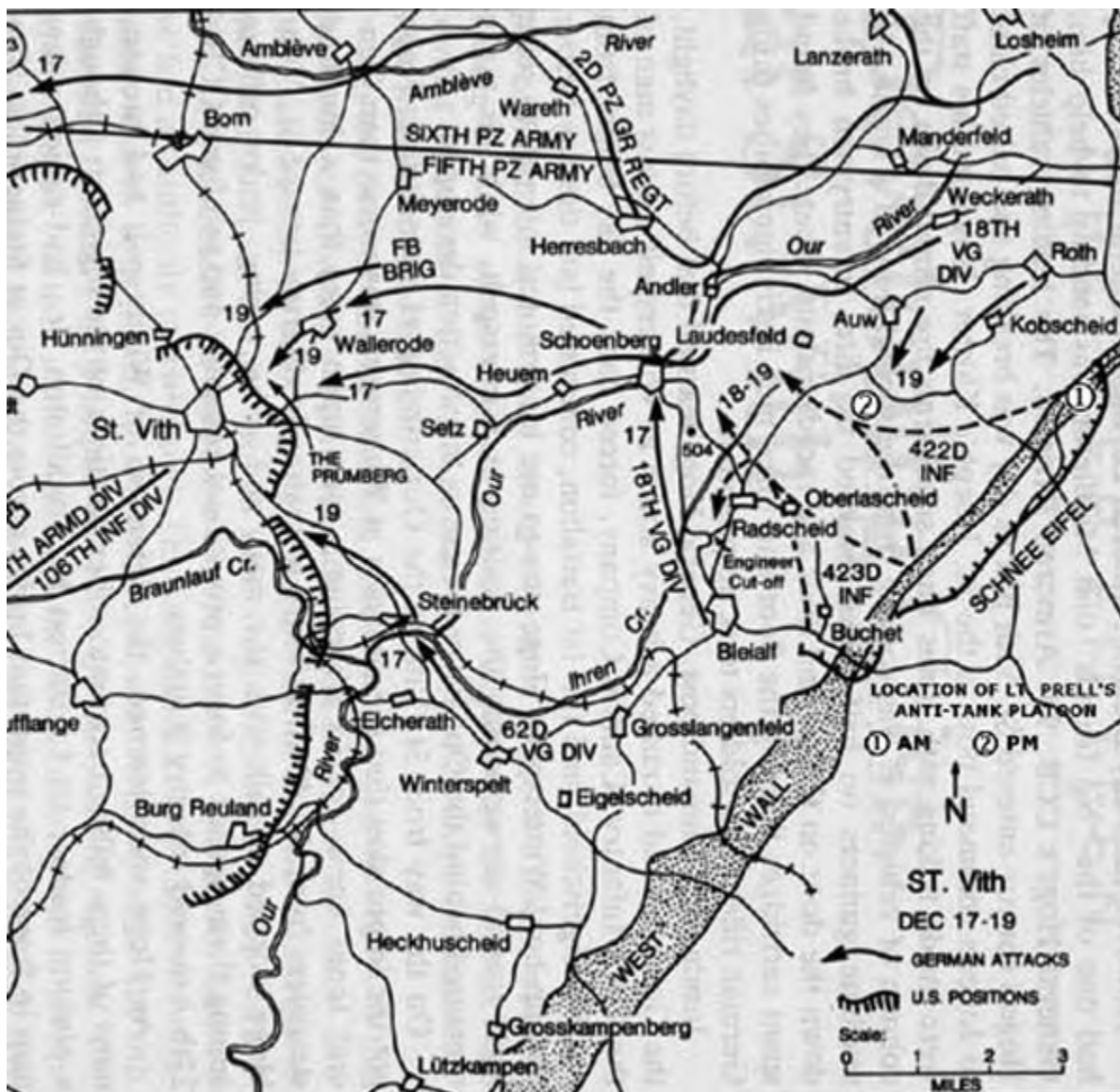
I awoke on the morning of December 16th with a shock. Sounds carry across open areas, and the sounds I heard coming from the north of my position were of tanks and artillery. The 2nd Division had laid telephone lines, and we

had connected to them. A call came in from company headquarters (CO HQ) alerting me to enemy action to the north of us. How do you spell adrenaline? Mine was pumping. I told Sergeant Phillips to alert the men and to take up gun positions in the event of an attack. (See Map 2)



MAP 2 15

By late that afternoon the sound of artillery was coming from the north, west and south. It was strange, as nothing came from where the Siegfried line lay just east of us. Then I received a call from CO HQ: "the Division is under heavy attack from both the north and south, so the 422nd will be pulling out in the morning (December 17th) and moving to a position where it can protect the northern flank of the Division." We were to move in an arc to the rear, using my platoon as the pivot point. (See Map 3).



MAP 3 16

You may want to return to Page 12, and reread the section of Colonel Slaydan's Diary, dealing with December 17th. Then read the following quotation from a memorandum written (September 25, 1945) by Colonel Joseph C. Matthews, Regimental Executive Officer of the 422nd during the Battle.

From: Lt. Col. Joseph C. Matthews AG & SF RS Miami Beach, Florida 25 September 1945 Memo to: Former Members of the 422d Inf:

1. Purpose. This bulletin is an attempt to furnish you with the available information on casualties, awards, etc. pertaining to the 422d Inf. and to bring you a message from your former Regimental Commander, Colonel Descheneaux, who is hospitalized in Fitzsimmons General Hospital, Denver, Colorado, as a result of tuberculosis, which he contracted while a POW. Please make this bulletin available to any former 422d men who may be near you.

2. Summary of Combat Operations. The 422d Inf. went into combat in the Schnee-Eifel Area of Germany on 10 December 1944. On 16 December, the regiment was hit by the German Ardennes counter-offensive, and was quickly cut off. Several sectors of the regimental zone received heavy artillery fire and ground attacks, all of which were repulsed. Co. "L" and CN Co. counter-attacked towards AUW on the afternoon of 16 December and prevented the Regimental CP, AT Co. and Cn Co. areas from being overrun. On the night of 17 December, 2d Bn was swung around facing north, to meet a threat from strong enemy forces which had outflanked us.

On 18 December, orders by radio from Division Headquarters directed the 422d Inf., in conjunction with the 423d Inf., to attack and destroy enemy forces at Schoenberg, and continue along the Schoolbag St. Vith road and clear the enemy from that road, which was originally our principal supply route. Meanwhile, the 7th and 9th Armored Divisions were committed in the vicinity of St. Vith, where the 106th Div. CP and other installations had been located, but they were unable to stop the German drive at that point.

The 422d Inf. made an extremely well executed cross-country withdrawal during the day and night of 18 December, to assembly position southeast of Schoolbag, and attacked towards Schoolbag on the morning of 19 December. They quickly came under small arms and artillery fire from several directions, and the 1st Bn, on the right, was attacked by tanks and part of the Bn was cut off and captured. The 2d and 3d Bns continued the attack towards Schoolbag and came under intense fire from several types of weapons of a large enemy antiaircraft unit, which inflicted heavy casualties and knocked out a number of our mortars and machine guns.

The 423d Inf. on our left had sustained heavy casualties, was badly disorganized, and later was almost entirely captured or surrendered.

In the afternoon of 19 December, having had no re-supply of food or ammunition, or evacuation of casualties for the past four days, Colonel Descheneaux decided to surrender that part of the regiment. Parts of the 1st Bn, Co "G", Co "H", and men from other units found their way to the Regimental Motor Park, and held out until 21 December. Co "L" escaped almost intact through the German encirclement, and moved west, but ran into enemy positions on the night of 20 December, and were captured after sustaining many casualties. The majority of the vehicles and personnel of Regt Hq Co, AT Co and Cn Co, which had remained in the assembly area, tried to force a way out to the west, but ran into mine fields and artillery fire and were captured or surrendered. All of the regiment was killed or captured except 9 officers and about 70 men. The regiment was re-constituted in France on 10 April 1945, and has since rejoined the 106th Division.

If you noticed on Map 1, the 1st Bn (including Co "G" and Co "H" were at about the same location as my platoon, when the battle began. On the morning of the 17th they began moving out. My Platoon stayed in position for at least an hour and then we began to pull our guns out of their emplacements. Our move west started at noon. It wasn't long before we reached the tail end of the column. It was slow going and after several miles we were ordered to dig into positions on the north facing side of the road. The men "bitched" like hell, having to dig into almost frozen soil, but they did the job, and we settled in for the night.

All the time, the sound of tanks, machine gun fire, and artillery fire, but so far nothing aimed at us. In the morning of the 18th, I could see enemy tanks and trucks moving on a road, along the ridge north of us. The distance wasn't all that far, and if I had been given the order to fire on them, I knew my guns would have been effective. But soon the units of the 1st Bn began moving west again. I was contacted by my Company Commander, and was told that the Regiment was moving toward Schoenberg, which was under attack. Also that the 7th Armored Division was on its way to relieve our Division. I was to remain in position until I received further orders. This made no sense to me as I would be separated from the rest of the regiment. We were about where the 2 in the circle is shown on Map 3. For several days now my men had been eating "C" rations heated on the cylinder blocks of their trucks. We still had a lot of "K" and "D" rations in case we needed them. (See Appendix [xiii] and [xiv]). It was cold, cold, cold.

On the morning of the 19th, I tried to radio Co.HQ, with no success. I sent Sgt. Phillips in my Jeep to see if he could make contact with the 1st or 2nd Bn or with our Co HQ. An hour later, he returned to inform me that the road running south from AUW (see Map 3) was a sea of German vehicles moving south. In plain English, we were cut off from the rest of our Regiment. Phillips said he had met up with a member of the 2nd Bn. who told him our regiment (422nd)

had surrendered. Well wasn't that just too much to stomach. Here I was, out here all alone, still hadn't fired a shot, and we have been told the 422nd had surrendered. I can't contact anyone by radio. What the hell, am I supposed to do? Our 57mm guns were still dug in (somewhat), and we could see the enemy on the far ridge. I told Sgt. Phillips, I'd be damned if I was going to be in this war and not fire a shot, so I instructed him to have the gunners, go after the vehicles moving along the road on the far ridge. A moment after we began firing, the Germans started shelling our position. One of their rounds hit a tree showering us with shrapnel. Several of us were hit, luckily no one was seriously wounded.

I called my four Sergeants together, and we agreed the situation was hopeless, unless we gave up trying to be an Anti-Tank Platoon, and instead became a Rifle Platoon, and got the hell out of there.

It didn't take long to remove and ditch the breach-blocks of our three 57mm guns, and to disable the vehicles. (See Appendix [xv]). "Light packs, take only "K" and "D" rations, and a single bandoleer of ammunition...we move out in ten minutes." I felt we should stay off the roads, and move west (cross-country) toward Schoenberg. After the war, I was to learn, it hadn't mattered which way we traveled, and sooner or later we would have run into elements of the 18th V.G.D. (Volksgranadier Division).

It was now afternoon and we were moving slowly through what was wooded, then open, then wooded, terrain. Tec5 Fielen and I out in front, followed by the First Squad in a wide Skirmish Line, then the Second and Third Squads in wide "V" formation, with Sergeant Phillips in the rear.

Light snow was falling, and it was not only very cold, it was beginning to become dark. Fielen and I were moving up a slope (in the open) when someone shouted something in German, followed by shots from an Infanterie Waffen Sturmgewehr (Infantry automatic rifle). (See Appendix [xvi]).

Before we could drop to the ground several of my men were "cut-down" by this gunfire. After we did drop to the ground, we were then "hit" by what seemed to be a hundred flashlights beamed at us. Well, maybe not hundred, but to me it seemed like a hundred. I had led my platoon into a bivouac area occupied by a German Engineer Company. Lucky for us they were an Engineer outfit and not the SS (or even Combat Infantry). At the time I wasn't sure who was more afraid...we or they...? I was sure that there was no way out. We stood up holding our hands high above us...and they accepted our surrender. Three of my men were dead and four others were wounded. Those of us who were not wounded were taken to a nearby road (it turned out to be the road running south from AUW (See Map 3) and from there, we were marched to Bleialf and on to Prüm (See Map 4).



(Note: When doing research on the Battle of the Bulge, I learned that the Engineer Company was probably part of the 1818 Engineer Battalion, 18th Volksgrenadier Division commanded by Oberst Hoffman-Schonborn. The 18th V.G.D. was part of the Fifth Panzer Army, commanded by General der Panzertruppen Hasso von Manteuffel. Yes, very lucky for me, because just north of us was the German Sixth Panzer Army, commanded by Oberstgruppenführer der Waffen-SS Josef ("Sepp") Dietrich. Under Dietrich was General Priess, commanding the 1st SS Panzer Corps. And under Priess was the infamous Kampfgruppe Joachim Peiper, commanding one of the 1st Panzer Division's Panzer regiments.

Quoting from *A Time for Trumpets*, by Charles B. MacDonald (New York: William and Morrow and Company, 1985):

Peiper received his orders for what his superiors called "the decisive role in the offensive" three days before the start of the attack from the commander of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, General Priess. In the course of the briefing, Priess passed along an order of the day from the Sixth Panzer Army's commander, General Dietrich, which reflected Hitler's exhortation to his senior commanders at the Adlerhorst. The offensive represented "the decisive hour of the German people" and thus was to be conducted with "a wave of terror and fright" and without "humane inhibitions." As Peiper himself later recalled the order, the German soldiers were to be reminded of "the innumerable German victims of the bombing terror." He was also "nearly certain" that "it was expressly stated that prisoners of war must be shot where the local conditions of combat should so require it." Although that proviso was incorporated into the Kampfgruppe's order for the attack, Peiper himself made no mention of it in his oral briefing to his commanders, for they "were all experienced officers to whom this was obvious." The word to kill prisoners nevertheless reached almost all subordinate units. One company commander enjoined his men to "fight in the old SS spirit," and added: "I am not giving you orders to shoot prisoners of war, but you are all well-trained SS soldiers. You know what you should do with prisoners without me telling you that." A private recalled that not only were they to take no prisoners but "civilians who show themselves on the streets or at the windows will be shot without mercy."

One noncommissioned officer urged his men to think of the thousands of German women and children buried in the rubble of German cities; then they would know "what you as SS men have to do in case you capture American soldiers." The offensive was aimed at "the murderers of our mothers, fathers, and children." Prüm turned out to be a collection point for those members of the 106th who had become POWs. On the morning of December 20th, we began

a march of 10 miles, to the town of Gerolstein, where there was a railhead. This was to be our introduction to what were known as "Forty and Eight" (forty men or eight horses), boxcars from World War I. (See Appendix [xvii]). The German guards counted us out into groups of sixty (not forty) and loaded us into these broken-down boxcars. As I remember, there were at least 25 boxcars, all lined up behind an antique engine, which was ready to pull the lot into Germany.

If I were to choose to chronicle the "one-week", which had the greatest effect on my life, the week of December 21st to 28th would be, that week. To describe the events, the emotions, the interpersonal relations, and the sheer enormity of what occurred, would fill a book. Father Cavanaugh, our Regimental Chaplain, wrote an account of that week and rather than copy it in detail, I will attach his story to this record. The following is my account, very brief and I trust unemotional. As soon as our group of "60" had been loaded into a boxcar, it became apparent that everyone would not be able to sit down at the same time. Someone shouted "I am a Lt. Colonel, does anyone outrank me? If not, I am in charge." No one did outrank him so he took over. He had us "count off" and after being assigned numbers, he had the "odds" sit down and the "evens" stand. We were to all stay clear of the sliding doors, where there was a slit where one could relieve one's self, when the need arose. We took count of how many canteens of water and field rations we had with us. (I had a canteen of water and two "D" rations. Some of the men had no water and no rations).

This was a group of 60 officers and enlisted men, all from the 106th Division. The highest rank in this boxcar was a Lt. Colonel. In addition we had several Majors, Captains, and Lieutenants. Closest to me was the 422nd's Chaplain, Father Paul Cavanaugh (a Jesuit priest from Cleveland, Ohio).

Sometime later that day, with a series of lurches, the train moved off on its journey into Germany. With frequent stops and starts the train moved east, and every two hours those sitting exchanged places with those standing. Strange as it may seem, there wasn't a lot of conversation. It was only after the war that I learned, this was the coldest winter ever recorded for this part of Germany.

It took two days to cover the 68 miles from Gerolstein to the railroad yards in Limburg (a town 22 miles east of Koblenz). It was late in the afternoon when we arrived in the Limburg marshalling yards. The guards began opening the boxcars one by one, allowing the occupants to jump down and relieve themselves, before being forced to climb back in the cars. I was in a boxcar toward the end of the train. As you will discover, the events soon to take place, delayed until the next morning, the opening of the door to my boxcar.

A summary of what happened is described in a RAF Report, (See page 24). As darkness fell, so did 61 tons of bombs, dropped by a flight of 50 RAF Mosquitos.

No one had bothered to inform the RAF that at 1805 hours on the 23rd of December, some 1400 Officers and Enlisted men from the 106th Division would be in boxcars in the middle of the marshaling yards in Limburg, Germany. The bombing proved to be quite accurate. (See the Photograph "Bombing 23 Dec '44" in Appendix [xviii]).



DIEZ/LIMBURG BOMBING 23 DEC '44

PHOTO COURTESY
WRIGHT-PATTERSON
AFB MUSEUM

Report of Air Night Operations, over LIMBERG Railway Centre, 23/24 Dec. 1944.

PART I PAGE 1:AIR OPERATIONS (HOME).

S.M.J.D.

23/24 DEC - NIGHT OPERATIONS.

157 aircraft were despatched on the following operations:-

22 on LIMBURG Railway Centre (22 Miles E. of KOBLENZ)	Mosquitos
15 on SIEGBURG Railway Centre (7 miles N.E. of BONN).	Mosquitos
7 on BREMEN, HANNOVER, OSNABRUCK and MUNSTER.	Mosquitos
27 on Bomber Support	27 Mosquitos 13 Stirlings 9 Halifaxes 5 Fortresses 5 Liberators
1 on Weather Reconnaissance	Mosquito

RESULTS.LIMBURG Railway Centre.

50 Mosquitos attacked, between 1805 and 1831 hours, dropping approximately 51 tons of H.E. (including 25 x 4,000 lb). and 24 x 250 lb. marker bombs in conditions variously reported as from nil to 7/10ths thin low strato-cumulus or haze.

The marking throughout was good and practically all the Main Force aircraft were able to bomb on the markers, and bombing appeared to have been well concentrated. Two good explosions and several fires were observed.

Very slight heavy flak was encountered.

SIEGBURG Railway Centre.

38 Mosquitos attacked, between 1728 and 1750 hours, dropping approximately 50 tons of H.E. bombs (including 19 x 4,000 lb) from between 23/27,500 feet in cloudless conditions but some ground haze.

The aircraft attacked either on their leaders or falling that, owing to approaching darkness, on navigational aids or bomb flashes. No accurate assessment of bombing results can be made.

Very slight heavy flak was encountered.

One Mosquito attacked COLOGNE dropping 1 x 4000 lb. H.E. bomb at 1738 hours.

The bombs came down with shrieking sounds, and as they impacted around us, all I remember is Father Cavanaugh's total calmness. It was all over in minutes, but at the time it seemed like an eternity.

East of Limburg we were loaded back into a new set of boxcars. During the trip to Bad Orb, we spent Christmas on the train. Then marched up the hill to the prison camp IXB at Bad Orb. Here the officers and enlisted men were separated

from one another. We were given a POW number; mine was 25563. After a short stay, the officers were moved 20 miles east to Oflag XIII-B, near Hammelburg.

Of all my memories dealing with the war, the most difficult for me to bring back into consciousness are the months during which, I was a Kriegsgefangen (POW) in [Oflag XIII-B](#), from early in January, 1945, until March 27th. Again I refer you to Father Cavanaugh's account. Although some of my recollections differ from his, overall his description of the camp and events are valid. (See page 96, 1/2 way down.) On March 27th a small force of US troops liberated the camp. This event has been the subject of several books, not only because the objective of the exercise was to release General Patton's son-in-law (Lt. Colonel Waters) from the camp but also because the "Raid" (as it has been called) came to such a disastrous conclusion.

"48 Hours to Hammelburg" by Charles Whiting (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970) "Raid! The Untold Story of Patton's Secret Mission", by Baron, Baum and Goldhurst (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1981) Of course, to his dying day, Patton denied having ordered the assault to free his son-in-law..... but those of us in the camp know the first words of the Officer in charge of the Task Force were: "Where is Colonel Walters".....! Patton told reporters (when asked about the affair) that he ordered the raid as a diversionary tactic.

The American POWs were given the choices of (1) climbing on the tanks and riding out on them, (2) staying in the camp and waiting to be freed, or (3) taking off cross-country on our own, trying to work our way to the American lines. It didn't take more than a minute for me to make my choice.

I and two other Kriegies gathered our meager belongings and took off cross-country (no way was I going to ride out on a tank....and no way was I going to stay in the camp). (At this point, Father Cavanaugh and I went our separate ways.) We three tried to work our way southwest from the camp. After several days we had made good progress, and were hiding in a wooded area a few hundred yards from a farmhouse. Tired and hungry, we drew "lots" to see which of us would visit the farm to try to find some food. It was at the break of day when the "chosen" one took off, skirting the field, between us, and the farmhouse. About an hour later, three German soldiers came up behind us, and we were POWs again.

We were separated from one another and in Würzburg, I was put on a coach train (with a Lieutenant as my guard) for the fifty-mile trip to a camp at Langwasser, a short distance south of Nuremberg. My guard was most cordial, giving me his name and address, so that we might be in contact after the war had ended.

The Camp was Stalag XIII-D -- Oflag 73 (for photographs and a description of the camp log onto: <http://home.t-online.de/home/RIJONUE/stalag.htm>) Within a day after arriving at this POW Camp, I became ill, and was sent to the camp hospital. I was kept there by an Australian doctor, while most of the POWs in the camp were "force marched" away (toward the east). A week later (mid- April) the German guards, just up and disappeared, and we were able to walk out of the front gate. The Australian doctor and I commandeered a motorcycle from a residence near the camp (I gave the owner a receipt from the US ARMY) and we took off going west (for, maybe a few hours) until we found troops from an American Armored Division. We were given some food and "petrol" and we then took off for Paris. At the time we were riding the motorcycle away from the camp, the Australian told me Russian POWs were in a nearby camp, and that if they got loose, there would be one hell of a riot. I learned later (after the war) when the Russians got out they more than just rioted, they created mayhem.

From Paris, I was sent to Camp Lucky Strike and on May 6th, I boarded a hospital ship, which arrived in New York on May the 17th (we were at sea when we were notified the war in Europe was over, VE Day, May the 8th). You can imagine the reception we received upon our arrival in New York.

<http://www.skylighters.org/special/cigcamps/cigintro.html> The day after arriving in New York, I was assigned to a Rehabilitation Center, located at the Biltmore Hotel in Montecito, California. I was allowed one week of "delay in route" before reporting to the Rehab-Center. The rail trip to the Los Angeles train station seemed as if it took forever to get there. Arriving in the late afternoon, I was met by my father. After a strong embrace and a series of hugs he asked me if I would like to do anything before going home. "Yes", I said, "could we stop by the Pacific Dining Car and have a New York cut steak?". We did and of course I couldn't finish it, but oh (!), did it taste, ever so wondrous....what a way to begin the task of erasing the memories of Hammelburg.

At the Rehab-Center all they did was feed us. In the Lobby they had installed several large refrigerators filled with cold cuts, milk, and all the makings of a "Dagwood Sandwich." By the end of the month, after gaining back the weight I had lost (twenty or more pounds) I was reassigned to the Headquarters of the Infantry Replacement Training Center (IRTC) at Camp Hood Texas. I took my brother Melvin's 1939 Ford, and drove it non-stop from LA to Killeen, Texas (50 miles southwest of Waco).

The IRTC was training Infantrymen for the planned invasion of Japan. I don't know why, but instead of assigning me to some Anti-Tank field outfit, the officer interviewing me asked if I would like to work for Lt. Colonel Howard. L. Shinaberger, the Camp's Adjutant General. "Oh, yes Sir," I replied and the next day, I had a new rank, and a new title: 1st Lieutenant Donald B. Prell. Asst. Adj. Gen. (Assistant Adjutant General).

What did I do for the next few months.....not very much. Every morning the first thing I did (after having breakfast and then morning coffee) was to sign the Daily Bulletin before it was "mimeographed" and distributed to all units of the IRTC.

Then after another morning coffee, I had my driver take me in my Jeep to inspect training. After lunch in the Officer's Mess, I would return to my office, where I was required to sign all sorts of important orders and other documents, which could only be executed by someone as important as I was.

When the war in the Pacific ended (VJ Day, August the 14th) the need for training Infantrymen for the invasion of Japan also ended. The Camp's Adjutant General and its Asst. Adj. Gen were now set to work, closing down the IRTC at Camp Hood, Texas. It took us a little over four months.

On November 26, 1945, I was given my "Separation" physical examination. (See Appendix [xix]). It showed that I had shrunk to a height of 61 inches. In the remarks section it was stated: "Anxiety state mild. Manifested by nervousness and tremulousness." Now I ask you, wouldn't you have all of that, if you were taking a physical to get out of the service? Yes, I still had my flat feet, and everything else was "Normal".

On January the 7th, 1946, Lt. Colonel Howard. L. Shinaberger signed my discharge papers (See Appendix [xx]) and I signed his papers. After exchanging documents, and saluting each other, we officially closed the IRTC at Camp Hood, Texas. It later reopened as Fort Hood, home of the 1st Cavalry Division.

My military career hadn't quite ended, then and there, as I soon joined the Army Reserves, and remained in the Reserves until 1960. At that time I was the ranking 1st Lieutenant in the US Army Reserves (I had been a 1st Lt. for 15 years). I was informed I had to become a Captain or I would need to retire.

Not wanting to take on the tremendous responsibility of being a Captain, I choose to leave the service. My papers are dated 29 January 1960 (See Appendix [xxi]).

No doubt this report is wanting, there were so many events and "vignettes" I have omitted. The chance meeting of Bud Mittenthal, Mort Granas and I at Fort Benning, in June of 1944. The payment of \$1.00 to the enlisted man offering me my first salute (after receiving my commission). And on and on and on.....



Source: Donald B. Prell 04/21/2018