

William H. Borst

106th Cavalry Recon (Mechanized)

Sgt 32 771 802

PH, BS, BS/OLC, BS/2 OLC, EAME/3, ETO, POW

One Soldier's Story – William H Borst

November 1944 – April 1945

Bill Borst died in November 1988 and except in the most general of terms, he never spoke of his experiences in The War, as is true with many other veterans. Nonetheless, with the recent finding of a German Map in his basement upon which a hand written diary is maintained of the 106th Recon's experience before, during and after their deployment in Grosslangenfeld during the Battle of the Bulge, his life as soldier and POW becomes understood and vivid. The following is an attempt to relate these circumstances and details to those who knew him best – his still living wife and two adult daughters.

- Information about battles and the prison camps is historical
- Personal experiences are provided by family sources and also by information found on a map detailing the travels of the POW's (obtained only recently)
- Information which seems logical, but is assumed, is noted

June 2015

THE MAP

"The Map" was discovered in the basement of William (Bill) Borst in Midland Park, New Jersey, after his death in 1988 by his grandson, Jamie Vermilyea. Bill Borst never spoke of the map nor ever shared many experiences of his time as a POW. Because of The Map we now know that he was a member of the 106th Infantry Division, 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized).

Footnote: The reconnaissance troop is the mobile reconnaissance agency available to the division commander and is employed by him to communicate details of hostile organization, strength, and dispositions, the characteristics of terrain, and other information upon which to base a plan of action.

At 29 years of age Bill Borst was a relatively old man when deployed to the Ardennes on December 11th 1944 ; the German offensive began just five days later on December 16th, and within three days after that he found himself, along with nearly 7,000 other members of the 106th Infantry Division, a POW. Nothing was heard from him or about him for months. He was listed as "Missing in Action" until May 8, 1945 (which was coincidentally VE Day) when his wife, Henrietta Borst, received word that Bill Borst was alive and was in a Brussels hospital.

Bill Borst didn't speak much about his POW experiences and since most of his military records were burned in a 1973 fire in St Louis, little could be learned from his military records either. However, with "The Map" and the information it contained, his life as a POW becomes much more vivid and clear.

Based on notations on the map, the chronicle was prepared by at least four survivors of the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop around the time of their liberation in mid-April 1945.

The map notations are faded and hard to read in some cases but are listed herein as accurately as possible in bold lettering and centered. Family memories are shared also in bold lettering and centered to help establish the time and place of Bill Borst's experiences.

The map upon which the writings are made was published in Berlin in 1938 and is of German Nazi origin for the Luftwaffe (LUFT-NAVIGATIONSKARTE). Cities and towns are in the German language. Notations are all in English and hand written. The Map measures 23 inches tall and 25 ½ inches wide.

FULL MAP VIEW



At the bottom of the map and centrally placed the notation reads:

**106th
RCN.TR**

Footnote: within the 106th Infantry Division were several component units including the 422, 423 and 424 Infantry Regiments, 81 Engineers Combat Battalion (which received a Distinguished Unit Citation for action in the Ardennes), 106 Signal Company, three Batteries (Battalions) of artillery and so forth. Within the 106th Infantry Division was also the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized) of which Bill Borst was a member and the contingent for which "The Map" was prepared. Thus, the abbreviation above "106th RCN.TR" stands for 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (Mechanized)

**FROM TIME CAPTURED TILL
LIBERTATED THE MEN WALKED
APPROX. 800 MILES
LOST APPROX. 45 LBS.**

Actually, in following The Map, travel from the Ardennes to Stalag IVB and then to Stalag VIII A was mostly by train and approximately 500 miles. The Forced March afterwards, which consisted of all walking, was approximately another 400 miles. The Map's purpose is to highlight the route traveled by the POWs – accurately emphasized above is that each soldier lost significant weight due to lack of food. POW's were first moved by train east to captivity in the Stalags and later they were marched back west to stay ahead of the Soviet advances.

MADE AT
HILDESHEIM
GERMANY
AIRFIELD



"The Map" was made at Hildesheim, Germany, which is 23 miles south of Hanover and in the area of liberation on April 13th, 1945.

To the left of this notation are two names with a star (★) beside each name. They are:

John Ulicni III (from Illinois) and
Carl Petrone N.J. (from New Jersey).

To the right of this notation are two other names. They are:

Edward Fleming III (from Illinois) and
Roy Mechling PA (from Pennsylvania).

The chronology begins along the left hand side of the map and then moves east (right) to the Ardennes.

Left States Nov 10, 44

Historical note: Starting on 7 October and continuing through 10 November, the 106th Infantry Division was moved out of camp Myles Standish in Taunton, Massachusetts in

four movements to the Oxford-Cheltenham vicinity in the south midlands of England. – (As they left November 10th, The 106th Recon would have been the last unit to leave camp Myles Standish. Departure was on the USS Wakefield.)

Hit High Seas Nov 11, 44

Landed in Liverpool Eng. Nov 17, 44

For the rest of November the 106th Recon obtained equipment and underwent training in England before shipping out.

Hit Eng. Chan
Dec 1. Sighted France
Returned to Eng – then
Returned & Landed at LeHarve, France
Dec 7-44



LeHarve – winter 1944-1945

Hit front lines Dec 12, 44

To be exact, they were deployed a few hours earlier on the evening of December 11th. The assigned area for the 106th Recon Troop was the German town of Grosslangenfeld and they were deployed between the 424th Infantry Regiment to their south and Troop B of the 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron to their north.

In their renowned book, "THE WAR-An Intimate History" Geoffrey Ward and Ken Burns speak of this moment in the Ardennes by saying: "The 28th and 4th divisions were in the line still recovering from combat. The 106th and the 99th, above the 28th, were newcomers to combat being gently introduced to what one former GI called "the milder elements of infantry warfare": observing, patrolling supplying.

In the early morning of 16 December 1944 at about 0530, soldiers of the 106th Division on the Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountain) Plateau received their baptism of fire. The Germans opened fire with over 2000 guns, ranging from 3-inch mortars to giant

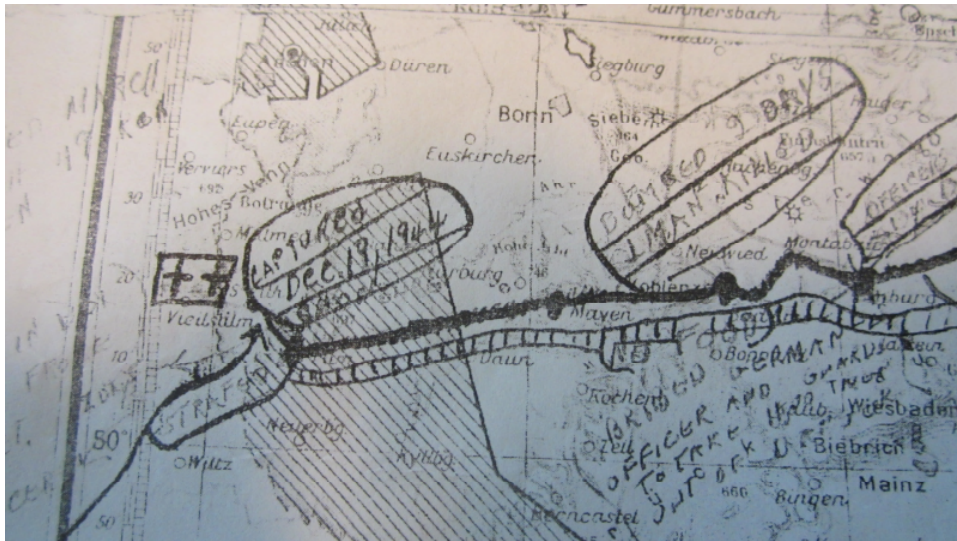
16-inch railway guns and hit the entire length of the American front in the Ardennes region. The bombardment caught the Americans both in the line and back at headquarters by complete surprise.

Notation from The Map:

5 men wounded
Plat (platoon) CP hit by arty (artillery)

(This would be the 2nd platoon command post of Lt Joseph Haines that was hit by artillery).

Many American units were cut off from each other and from headquarters because the shelling had ripped to pieces the phone lines that were hardly buried, if at all. This had the effect of causing much confusion among the units on the line and regimental and divisional headquarters. Fighting continued unit by unit usually led by junior officers but by 19 December the situation for the entire 106th Infantry Division had become desperate.



Continuing the writings on The Map:

CAPTURED
DECEMBER 19, 1944

This is an interesting note as it is circled and directly on the town of Malmedy – famous for the the massacre of 84 American soldiers two days earlier on 17 December.

STARTED MARCH
WITH 49 rcn
MEN

This notation suggests half the Recon Troop were captured together and the others individually.

FLEMING MECHLING
BUDED UP



Footnote: This would be T/5 Edward Fleming and Sgt. Roy Mechling (both authors of "The Map"). There are several researched references to marched and barracked POW's partnering with two or three other POW's for companionship. They would walk together, talk together, eat together and if necessary to stay warm, they would sleep together. They would share everything and usually be lifelong friends after the war.

Then there are three messages together:

STRAFED

LOST OFFICER
CAPT. TURNED YELLOW

(STAYED IN BOX
CARS FROZE
FEET)

Footnote: The POWs captured in the Bulge suffered enormously. They were in bad shape when captured, hungry and suffering from frostbite. Many died on the way to the camps. Stuck in boxcars for days, they were bombed by the Allies as they sat in rail sidings. It took a month for the POWs to be processed and placed in stalags. Conditions at the camps had only gotten worse as the war went on. They were overcrowded and the lack of food was becoming a crisis. Best estimates say that around 180 men of the 106th ID died in captivity. Noted author Kurt Vonnegut, a member of the 422nd, vividly described his experiences during the Bulge and as a POW in his classic work, Slaughterhouse Five.

The next four notions are near the town of Koblenz, Germany, after traveling 140 miles to the East by train:

BOMBED 2 DAYS
1 MAN KILLED
(NO FOOD)

Monday, December 25th. Christmas 1944 came and went without any food for Bill Borst and the other prisoners while traveling on the prison train.

BRIBED GERMAN
OFFICER AND GUARD
TO TAKE
OUT OF ___?___

OFFICERS KILLED
BY BOMBERS

The train continues east toward Poland. No indication of travel time but two more notations just north of Frankfurt:

(WEATHER COLD)

BY TRAIN TO 4-B

4-B can only be one thing – Stalag IV-B located 290 miles further east of Frankfurt near Dresden. The notations at this site read:

ARRIVED DEC 29
STAG IV-B

Ten days after capture and over 450 miles to the west, men of the 106th Cavalry Recon arrive at their first POW camp – Stalag IV-B. It is estimated that the 106th Cavalry was in Stalag IV-B only about two weeks – from 29 December to about 13 January before moving to Stalag VIII A.

Then the map notation:



There are four notations on "The Map" for Stalag VIII A and clearly Bill Borst and the rest of the men were suffering. Arriving by train in mid-January, Bill Borst and the men of the 106th Cavalry must have been some of the very last POW's to be placed in this camp. The Russians were coming, and conditions were deteriorating.

Food Situation
Bad

Several
More Men
Died

Stalag VIII A
31 Days

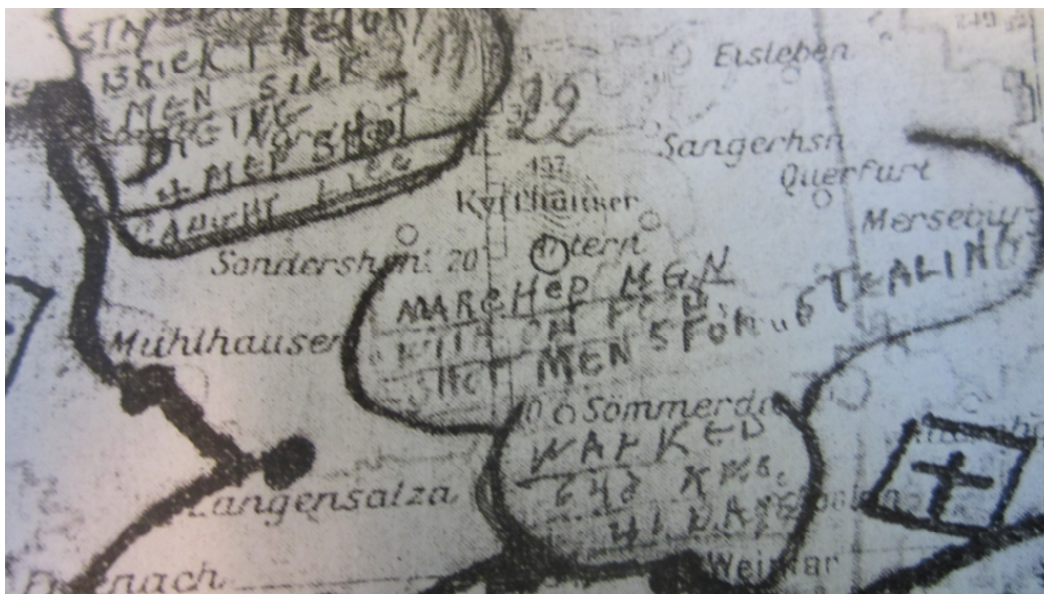
Left Feb 14
45

Footnote: Once at their permanent Stalags, the P.O.W.s' diet largely consisted of potatoes and moldy bread at least partially made from sawdust. Watery soup made with carrots or turnips was another staple

Footnote: The winter of 1944/45 was extremely cold, the ground frozen and covered with snow. By mid-January, heavy gunfire and bombs could distinctly be heard. The general expectation among the VIII A prisoners was that soon they would be liberated by the Russian army, a prospect not relished by many POWs, as the Russian soldier was an unknown quantity when it came to identifying POWs against German combatants.

Footnote: On the 22nd January 1945, on the orders of Adolf Hitler, all POW camps situated in eastern regions of Germany and occupied territories were ordered to evacuate their Stalags and march westwards away from the advancing Russian army.

The Hitler decree caused the remaining men of the 106th Cavalry to be ordered to move again. There are dots marked on The Map which may indicate the places reached on a daily basis. There are no notations on The Map for nearly 200 miles. But how the prisoners of the 106th were moved and lived is no historic secret.



The Map notations continue again near the town of Weimer, Germany.

MARCHED MEN
WITHOUT FOOD

SHOT MEN FOR STEALING

WALKED 642 KM
41 DAYS

At this point The Map shows the march turned sharply north and was heading directly toward Hanover. The next notation is five dots (days?) later.

STAYED AT BRICK FACTORY

POW's arrived at an old brick factory outside of Duderstadt. This was a large building, four floors, very cold and referred to as "a hell-hole". There were over 4,000 prisoners held in this building. There was one water pump outside, no toilet facilities. The floors were wood and the waste from those above seeped down to those below. The service diary of prisoner Robert Kline reported that two Americans and nine Russians were killed for lighting matches during a bombing raid at this location.

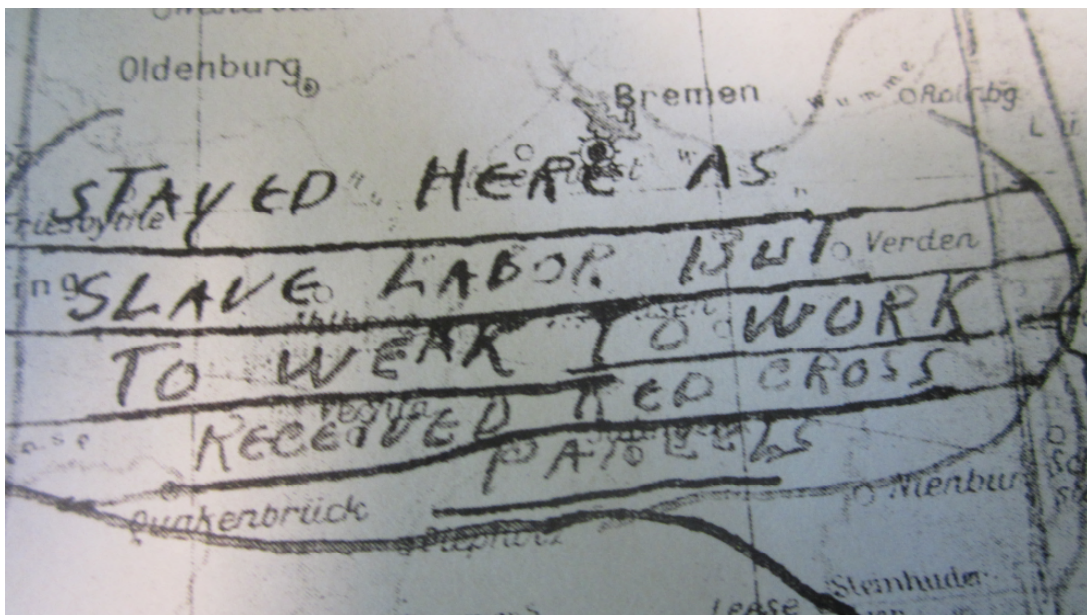
Continuing with map notations:

MEN SICK

4 MEN SHOT

CAUGHT LICE

And after an additional five dots (days) the march arrives in Braunschweig (Brunswick in English) and is near its final destination.



STAYED HERE AS
SLAVE LABOR BUT
TO WEAK TO WORK

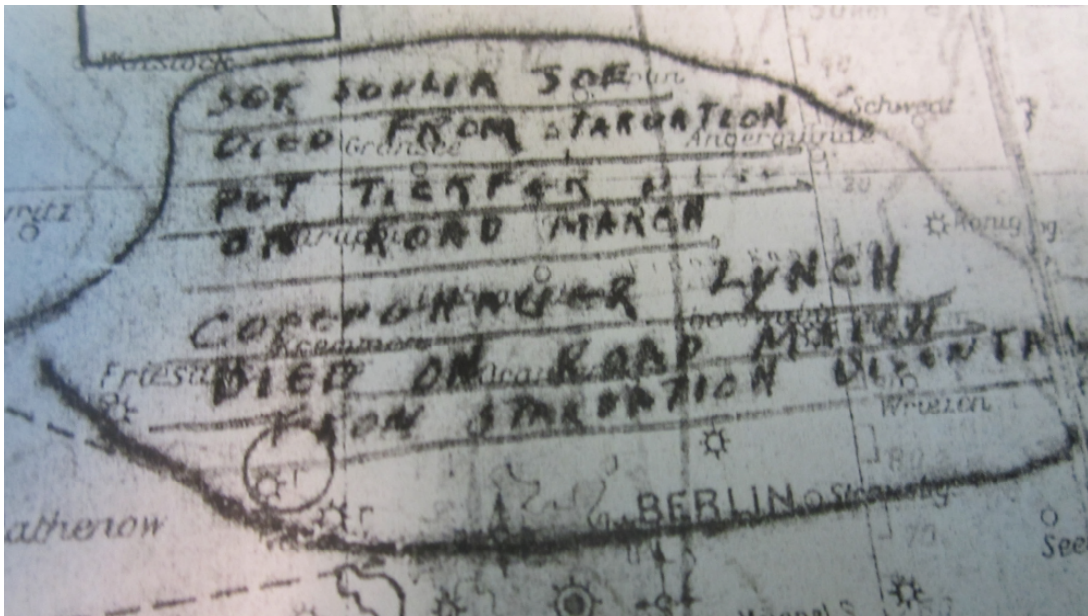
RECEIVED RED CROSS
PARCELS

ARRIVED

MAR 29

POW's from Stalag VIII-A begin arriving in Braunschweig (Brunswick) on March 24, 1945, with members of 106th Recon arriving March 29th. Braunschweig is a Kommando (work camp). They would be working on a roads and railroads that had been bombed. Most were sick and too weak to work. One POW described how things were, "I still have the diarrhea. I don't know of anyone that does not have it. It is making us all so weak we can hardly walk."

Now the Americans are closing in and the German guards move the prisoners again. Beginning April 9th the POW's left Braunschweig walking in an eastward direction to keep ahead of the American drive. The adjacent towns of Helmstedt and Horsingen were the final destination with all prisoners arriving by April 12th. Ending the 422 mile march from Stalag VIII-A in Gorlitz to Horsingen.



Then these notations on The Map:

SGT SOULIA JOE
DIED FROM STARVATION
(Sgt Joseph W Soulia 106th Recon Troop)

PVT TICKFER DIED ON ROAD MARCH
(T/5 Morris G Tickfer 106th Recon Troop)

T/4 Charles Copenhaver (mis-spelled)
"(T/4 Charles Kopenhagen, 106th Recon Troop)"
DIED ON ROAD MARCH
FROM STARVATION DYSENTERY

And finally, the long waited day.

HORSINGEN
LIBERATED
12:50 FRI 13
APRIL 82nd RANGERS
2ND ARMORED

The ordeal as a Prisoner of War is over. Liberated in Horsingen, Germany at 12:50PM, Friday, 13 April 1945.

The POW's in Helstedt were liberated that same day but a few hours earlier at 10:00 am.

SENT 1ST MSG
HOME FRI 13
44

The Map has a last notation off to the side and not along the line of march at the City of Magdeburg.

3400 civilians killed
JAN 16, 45

Footnote: On that day, there was an Allied air attack on the German city of Magdeburg by the [Royal Air Force](#). The RAF bombing raid on the night of 16 January 1945 destroyed much of the city. The official death toll was 16,000 people burned or suffocated from lack of oxygen or were poisoned by fumes in this attack.

For the remainder of its stay in Europe, the 106th Infantry Division handled POW enclosures and engaged in occupational duties. (An ironic duty assignment after the POW experiences of the 106th Recon). The Division was deactivated 2 October 1945.

But for the 106th Cavalry, as of Friday, April 13th, 1945 their war was over. Friday the 13th was not likely held as an unlucky day for men of the 106th from that day forward.

Footnote: The 106th Recon was liberated one day after the death of FDR.



A liberated prisoner of the 106th Infantry Division
Pvt James Watkins – 423rd Infantry Regiment

courtesy of the family of William Borst, specifically his wife and widow, Mrs. Henrietta Borst. Compiled by their Nephew, Mr. Edward Strand. 06/2015

Part 2

(At the time of this interview, Henrietta "Yetta" Borst lived in the Holland Christian Home in North Haledon, N.J. At now nearly 97 years of age, her eyesight is not as good as it use to be but her memory is sharp and clear and remarkably parallels referenced historical records.)

William ("Bill") Herbert Borst was born May 9th, 1915, in Jersey City, New Jersey, to parents William Herbert and Anna (Steenhuisen) Borst. (Interestingly, Bill Borst had the same full name as his father but was never referred to or ever used Jr.).

Bill began working for the Central Hanover Bank and Trust Company as a messenger boy while still in high school. He continued at the bank after graduation in 1933 from Ridgewood High School and also continued his education by taking night classes at City College of New York.

A lifelong member of the Reformed Church, Bill met his future wife, Henrietta Van Den Berg, in church one Sunday in Midland Park. As they both worked in NYC (she as a secretary to an import company) they rode the same train to and from work each day. One day Bill asked if he could give Henrietta a ride home from the train station and shortly after they started dating.

Bill and Henrietta ("Yetta") were married on Yetta's 24th birthday, October 9th, 1942.



Shortly afterwards Bill was able to obtain a job closer to home and was hired by E.R. Coven Mortgage Company on Hamilton Street in Paterson, N.J. Yetta also changed jobs and found work as a secretary for an insurance company in Midland Park typing insurance policies. They often went on family trips to Bear Mountain where hiking, cook-outs and roller skating were the activities of the day.



Bear Mountain



But world events were catching up with the young family. Uncle Sam sent a draft notice and in March 1943 Bill joined the Army – he was just shy of his 28th birthday. Yetta moved back home and lived with her parents, Cora and Jacob Van Den Berg and sister Clarissa (brother Jake had already joined the Army and left home). Bill's first duty station was Ft Jackson, in Columbia, S.C., where he went through basic and advanced training with the 106th Infantry Division.



Basic Training Ft Jackson, S.C.

After communications training at Ft. Riley, Kansas, Bill participated in multi-division maneuvers in Tennessee. He told Yetta that Tennessee was a very pretty state and that he loved it with so many sheep farms and friendly people.

The division was next moved to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, for specialized training.



Camp Atterbury, Indiana

After several weeks of advanced training at Camp Atterbury, the 106th was ready for deployment. In the fall of 1944 they packed and headed to their departure station which was Ft Myles Standish, Massachusetts. But there was one more family matter to deal with before final deployment to Europe, Bill Borst was headed overseas a father. On September 5th, 1944, Bill's oldest daughter (Carol) was born.



Bill Borst and twelve day old Carol. Notice on Bill's left shoulder the patch for "The Golden Lions" and Corporal Tech 5 chevrons

Yetta recalls that Bill traveled each weekend from Ft Myles Standish to Midland Park to see Carol and Yetta prior to being shipped out on November 10th to Cotswolds, England.



Bill and Yetta Borst R&R at Camp Myles Standish. One month before Bill's Division is shipped out to England.

Bill Borst the Person (continued)
Yetta's war memories about Bill

- I knew Bill went to England and then France but I didn't really understand what he did
- After the Battle of the Bulge I received a telegram that he was MIA (missing-in-action). Some time later I got an update that he was still listed as MIA.

- We knew nothing else until VE Day (8 May 1945 and also one day before Bill's 30th birthday). That day a Western Union telegram was delivered saying Bill was alive and in a hospital in Brussels. Coincidentally, that same day Bill's mother, Anna, received a letter from the Red Cross that he had been a POW.
- When Bill finally got home the Army gave him a 2 week leave. We went to a hotel in Atlantic City ("I think it was The Dennison Hotel") which was especially for ex-POWs and their wives. It was a very nice time.

After the war Bill spoke very little about his time as a POW. But this is what Yetta recalls:

- Bill said that the German soldiers who captured them were actually nice. One of them said in English, "Anybody from Chicago? I have a cousin in Chicago." But the guards on the train were SS and they "weren't the same."
- He said they were cold a lot and not much food. They often only had potatoes if they were lucky. They marched all the time he said.
- Once they marched to a farmhouse and one of the soldiers stole a piece of leather. The guards announced they would start shooting prisoners until the thief confessed. The thief stepped forward and was taken away – but they let him go and nobody was shot. (The Map has two references to prisoners stealing near Weimar, Germany, while on The Forced March. In both cases they were all shot. This is either a different incident of stealing or Bill Borst was shielding Yetta from the violence of the Forced March.)
- I think Bill said the Russians liberated them (on April 13th) but I'm not sure. (It was actually the 82nd Armored Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2nd Armored Division who liberated Bill Borst in Hosingen).
- After Bill was released from the hospital in Brussels they didn't have any American uniforms to give him so they gave him a Canadian uniform. Plus he had lost weight so he looked quite different. He was walking down the street and saw some sailors walking toward him. One was staring at him and Bill stared back – it was someone he knew. It was Adrian Van Zweden, a boyhood acquaintance from New Jersey. 70 years later, that same Adrian Van Zweden is currently a resident in the Holland Christian Home with Yetta Borst.
- After being hospitalized in Brussels, Bill returned home in June and we had a long furlough together. His last military assignment was in Atlantic City. There he helped returning veterans with paperwork and forms and doing their taxes until his discharge late that year.

Getting back to normal:

- After the war Bill went back to work for E.R. Coven. He transferred to the Clifton, NJ, office and eventually rose to become Vice President. He retired in the 1970's.
- He had no permanent damage to his frozen feet (from the 400 mile Road March as a POW but the damage was severe enough to earn him The Purple Heart Medal.)
- Bill and Yetta had two more children. Their second daughter, Susan, was born October 20, 1946, and their third daughter, Cathy, was born January 11, 1950.
- Bill always liked his pipe, both before and after the Army. In fact, Yetta recalls that sometimes while Bill was driving the car he would ask her to light it for him.



Bill and his pipe with Tyson and granddaughter Lindsay

- Before getting married Bill had a dog – a German shepherd. After that he only had collies – Prince, Sandy and Laddie were among his favorites.



Bill and Prince

- Bill never spoke of The Map or who put it together.
- Bill stayed in touch with a couple men of the 106th – Bill Tower and Frank Valvano. He attended one reunion of the 106th with Yetta some years ago in Madeira Beach, Florida, at the Holiday Inn (Perhaps this is when The Map was distributed to him?)
- Bill Borst died November 22, 1988.

Remembering Bill Borst:

To everyone, Bill was an easy person to like. He was always calm and quietly in control while possessing a warm smile. He was never one to anger or raise his voice. Yet in his 115 days of captivity by the Waffen SS he was made to endure awful hardships and saw terrible acts of cruelty.

Yetta was asked, "Did Bill have any hatred for the Germans or the prison guards? How did he deal with it?"

"Bill never talked about hating the Germans. In fact, he never talked about hating anybody. He really came back home the way he left."

That's the way he was, just a nice guy.

June 2015 ems

Part 3

Some early historical accounts on the performance of the 106th Cavalry Recon Troop are not favorable. An example: "(On 16 December) the collapse of the 106th Reconnaissance Troop at Grosslangenfeld, just over a mile to the North, allowed another German force to advance on Eigelscheid from that direction."

Below is an account on how the 106TH Cavalry Recon Troop's portion of the battle actually was waged by an eyewitness and a participant, Lt Joseph C Haines. The penetration of so many German units through the American lines in the area of Grosslangenfeld on 16 December created the assumption that defenses of the 106th Recon had disintegrated. They had not. Bypassed by many other units, Grosslangenfeld was attacked by two regiments of the 62nd Volksgrenadier Division – the 190th and the 164th. 106th Recon held Grosslangenfeld until the afternoon of 17 December when ammunition was exhausted and they pulled out.

Two of the corroborators of the 106th Cavalry Recon Troop's performance referenced in the Haines account are Edward Fleming and Roy Mechling. The same Edward Fleming and Roy Mechling listed as authors on The Map in Part 1. Their names have been highlighted for quick and easy reference in the following account.

Additionally, Yetta Borst met and knows three additional soldiers referenced in this account – Bill Tower, Art LaCroix and Bill Selje. Their names are highlighted as well.

Footnote:

The six officers of the 106th Cavalry Recon Troop on 16 December 1944
HQ Capt. Paul Million became a POW in Stalag 9-B,
HQ Lt George Vaream was a POW & died in Stalag 9-B,
HQ Lt Leonard Prosnick was a victim of an accidental aircraft bombing
1st Platoon Lt Edward McGee was a POW in Stalag 9-B,
2nd Platoon Lt Joseph Haines was a POW in Stalag 9-B,
3rd Platoon Lt Myron Johnstone was a POW in Stalag 13-B

June 2015 ems

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED AT GROSSLANGENFELD, GERMANY

December 16-18, 1944

Lt Joseph C. Haines

2nd Platoon 106th Recon Troop

Published Source: Bulge Bugle November 2002

Since World War II, I have read numerous accounts about the Battle of the Bulge detailing what happened to the various units positioned along the Siegfried Line between Belgium and Germany. None of these accounts that mention our 106th Recon Troop relate the truth about what really happened at Grosslangenfeld from dawn on December 16th until we pulled out the afternoon of December 17th.

Some of the 'reports' I've read are – Colonel R. Ernest Dupuy's book, St. Vith: Lion In The Way (reprint 1986, pp 50) states; "As the morning waxed, and the 423rd reports 16

December as "clear and cold," it was evident that the enemy had taken Grosslangenfeld in the 424th Infantry sector.... As a matter of fact, we were still fighting in Grosslangenfeld until early afternoon on the 17th!! Then, on pp 55, Colonel Dupuy states; The 106th Reconnaissance Troop at Grosslangenfeld disintegrated, opening Cannon Company's left flank.... The Germans actually advanced between the Cannon Company of the 424th Infantry and the 106th Reconnaissance Troop. We did not disintegrate! And, on pp 57; "Personnel carriers rolling in from Grosslangenfeld disgorged wave after wave of infantry..... Later, on pp 58, he mentionssome infiltrating enemy from Grosslangenfeld... ALL of these statements are false!! The actual facts are that NO enemy troops or vehicles passed through Grosslangenfeld until mid-afternoon of the second day – December 17th!! These unsupported statements by Col. Dupuy are a gross insult to the men of the 106th Reconnaissance Troop who fought valiantly in defense of their untenable position at Grosslangenfeld; completely cut off from other American Units, surrounded by the enemy, out of communication and nearly out of ammunition.

Unfortunately, these same untruths were repeated by Charles B. MacDonald in his book "A Time for Trumpets"; as well as being noted by several members of our Troop in various other so-called 'official accounts' written about the Battle of the Bulge (titles and authors not specifically recorded).

The following account has been compiled from my memory of these days; plus, the collective memories of some of the survivors of the Troop with whom I have either talked or corresponded over the years: i.e. – Paul Thompson, Richard Bradbury, William O. Tower, Arthur LaCroix (see family note below) , Calvin Lezzi, Howard Hughes, Edward Fleming (one of four authors of "The Map"), Robert House, Earl Liston, Michael Gresh, Jr., Willis Selje (see family note below), Kenneth Booz, Abraham Freund, John Simpson, Robert Fisher, Louis Cunningham, Rudy Aittama, Ralph Pope, Michael Liskiewicz, Bill Roub, Roger Frambs, Rishel White, and the late William W. Randall, Roy Mechling (one of four authors of "The Map"), Myron Johnstone, Edward McGee, Gene Hammond, Al Orzolek,

Robert Madsen; plus, no doubt others I can't quite recall. The Troop was organized on 15 March 1943 (organic to the 106th Infantry Division) and trained at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Then participated in the Tennessee Maneuvers from January 20 through March 26, 1944.

Footnote: after reading a draft of this album, Henrietta Borst remembered meeting three of the veterans highlighted and underlined in the preceding paragraph.

- "William "Bill" Tower had a daughter who went to Wheaton College and Bill knew people who went to our church."
- "Arthur "Art" LaCroix was from Sioux City, South Dakota. He was an Indian."
- "Willis "Bill" Selje. He had a very nice wife named Vi."
- (The wounding of LaCroix and Selje are narrated two pages below)

From the Tennessee Maneuvers we moved to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, to complete our training for overseas movement. Beginning 9 October 1944, we moved to Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts, for embarkation and shipment to the European Theater of Operations; and sailed on 10 November 1944 aboard the Wakefield. After an uneventful but rough crossing, we landed at Liverpool, England.

Footnote: Every place of training and in the exact same order of deployment as described herein was also confirmed in May 2014 by Henrietta Borst's war recollections of her husband's training. (See Part 2)

In England, we went by train to Stow-On-The-Wold where we received the rest of our authorized equipment, including brand new M-8 Armored cars complete with the very latest in radio equipment. After a short stay in England, we boarded an L.S.T. at

Weymouth for the Channel crossing to Le Havre, France. Crossing the Channel, we encountered very rough weather. While anchored outside Le Havre Harbor waiting our turn to dock and unload, both anchors were torn loose and we had to return to Weymouth for repairs. After receiving new anchors, we repeated the crossing and a successful landing was made. After unloading, we proceeded by convoy at night across France to the vicinity of St. Vith, Belgium, arriving there on 9 December 1944.

Footnote: This account gives more detail of The Map notation in Part 1 –
"Hit Eng. Chan Dec 1. Sighted France Returned to Eng – then Returned & Landed at LeHarve, France"

They had to return to England and replace lost anchors!

We were attached to the 424th Infantry Regiment, and on 11 December 1944, we were placed on line during a night blackout move to replace a Rifle Company of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division. Our orders were to replace the Rifle Company - man for man, gun for gun.... Plus, we were ordered to maintain complete radio silence; dismount our .30-caliber machine guns from our vehicles; hide the vehicles in various buildings in the village of Grosslangenfeld, which we were to occupy; then assume the mission of a Rifle Company in the defense.

Note: At this time, the Troop T.O.& E. authorized –
6 officers;

149 enlisted men;

13 - M-8 Armored Cars;

99 - .30-caliber M-1 carbines;

13 - .30-caliber machine guns (light);

3 - .50-caliber machine guns;

30 - .45-caliber submachine guns;

5 - Rocket Launchers A.T.;

9 - 60 mm mortars;

26 - .30-caliber M-1 Rifles;

24 - 1/4 ton trucks;

5 - M-3 halftracks; and

1 - 2&1/2 ton truck (mess truck)

Footnote: A table of organization and equipment (TOE or TO&E) is a document published by the U.S. Department of Defense which prescribes the organization, staffing, and equipment – all listed above for the 106th Recon.

We were positioned facing the Siegfried Line, with the 424th Infantry Regiment's Cannon Company on our right (we could not see their nearest position to us) and Troop "B", 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron on our left (nor could we see their nearest position to us either). Most of our vehicles were placed where we couldn't readily utilize them. We had a full complement of officers and about 85% of our authorized enlisted personnel and attempted to man the positions vacated by the Rifle Company in Grosslangenfeld. We were forbidden to test fire our machine guns and 37 mm cannons on the armored cars, or to fire in our final protective line. We were ordered to use the range cards previously established by the Rifle Company so the Germans would believe the same Unit was still in place. There were no provisions for artillery support, or any other supporting fire for us. We were told this was a quiet sector or rest camp!! Since we were forbidden to use our radios, our only communication with other Units was a telephone line to the 424th Infantry Regiment. (It was years later that we learned all the other Units in the area had radio contact with Division.)

Footnote: T/5 Borst went through extensive Communication Courses at Ft Jackson and Ft Riley in 1943 and would have been responsible for Troop landline net, radio, signal flag and Morse-key communications. But since radio use was

forbidden and unavailable on December 16, the only effective communications were the above ground telephone lines which were easily cut during battle.

The only contact we could recall from the 'outside' was the visit by a Red Cross Doughnut Mobile on the 13th or 14th of December that served us coffee and doughnuts, complete with music and the smiles of two American women!

At approximately 5:30 A.M. on 16th December 1944, we came under attack by German artillery, rockets, and mortars. This attack set fire to several buildings in the village, including my Command Post. The barn where our ammunition trailer had been hidden took a direct hit during the night of December 16-17, and our ammunition supply was destroyed except for the small amounts we had placed at various platoon positions.

(Recall Map notation)

"5 men wounded" "Plat CP hit by arty (artillery)"

Shortly after the initial shelling ceased, German infantry began to advance toward our positions in Grosslangenfeld. We were successful in repulsing them with small arms, machine guns, and 60 mm mortar fire; the mortar ammunition was soon exhausted. Later in the morning, another attack was mounted, and again repulsed, with heavy losses to the Germans.

During the shelling and early ground attacks, three of our men were seriously wounded — Sgt. Arthur LaCroix, T/5 Willis Selje (friends of Yetta Borst) and Pfc Robert House. Since our only medical service consisted of platoon medics, the Troop Commander decided to send the wounded to the rear. A halftrack was disarmed, and red crosses affixed to the sides, to transport the wounded to the nearest medical facility. Along with the driver, T/5 James Guthrie, volunteers Medic Abraham Freund and Supply Clerk Cpl. Howard Hughes accompanied the wounded. The volunteers were to deliver our wounded to a medical facility, report our situation, rearm, draw as much ammunition as they could transport and return to our position. They never returned. (Years later, it was learned they had successfully reached St. Vith, delivered the wounded (all survived their wounds), reported our situation, rearmed, drew a supply of ammunition, and attempted to return to Grosslangenfeld. Unfortunately, by the time they were able to begin the return trip, German troops had moved into the area between St. Vith and Grosslangenfeld.)

Shortly after the German attack began early on the 16th of December, our telephone lines were cut to the 424th Infantry Regiment. We were now out of communication with anyone.

Footnote: with no available communications of any type, communications technician T/5 Borst was out of a job within minutes of being involved in his first battle.

The Troop Commander sent out mounted patrols to both flanks in an attempt to make contact with adjacent units (Cannon Company of the 424th and Troop "B", 18th Cavalry). The patrol to the left flank returned to report they had made contact with Troop "B", 18th Cavalry, and were told: We thought you guys were wiped out!!.... Heavy firing was heard on our right flank during this period, and the patrol we sent to the right flank (Cannon Company) did not return; nor did we receive a report from them since we were forbidden to use our radios.

Once the fighting started on the 16th, we uncovered our Armored Cars and began firing the 37 mm cannon at the attacking German troops. Since these guns were received new in England, we had never had an opportunity to "bore sight" or fire the guns — we accomplished the "bore sighting" firing at the enemy! The ground attacks and shelling continued off and on throughout the day of the 16th, but tapered off that night.

Early on the morning of the 17th of December, the enemy ground attacks and shelling resumed. We were successful in repulsing the ground attacks, but were running critically short of ammunition. Around noon on the 17th, the Troop Commander, Capt. Paul Million, called an officer's meeting at his Command Post to discuss the situation and

determine a plan of action. After reviewing the situation, it was determined that only two courses of action were available: one, to continue to hold our position until all ammunition was exhausted and be killed or captured; or, two, to break contact with the enemy and attempt to fall back to Schöenberg where it was believed the Division reserve was located. It was believed if we could get back to contact Division, we could get updated on the situation, get supplied with food and ammunition, and receive new orders. Course of action two was adopted and orders (verbal) were issued that on a given signal we would break contact, one position at a time, and attempt to reach Schöenberg to the north. The order of withdrawal was to be First Platoon (Lieutenant Edward McGee), Headquarters & Headquarters Platoon (Captain Million and Lieutenants George Vaream & Leonard Prosnick), Second Platoon (Lieutenant Joseph Haines), and, last, Third Platoon (Lieutenant Myron Johnstone).

Our withdrawal began shortly after 1300 with the First Platoon successfully breaking contact and withdrawing as planned. Headquarters and part of Headquarters Platoon then fell in line behind First Platoon and began their withdrawal. Second Platoon managed to break contact with two thirds of the Platoon intact and joined the withdrawal (the third section of Second Platoon was cut off by advancing German troops and unable to complete the withdrawal). The Third Platoon leader had arrived late to the officer's meeting and either misunderstood the direction of withdrawal or discovered the planned route was now blocked by the enemy (I believe the latter to be the case); as he attempted to withdraw back the way we had initially entered Grosslangenfeld — from Winterspelt to the west and the area of the 424th Infantry Regiment. Their first vehicle in line was struck and disabled by a mortar or artillery shell thereby blocking the road (possibly by "friendly fire", since it had been reported to others in our sector that "Grosslangenfeld had fallen" the previous day (on the 16th)). Lieutenant Johnstone was "slightly" wounded when a mortar shell exploded on the rail of his halftrack. The enemy was then able to quickly overrun those still remaining in Grosslangenfeld — which included the Third Platoon, parts of Headquarters Platoon, and the third section of Second Platoon. During this brief encounter of intensive fighting, several members of the Troop were killed or wounded. The wounded and other survivors were quickly taken prisoner and marched to the rear into Germany. However, one of our severely wounded men was carried to the German Aid Station by a buddy and received immediate and excellent care by the German medical personnel.

The sections of the Troop that managed to withdraw proceeded in a northerly direction on the paved road that ran through Grosslangenfeld toward Bleialf. However, attempting to avoid contact with the enemy, we decided to leave this major roadway and travel cross country, with the hopes of making contact with friendly forces. Shortly after leaving the paved road, we entered a deserted village (Winterscheid - in the 423rd Infantry Regiment area) where we stopped to put tire chains on our vehicles. Resuming our trek, we met up with elements of Troop "B", 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron at a crossroads just outside Winterscheid. They were really surprised to see us — they thought we had been "eliminated" the day before (December 16th). It was decided we would join them in the attempt to reach Schöenberg. Troop "B", 18th Cavalry, attached to the 423rd, had been given approval by radio to withdraw the day before - December 16th!! We were not aware of this decision, which left our left flank completely exposed.

We fell in behind Troop "B", 18th Cavalry, and continued northward on secondary roads toward Schöenberg. During our journey, we were under occasional artillery fire, including some tree bursts, until it began to get dark. We stopped on a wooded knoll just short of Schöenberg to confer with the officers of Troop "B", 18th Cavalry. After a short conference, it was decided we would break up into small groups and attempt to infiltrate the lines west toward St. Vith and get back to what we hoped would be American territory.

We disabled our vehicles, guns, and radios; then walked a short distance into the woods to what appeared to be a woodcutter's shack. It was then decided we would spend the night here and see what the situation was in the morning. Just after daylight on 18 December 1944, we were nudged awake by German troops holding submachine guns and rifles and told we were now prisoners of war and the war was over for us!! (Note: I read one story that stated ...they surrendered to a group of 14-year-olds without firing a shot.... I wonder if the author of that statement ever looked into the muzzle of a "Burp Gun" and asked the soldier holding it.... "how old are you??")

The greatest irony of all is the fact that the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop was deployed as Infantry (replacing a Rifle Company in the defense) prior to any combat activity in the area. And, we fought as Infantry — although we had not been trained or equipped as Infantry — yet, we were not considered eligible for the Combat Infantry Badge. Nor, have we ever been considered for any of the other medals or accolades deservedly heaped onto all the other Units in the area on that day that did their duty exactly as we did because of all the inaccurate and misinformation recorded about us in so-called "official" records!!

FOOTNOTE: All 106th infantry members who received the Combat Infantryman Badge were also later awarded the Bronze Star. For award of the CIB a soldier must be an infantryman satisfactorily performing infantry duties and actively engage the enemy in ground combat.

I have had no contact with anyone from the Troop who said they had ever been interviewed "officially" about what we did or did not do during this period of December 16-18, 1944, at Grosslangenfeld!! After my release as a prisoner of war, I was 'debriefed' by being asked these 3 questions; Did you see any acts of heroism by any member of your Troop (this was the point at which I related the "act beyond the call of duty" performed by S/Sergeant Roy Mechling (one of the four authors of "The Map") at Grosslangenfeld; recommending he be awarded the Silver Star for his bravery. On 16 May 1996 (about 52 years later!!), S/Sergeant Mechling was finally awarded the Bronze Star Medal with "V" device in an appropriate ceremony at Fort Jackson, South Carolina.)....did you see any cowardice by any member of your Troop (I answered, ABSOLUTELY NOT). Were you treated in a humane manner while a prisoner of war....!!! This account as written is the truth of what really happened, and to prove the 106th Reconnaissance Troop did not disintegrate on 16 December 1944.

Lt Joseph C. Haines

Footnote:

Excerpt from The official history of the 62nd Volksgrenadier Division by Leutnant Gerhard Wurm

Saturday, 12.16.1944: In Grosslangenfeld stands a reconnaissance unit. We pushed in a northerly direction toward Grosslangenfeld and received such heavy fire from 37 mm cannon, mortars, and light and heavy infantry weapons, that we withdrew into the forest on the right river bed to the left. At the same time the Americans are attacked from west from parts of the Regiment 190. However the attack does not go as planned. The resistance is much stronger than we had expect and coordinated very well tactically. The defenders of the town seem to be everywhere and defend against one wav after another. We take heavy losses and there are rumor, that our two companies are facing an entire bataillon.

Sunday 12.17.1944: Just even with the dawn the attacks resumed. The battle now took on a gruesome form, as now we could see the bodies of our comrade who were killed the day before and during the night, which were strangely frozen, preserved in their death throes by, their blood turn the surrounding snow pink. A few looked like they were only sleeping, but among others, one recognized the hideousness of death immediately. Finally, at Grosslangenfeld the resistance slows down. The enemy in front

of 190 and 164 must be worn down by Artillery and heavy infantry weapons before he withdraw.



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