

## William H. Borst

### *Part 2*

106th Cavalry Recon Troop / 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division

One Soldier's Story – William H Borst

### **Part 2 of the story of "The Map"**

As told by Henrietta Borst, his wife – May 2014

(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 9<sup>th</sup>, 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 24<sup>th</sup> birthday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 106<sup>th</sup> 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 106<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup>, 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup>) but I'm not sure. (It was actually the 82<sup>nd</sup> Armored Reconnaissance Battalion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 106<sup>th</sup> – Bill Tower and Frank Valvano. He attended one reunion of the 106<sup>th</sup> 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.

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



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