

William H. Borst

Part 3

Part 3 of the story of "The Map" - Grosslangenfeld

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

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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 Varem & 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.

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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