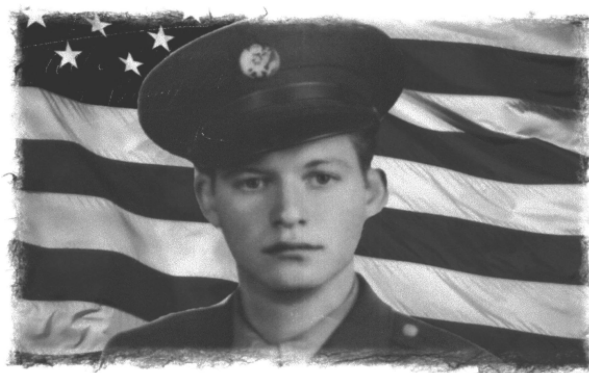


Vernon E. Brumfield
589th Field Artillery BN, Battery C
106th Infantry Division
Stalag IV-B (4-B)



I, Vernon Brumfield was born in Darbun, Mississippi October 15, 1925 and was inducted into the US Army November 15, 1943. I completed basic training at Fort Bragg North Carolina. Thereafter I was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana to join the 106th Div. "The Golden Lions" 589 Field Artillery Battalion, Battery C.

The 106th Div. Embarked from the Boston Harbor "Camp Miles Standish" on the USS Wakefield, destination unknown. We crossed the Atlantic Ocean to England then the English Channel to Normandy and France. We moved up the Seine River to Rouen across France, Belgium, Luxemburg, and into the Losheim Gap and the Schnee Eifel near the Siegfried Line.

General Von Rundstedt and the German Nazi Commanders led an Assault against the Allied Forces December 16, 1944 "The Battle of the Bulge" in an attempt to gain supremacy of Western Europe. I was wounded in battle and captured with the "Lost 500" in a motor pool, December 21, 1944. The conditions that the Americans were subjected to was a horrendous experience. We "the American Prisoners of War" marched to Muhlberg Germany. **Stalag IV-B** and interrogated by the Gestapo. Most of the American P.O.W.s were Divided into work groups and sent to slave labor camps. I was sent to Leipzig and Halle to repair Railroad tracks that had been destroyed due to Allied air raids.

In the spring of 1945 the Russian troops were moving toward Berlin from east to west & the American & British Forces were moving from west to east. The Allied forces met at the Elbe River on April 25, 1945 and I was liberated from Hitler's Third Reich a free man. A time for jubilation!

I was repatriated at Camp Lucky Stripe in France, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to Norfolk, Virginia thereafter to Hattiesburg, Columbia, and Darbun, Mississippi.

Vernon E. Brumfield
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589th Field Artillery Battalion
Battery C 106th Division

Stalag IV-B

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To Archie Christman:

It is always a pleasure to hear from members of the 106th, but to re-new friendship with your buddies in the 589th, especially you "Chris", whom I have always respected, is nearly beyond comprehension. I really enjoyed our telephone conversation, and I'm looking forward to visitations.

A summary of my personal history: I was born in a rural community, in which farming was the major occupation and cotton was the chief money crop. The name of the community was Darbun. We received our mail from Kokomo and the county seat was Tylertown, Mississippi. I attended Marion-Walthall High School grades 1 to 12 until 1943. During the school year of 1943-1944, while a senior at Marion-Walthall High School, I received a message from Uncle Sam "Draft Board" to report to Camp Shelby, Mississippi on November 15, 1943, exactly one month after my birthday. I complied with the instructions. I reported and was given my basic rights. He stated and I repeated, "I do". I'm in the army now.

I received my basic training at Fort Bragg, NC. Oh yes, I will never forget upon arriving at Fort Bragg. Snow everywhere, a few days before Christmas and Bing Crosby was singing White Christmas. several of the men started crying. I was sad to see their reaction. I didn't realize then that the Fort Bragg incident was nothing in comparison to the events that would occur in the future.

In April of 1944 I was sent to Camp Atterbury, Indiana to join the 589th Field Artillery Battalion, Battery C, 106th Division. Army trucks met us at the station in Indianapolis, Indiana and brought us to camp. In the back of an army truck on the way to camp is where I met Ed Malone, a mountain of a man ,a big brother, or my protector. Maybe he thought that country boy, needed all the help he could get and you know he was right.

In an attempt to unify our experience in Indianapolis, I would like to make a few comments about my youth. I participated in nearly all social and physical events in high school. I played baseball and basketball and served as the Captain of the basketball team during my Junior and Senior year. Remember the weekend passes at Indianapolis. Chris, you, and I went bowling. I don't believe I had ever seen a bowling ball before, and had never played the game. I observed your moves, yes, you took care of the score. I will never forget according to your record my score was 186. A few weekends later we went ice-skating. We rented ice skates and proceeded. Hey, I could hardly walk but this was a piece of cake. I thought, there was nothing that I couldn't accomplish. I'm sure you know the rest of the story. My feet went from under me and I busted my can; thereafter never have I attempted the sport known as Ice Skating.

We completed our responsibilities at Camp Atterbury, or Uncle Sam needed the 160th elsewhere. We were sent to Boston, Massachusetts, Port of Debarkation, then across the Atlantic to England. While in Boston I recall three outstanding events in which I was implicated. One, my name was placed on the board to report for duty K. P., "kitchen police". I had the honor of cutting butter all night long. Never did I believe that I would eat any more of that fatty substance. Two, I was also informed to report to the quarter master department, Sergeant LeMasters. To get everything prepared for the big trip across the Atlantic, I entered the building from one end and the good Sergeant was

walking toward the old stove like he had been on a drunk the night before. He gave a command! "Make a fire". I didn't appreciate the tone of his voice and maybe also I didn't feel too good, for it was cold. I ignored LeMasters and again he gave the command only this time with more emphasis and dressed it up with a few choice words. Sergeant LeMasters' action angered me and I answered by stating, "If you want a fire, build one yourself." The Sergeant reached into his pocket, pulled out a knife, opened the blade and proceeded to march in my direction. I assume LeMasters was going to make or force me to obey his command. I sidestepped the knife and the good Sergeant landed on his back due to my assistance. He replied that I had broke his back and that he was going to have me court marshaled. Ed Malone entered the building during his aggressive move and observed the event. Malone proclaimed that if LeMasters brings charges that he would testify in my behalf, that it was self-defense, because he was attempting to cut me with a knife. LeMasters dropped the charge and did not report the incident. I heard later from some of the men that beat the Hell out of LeMasters.

The third event in Boston caused me and others some difficulty, because no one enjoys an all out inspection. You know the procedure all G. I. articles on display according to regulations, but this inspection was different from all the others. They were looking for one particular item, a pair of underwear "shorts". I made preparation on a previous inspection and detected that someone had borrowed or stolen a pair of my shorts. I proceeded to replace the article by robbing Peter to pay Paul. I understand that no good soldier ever came up short in equipment therefore I replaced the missing item by stealing another pair of shorts. I removed the ink (number) and replaced the number with my own 7037.

The soldier without his drawers reported the incident. I heard the officer proclaim that whoever committed the crime would be severely reprimanded. I was depressed, and worried about the possibility that the blurred number would cause me problems. The soldiers were upset and angered about the inspection. I'm not sure, but this probably was the first drawer inspection in the history of the U.S. Army. The inspection team examined and reexamined every pair of shorts in the unit. The first round of their inspection tour they found nothing to indicate any wrong doing, but on the second round I had the inner feeling that one of the officers noticed something suspicious, he smiled and moved on. Oh, what a relief, to escape the humiliation.

We departed from Boston Harbor on the U. S. S. Wakefield,, destination unknown. We arrived in England around South Hampton where we remained for about two weeks, prior to crossing the English Channel to Normandy.

I didn't enjoy the British invitation and I'm sure under different circumstances. They would have preferred we remained at home. The climate was unique, wet pants and socks in the morning due to climat1~onditions. Black outs, and robot "Buzz" bombs was enough to warn one of the conditions in a strange land.

We crossed the English Channel in L. S. T.'s "prepared for action". In spite of the turbulent weather conditions, we landed at Normandy, went up the Seine River to Rouen, France across Belgium, Luxembourg to the front line to defeat Hitler's Third Reich.

The members of General Courtney Hodges' First Army entered the "sacred soil" of Hitler's Third Reich and moved to the Siegfried Line where we made our stand to defend an area about 24 miles. The division was entrenched atop the Schnee Eifel.

General Von Rundstedt in the Battle of the Bulge made a final desperate attempt on December 16, 1944 to break through the allied lines to reach the channel ports and Paris. He took advantage of foul weather, which grounded allied planes. The heavily wooded terrain in the Ardennes and Strategic surprise would give them the opportunity to accomplish their objective regain supremacy of Western Europe.

Chris, you were on this expedition, how did you enjoy the view? I also realize that you can attest to the exact dates and fill in some of the blank spaces to (a) greater degree than a foot soldier.

Early morning, December 16th, I was awoken from a peaceful sleep by German tanks and mortar explosions. Soldiers dressed and began to disburse in all directions. Some of the members of Battery "C" tried to eat breakfast, but to no avail, kitchen utensils were vibrating and some of the men were seeking protection under the dining tables. I didn't enjoy the meal and decide to report to the field phone behind the 105 millimeter howitzer's.

The afternoon of the 16th, Col. Kelly ordered the commanders to defend our positions across an open field. I was stationed behind a machine gun in a semi-fox hole with some protection along th inner area of the Ardennes forest. I looked eastward for approaching Nazis along the open field of snow.

It was difficult to locate the moving targets in the snow, because the Germans camouflaged their uniforms. Sporadic firing occurred along the line all afternoon. I was surprised when I looked to my left and observed our buddy Corporal Rhinebrick behind a 50 caliber machine gun and as white as the snow. I yelled to Rhinebrick that this action was like a wild west picture show. He replied, "Brum, you will change your tune after a while." My thoughts and concepts changed drastically soon thereafter, one of the men was hit in the back by a piece of shrapnel. He yelled and screamed for several hours. I think this event awoke me from my dream and I began to realize that I was in the middle of another phase of World War II or maybe the destiny of humankind.

In the later afternoon approximately one hour before dark, Malone came to my position and stated that we were nearly out of ammunition. I replied by stating, "Why in hell doesn't someone go and get ammunition." Malone replied, "Brum I informed Captain Rockwell that you and I would volunteer." I was surprised, but accepted the challenge and departed after arrangements had been made for a replacement at my position. Malone and I moved westward toward St. Vith, the objective was to get the necessary equipment back to the front lines. We moved through the forest and snow covered terrain for about one hour and came in contact with a sergeant with about one dozen men. I believe the sergeant stated they were from Battery B. He proclaimed that his unit had been in a fire fight and they were going to St. Vith.

The sergeant assumed command and we proceeded along a valley, until we approached an elevated region, we detected the possibility of an ambush. The group leaders outlined the strategy. We were to move across an open area, the moon was shining brightly, at a distance of fifteen to twenty yards apart. The sergeant stated he would go first and

moved out. Four of five men were ahead of me but refused to move after the leader had gone beyond thirty yards. I exclaimed, "if you are afraid, move aside so that I could pass!" Malone was behind me and stated, "Brum, I will follow you." As we were crossing the open areas, I heard a sound to my left and immediately I fell into the snow. Simultaneously the Nazis opened fire killing or wounding most of the men in the group. The sergeant, Malone, another G. I. and I escaped the massacre, but we were under fire all night on the side of a hill. The next morning I couldn't locate anyone. I had slept for about an hour before daylight. I couldn't believe I was alone, and where was Malone? I got out of the foxhole, dug during the night. With gun in hand, I moved across the hill to a farmhouse.

As I approached the house, I identified about twenty-five or thirty American troops. A colonel appeared and shouted, "Anyone here in the 589th Battery C?" Another soldier and myself answered and he stated your outfits have been destroyed or captured, follow me.

The Colonel moved toward his jeep and took his position in the front seat. His driver was sitting behind the wheel and the motor was running. He moved fast because this was an opportunity to ride back to safety. We left the farmhouse, again moving westward toward St. Vith. We traveled two or three miles and came under the assault of artillery or mortar fire. One of the explosions forced the jeep off the road into a snow bank. The driver tried unsuccessfully to get the jeep back on the roadbed. Because of too much loose snow the wheels were spinning and shells were exploding. We jumped out and pushed the jeep back onto the road. While under fire, I realized that individuals under severe stress will react in different ways. That Colonel was a fighting man. He proved his courage. I am sorry that I never heard or asked his name. He had no identification on his uniform. Thereafter, continued our movement westward and joined another unit in a wooded area to reorganize and move toward St. Vith.

The third day of my western retreat was not as eventful as my preceding experiences. We established a camp in a wooded area for protection and to re-organize the dislocated personnel. The commanding officer attempted to contact other units to obtain assistance in order to establish a fighting unit.

The morning of the nineteenth, we departed from the camp area in a convoy. The convoy consisted of about fifteen trucks, escorted by about one hundred infantrymen. We traveled westward toward Belgium for about three hours, through valleys and over hills in the snow covered terrain.

It was about ten o'clock in the morning. I was sitting in the back of a covered truck, next to the last truck in the convoy. Then suddenly, the fury of the German tanks and artillery bombarded the convoy. I jumped from the rear of the truck immediately after the first bombardment onto the ground, rolled to the bottom of the valley or ravine (approximately 50 to 60 yards), then looked up to observe the annihilation. I saw balls of fire from the German tanks and guns. American soldiers were flying through the air. The trucks had been destroyed and were burning. The sound and vibrations is beyond description. I trembled and prayed. Then by some supernatural force I moved under the cover of underbrush, to the other side of the hill into a wooded area. As I moved up the hill I found a wounded soldier. I picked up the casualty and carried him with me to safety. We were constantly under fire as we moved northward into the forest. The tops of trees and branches were falling as the Germans continued their assault. I staggered on with

one arm around the waist of the wounded G. I. and his right arm around my neck. We pressed on until late afternoon northwest to my destination. Later, I located a medical tent. The Red Cross tent was visible in the light of the afternoon sun as we moved westward through the Ardennes. I asked the unknown soldier if he could walk alone to the medical unit and he stated yes. He staggered northwest toward the Red Cross Tent while I moved northward. After I had traveled about one hundred and fifty yards, I looked directly to my left and observed my wounded friend as he entered the medical unit which was consumed by fire. His body was blown to pieces. The Germans had made a direct hit on the medical unit. I exclaimed, "Good Lord, have mercy upon us" The hand of God or some inner force was directing me as I continued to move northward. I finally approached an area in which I heard voices and after some recognizance, I detected they were Americans and joined the group, which was a motor pool of American soldiers.

German tanks and troops surrounded the motor pool in the Ardennes during the night of the nineteenth of December. Several hundred Americans had assembled on this hill in the motor pool. Sporadic bombardment occurred throughout the night. The next morning the German commander of the tank corps launched a direct assault for several hours. To prevent a massacre, the Nazis dispatched an officer waving a white flag to discuss terms of surrender. The German officer was shot and killed; the flag of truth was ignored. Thereafter, the enemy bombarded us for eight hours, a rain of destruction; we were at their mercy. It was a miracle that any of us escaped alive. The Commander must have had some compassion for mankind because another officer was sent to negotiate surrender. I do not know when the discussions started or ended because I fell asleep, due to exhaustion.

I was awakened the morning of the twenty-first by a German trooper who struck me with a rifle. He was standing over me with a bayonet approximately twelve inches from my heart. The German soldier commanded me to discard my rifle and to move toward another group of Americans who had been disarmed and captured. This was one of the most embarrassing and humiliating events of my life.

I marched from the Ardennes a prisoner of war in Hitler's third Reich. As I moved from the motor pool with about five hundred other Americans, I was angry, depressed, hungry, and exhausted. I had slept only about six hours in the past five days and had eaten hardly nothing. We marched to Stalag IX-B Muhlberg, a British prisoner of war camp, where we were interrogated.

The expedition to Stalag IV-B was a horrendous experience. We marched three days and nights without food or sleep. Wounded soldiers fell out and some were left behind dead. Other soldiers tried to obtain food by digging snow and earth from storage areas. We found potatoes and were luck if we returned to the column before the guards inflicted bodily harm. The German civilians would take shoes, overcoats and mistreat us-as we passed from town to town. I moved to the middle of the marching column and was not harassed as many of the weary American soldiers. The fourth night of journey we were forced into railroad boxcars like cattle. There were not enough space for all to sit, and the smell was deplorable. There were no bathroom facilities available. I do not recommend this kind of a trip for a vacation. The British Royal Air Force strafed us the first night of this ordeal. They killed two soldiers in my boxcar and wounded one beside me during this raid.

We arrived at Stalag N-B about the middle of January and were interrogated by the Gestapo. The secret police lived up to their name by demonstrating their brutality. Two Americans tried to escape prior to our entrance into the compound. They hid under a building and the troopers turned their police dogs on to the men. The dogs literally tore the prisoners apart. It is difficult to observe that type of scene, but helpless to assist. The guards marched us into the compound and forced us to remain in formation throughout the night. I nearly froze, my feet were cold, I was hungry and exhausted, but I never lost my determination to live and to survive the ordeal. Several of the men fell' into the snow only to meet a greater tragedy from the guards.

The next morning I passed through the interrogation Center. We were searched and relieved of all valuables. I escaped the search with my wristwatch. The watch had an elastic band and I pushed it up my arm, which was covered by my coat. I traded the watch to the British for cigarettes, then exchanged one cigarette for a piece of bread which helped me to survive and to elevate starvation.

Most of the British at N-B were captured in the African and Italian Campaigns. They were pessimistic and accepted their role as being prisoners of Germany the rest of their lives. They quoted, "We will never get out of here." I didn't enjoy discussing the future in a negative tone.

I had great aspirations to return home to the United States, my home.

I remained at the British Non-Commission Officers Camp at Stalag N-B for about one week. Then sent to Leipzig, Germany, a slave labor camp, we repaired railroads that had been destroyed by American airplanes. The allies bombed Leipzig on an average of four times daily. The city was a main artery in moving troops and supplies from or to the American or Russian fronts. The German proclaimed that the Americans had destroyed the railroads and the Americans would repair the tracks. We worked from sun to sun, also our work hours were determined by the destruction of the main lines, frequently we worked through the night.

Early one morning we were transported by rail to Halle, a town approximately twenty-five or thirty miles from Leipzig, to repair the railroad track that had been destroyed the previous day. We arrived around six in the morning, the sun arose in the east as usual, and we observed the beauty of the day. Then around seven it became cloudy and visibility was difficult. The Americans had dropped a smoke bomb prior to a low altitude raid. Suddenly the Germans sounded the alarm and mass confusion prevailed as fighter planes struck the city and the railroad junction. Civilians throughout the area ran for protection and some of the prisoners. The guards started shooting as we fled for cover. I fled to an area next to a lake about a mile from the junction, only later to have a guard join me. We observed the water in the lake, jumped up and down due to the bombardments. The raid lasted only a short period of time, but the railroad yard had been destroyed, in fact one locomotive engine had been thrust by the concussion of the attack on to a shattered building one story high. An excellent example of power and destruction, during war. The removal of bodies and debris was not beautiful; our day had been one of despair. Thank God we survived for another day.

One afternoon we were returning from work and marching in formation to the compound, I began to whistle a tune. I heard the guard give a command but didn't realize he was talking to me, therefore, I continued to whistle. All of a sudden I had been knocked into

the snow. The guard hit me in the back with the butt of his rifle. I got to my feet and was circling the guard in preparation to attack. One of the prisoners grabbed me and pulled me back into the group. Today I believe that was a good move, because the guard had his bayonet pointed in my direction and ready for action. (After liberation I will search for this German guard.) I commandeered a bicycle, but never found the German guard.

The Germans informed us that we would receive more food on the work projects outside of the prisoner of war compounds. They did not inform us that we would not receive Red Cross parcels or that we would be subjected to no protection during air raids, but we didn't have a choice and were forced to comply or suffer. I believe we would have endured incarceration life to a greater degree in a permanent location. Our ration consisted of one small piece of bread and three potatoes. Most of the time they were defective or rotten. Occasionally the railroad officials would prepare a soup. After a bombing attack, provided that some type of animal had been killed and enough was available for the prisoners, the soup usually was millet, skin or bone. We received about one cup each. Lack of food was a problem and the Americans often discussed menus. This angered some of the prisoners and it brought about conflicts. One morning after the cup of hot water, bread, and potatoes had been issued; the guard accused two Americans of stealing a small jar of jelly. The guards used a large stick and whipped the prisoners to death. They also forced us to observe this atrocity.

In the middle of April 1945, the allies were moving toward Berlin. We heard artillery fire from the West and knew the Americans were on the way. The Germans moved us from the city of Leipzig toward the east just before the arrival of the Allied Forces. We marched for nearly two weeks to the Eble River. The bridge across the Elbe was blown up the night of the twenty-fourth, which prevented us from being liberated by the Russians. The morning of the twenty-fifth at ten o'clock, I saw a jeep, then two jeeps, with fifty caliber machine guns mounted rolling toward us. A few shots were fired and the guards threw down their guns, which were picked up by the ex-prisoners, and additional firing occurred. Some of the guards lost their lives. We were free men; a day of rejoicing, because we had been liberated from Hitler's Third Reich. The freedom of man; do we really appreciate its significance and its value? God bless the U.S.A.

I have summarized my experiences on the battlefield and my period of incarceration. I would have to write a book to describe everything in detail. In outlining my experiences it may appear that I was at the right place at the right time to escape death. I sincerely believe that God saved my life. I prayed the Lords Prayer and quoted the twenty third psalms. Yes, I made requisitions to God and he preserved and protected me through out my tribulation. I thank God, and today I glorify his name because he ~4 interceded in my life and made it possible for me to live.

I moved eastward from the Elbe River, after liberation, seeking a German guard. The one who had knocked me down with the butt of his rifle. I confiscated a bicycle from a German girl and rode from town to town. After one week, I gave up the search because we were to be air lifted to Camp Lucky Strike in France to return to the greatest nation on the planet on earth, the United States of America.

The Western coast of France, Camp Lucky Strike, was used as a rendezvous for ex-prisoners of war as they assembled from various Stalags from Germany. After V. E. Day, the Americans attempted to build up our strength before we crossed the Atlantic by feeding us raw eggs and milk. I remained at Camp Lucky Strike for about two weeks,

crossed the Atlantic to Norfolk, Virginia, then to Hattiesburg, Mississippi on my way home.

I did not inform my parents of my arrival in the States. In fact, they hadn't heard anything from me since they received the telegram that I was missing in action. I walked through the front door and my parents nearly fainted. I was home for sixty days and then reported to Miami, Florida, for recuperation. I remained in Florida for about one week and was sent to Fort Still, Oklahoma, where I was discharged December 1, 1945.



Page last revised
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