

Joe Salerno

World War II & Korean Conflict

*Company B (a rifle company) of the 1st Battalion, 423rd Infantry Regiment
106th Infantry Division*

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Born in Newark, NJ, 10 March 1925, a year in which it could truly be said "They were born for war." I graduated from South Side High School, then matriculating at Montclair State Teachers College (now Montclair University) in January 1943, I registered for the draft on my 18th birthday and was inducted^[1] May 21, 1943 into the Army of the United States. My Infantry Basic Training was completed at Camp Wheeler, Georgia and was then sent to the University of Alabama for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), with a major in Basic Engineering^[ii].

In March 1944 the Army Specialized Training Program was deactivated. I was then transferred to **Camp Atterbury, Indiana**, along with about 1,200 other ASTP students to join the 106th Infantry Division. I was assigned to Company B (a rifle company) of the 1st Battalion, 423rd Infantry Regiment.



My assignment was with the 2nd Platoon as a rifleman, later as an assistant squad leader and prior to overseas deployment as the senior platoon messenger/runner. Life at [Camp Atterbury](#) was training rigorous, but in many respects fun for those of us still teenagers. Although the cadre continually stressed the infantry motto, "Learn to kill or be killed" we the carefree youthful guys enjoyed not only the new found camaraderie but the pleasure of competition and confidence building in the obstacle and infiltration courses, as well as striving for the merits of an expert infantryman badge rating. The Army may have lived for morning reveille but when in garrison we lived for evening retreat. As soon as the flag came down and with the order "fall out" we either were heading for the bus into town or to the PX and social club. The people of Indianapolis adopted us and it was they who told us when we

were alerted for POE^[2] that our alert was for movement to Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts and embarkation to the European Theater of Operations, while the Army was keeping it as a big top secret for fear: That a slip of the lip could sink a ship.^[3]

We embarked on October 20, 1944 aboard the Queen Elizabeth, at the time the biggest and most luxurious of ocean liners, destined for England, disembarking at Greenock, Scotland on October 23rd. Prior to overseas deployment I was promoted to Private first class (PFC), passed the field test for Expert Infantryman and had an application for Infantry OCS^[4] accepted, but deferred. That was my rank and duty until I was captured in The Battle of the Bulge about midday on 19 December 1944.

Anecdotally, I recall an incident that my military intelligence test score was 132 and the West Point Military Academy entry requirement called for a minimum 134 at the time. Captain James D. Moore, our company commander, a West Point Alumnus impressed that I registered the top divisional score in a map reading course suggested I retake the test to equal or better "134" and he would then recommend me for the 'Point.' I demurred not because I wouldn't have liked going to West Point but afraid I'd do worse rather than better in a re-test; and instead indicating an interest in OCS. In retrospect not a very wise decision when I later learned that the expected survival rate for line platoon leaders in combat was nine minutes...and what does that say for the platoon messenger whose two steps next to him.

Our movement to Europe began by troop train to Bayonne, NJ then by ferry to a darkened pier where while carrying all our worldly possessions^[5] we had to climb more than 8-levels of circular stairs to board the Queen Elizabeth for transport across the Atlantic. We arrived after an uneventful ocean crossing to Greenock and then by train to Cheltenham. Field training took us to Gloucester and back to Cheltenham prior to embarking at Southampton for the channel crossing to LeHavre, France. Our welcome to France was a rain/sleet storm and living in a muddy open field for a about a week before being truck convoyed to the front. Being foot soldiers to the core we were elated when receiving word that our division was being assigned to 1st Army rather than General Patton's 3rd Army because "Pearl Handle" George stressed his tanks and expected the foot-sloggers to run to keep up.

Our division replaced the 2nd US Infantry Division unit for unit; gun for gun on the Schnee Eifel,^[6] which was the initial intrusion into the German homeland by Allied Forces (taken in early fall by the 4th US Infantry Division). Our sector was on the western mountain slope of a mountain ridge confronting another higher ridge upon which was located Brandscheid, a hamlet-like town that featured a glistening church steeple. We occupied Seigfreid line pillboxes on our hilltop with the enemy doing likewise on their slope. We were attacked on the 16th in what was to become known as the Battle of the Bulge^[iii]; our Company held to its front but armor-led forces overwhelmed the divisional flanks, at Auw to the north and Blielf to the south. Two of the 106th regiments, the 422nd and ours (423rd) were completely surrounded. On the 18th we pulled back from our line positions into a perimeter organized to counter-attack on the 19th through Schonberg with the mission to regroup with division at St. Vith. B-Company was designated as 1st Battalion "point" to take and hold the Schonberg Bridge. The mission failed. I was among the lucky ones...a survivor of what was to be historically recorded as the biggest battle of WWII.



I became a prisoner-of-war. In German parlance a kreigie. I likened it to "purgatory on earth" because although alive, for the first time in my life I was completely unable to communicate with and was out of contact with all my family and hometown friends. It was actually a loss of the liberty we had so casually taken for granted; subject to the whims of our captors who had the power of life or death over us. And that power was demonstrated daily. Upon capture I with a small group of GIs were locked in a barn and told by a gruff German soldier that if the count differed and someone escaped he'd execute ten for everyone missing. Scary but a wasted threat because we all collapsed to the floor from sheer exhaustion and were soon thereafter moved to an outside field enclosure so that the captured officers could have benefit of indoor incarceration. Later while on work details I was mistaken for a Jew and that only made it worse, often being severely roughed up and even denied the opportunity to stand by a warm fire^[7].

My combat experience was limited and comparatively routine. Oddly enough my baptism of fire came while I was defecating over a slit trench^[8] when suddenly the earth about me began to tremble and I realized I was in an exposed position with enemy shells coming in. I grabbed my rifle and without pulling my pants up made for our platoon pillbox jumping in headfirst. In a way, it served as a pressure-valve release because it provided a laugh at a most critical time when we became aware that this was for real, that "they" were out to kill us. Another noteworthy initial immediate encounter occurred when Pfc. Gordon Pinney and I were bringing a case of grenades forward and while crossing a logging road an enemy sniper literally shot my helmet off; thankfully, with no harm to me other than "scared beyond description." It wasn't too long afterwards; that being shot at, existing under shellfire and bombing raids became matter-of-course, but always as stomach-knotting and apprehensive as waiting for the opening kickoff in a varsity football game.^[9]

My weapon was the Garand M-1 semi-automatic rifle in which I qualified as a sharpshooter.^[10] Although I fired upon the enemy as situations required to the best of my knowledge I doubt I killed anyone. At the time I was dissatisfied with myself, but now in older age, thankful and hopeful that I did not kill another human being. Nevertheless, my constant prayer in life has been the hope that I may never so wounded or caused a death to bring grief to a German household. My soldierly duty in combat was not valorous, but was well done with pride and merit^[11]. My high point of meritorious conduct occurred during the early hours before dawn on December 16th when I had the mission of escorting our company commander from our platoon CP^[12] to the Company CP. I had to guide him through about 400 yards of heavy pinewoods while under heavy enemy artillery bombardment. As we approached the Company CP, the perimeter guard who happened to be a Private (Paul) Wagner, challenged us. Upon giving him the password we learned he had a grenade ready to throw and had discarded the pin. With him in a rather nervous/panic stage the captain ordered me (equally nervous) to lead him to a safe area to release the grenade which is a difficult task in a heavily treed area while under intense incoming artillery. Nonetheless, even though I too was rather skittish, led him to a ravine and directed he roll rather than throw the grenade down the incline (purpose to avoid hitting a tree and having it bounce back) as we sought cover behind the dirt embankment. It turned out the grenade was a dud, but it was a very nerve wracking incident during the early hours of the battle, which ultimately would give me many more.

I had no idea during those predawn hours of December 16th while escorting Captain James D. Moore to his CP that the biggest battle of World War II was unfolding and I was to be a part of it^[13]. It was our common misconception in the ranks that the Germans were beaten and that our combat time would be short-lived and that we'd become part of the Army of Occupation. How wrong we

were. After returning to the platoon and the barrage let up I accompanied Lt. Sterling Garwood as he inspected our positions and later we with Sgt. "Red" Ussery traveled back to the Battalion Supply point to scrounge some extra ammo. After dark the lieutenant put together a small patrol of which I was a part, to bring a supply of ammo and food to the squad we had in our advanced pillbox. It was situated at the foot of the mountain covering the road to Brandscheid. Restocking had to be done at night because the approach was totally exposed to the enemy on the opposite hill. The experience was always scary because the intermittent flares from both sides completely illuminated the area and we had to remain perfectly still with each burst. Any movement or noise would encourage enemy fire^[14].

Around mid morning of the 17th an enemy infantry force attacked our unit front but upon coming under our firepower hastily withdrew. We were quite elated until suddenly the artillery observation team in line with us was ordered back and we received word that our flanks had been penetrated and we were surrounded. At the time we thought it was only our battalion and never realized both regiments were in the trap; however, not to worry because the 7th Armored Division was on its way to relieve us. In reality it was well over 60 miles away and of no immediate help for us. At the moment I was particularly happy because my cousin Packy^[15] was with the 7th Armored and confident they would get through and maybe I could spend Christmas with my first cousin. What I was unaware of was that Packy had been wounded in the battle for Metz and was already back in the states under treatment for paraplegia. After dark again the enemy began pounding us with artillery and mortar bombardment. The Germans infiltrated our sound power phone lines confusing our communications with Kraut-gibberish, which combined with the artillery damage to our phone lines limited our communications to what we messengers were able to hand deliver. It was a hectic night and I was completely exhausted.

Shortly after dawn on the 18th the lieutenant told me to grab a bunk at the back of the bunker and get some sleep. Seems as if as soon as I fell off to sleep Sgt. Ussery started shaking me awake. Sergeant or not I told him off informing that I had permission to sleep the morning away. He responded with, "Well you can sleep but the rest of us are pulling out!" It took a moment for his remark to penetrate, so I got up and looked out to see our platoon already formed to march out. I quickly grabbed my rifle and combat pack^[16] and joined the group, which was already on the move. Our company joined the main line of march as battalion reserve providing rear guard support. On orders, one 2nd Platoon squad, I think it was S/Sergeant Parkinson's, was left in the Brandscheid bunker to cover the rest of the units disengaging. I was positioned at the tale end of our platoon walking two abreast with "Snake" Owens. About a mile out the column stopped. At the time we were unaware that the lead company, probably Company C had come under attack. Garwood came and took both of us back about 50 yards to serve as rear-guard;¹⁷ to provide the alert if enemy forces came at us from the rear. In the meantime, he shared a password with us because he was going back to get the squad that had been left behind. However, the march soon resumed with T/Sgt. Bill Niemela at the helm of our platoon because Garwood had not yet returned and I was dispatched to the Company CP position. Our road march was sporadically interrupted as small arms fire broke out to our front and flanks of our elongated column on the very narrow country roads; although at times we did break out cross-country. In the meantime Garwood who had returned with the missing squad was ordered to take his platoon into the high wooded area to our left

serving as flank guards for the column that had stopped for a rest period as early darkness set in. Within the hour Captain Moore dispatched me to have Garwood return with his platoon because we were to resume the march within minutes. However, I became a bit panicky being unable to locate the platoon^[17]. Time was running out so I hurried back to report, only to learn the platoon had already joined the line of march and I was to reposition myself with the platoon.

At one point we came to a "T" in the road with the column turning left. I was ordered together with Pvt. Mort LeBlanc and about three others to set up a roadblock to interrupt any enemy approaching from the right.^[18] It felt like an eternity but in about 20 minutes Garwood sent word for us to rejoin the main body. For most of the night I moved between the platoon and company as the column eventually made it up a very steep hillside and we were disbursed into unit bivouac areas. I returned to the platoon when we were ordered to sack out for the night; no fires, cigarette lighting and no noise permitted other than whispers. By now most of us had discarded gas masks and packs, but wisely kept the entrenching tool and weapons. All we could do was lie on the cold ground and bunch up pine needles to serve as a pillow. It was really cold and uncomfortable even for teenagers.

Apparently I did fall asleep because I was awakened by the noise of guys starting to dig foxholes for themselves. I did likewise, but what with tree roots and frozen ground it was an almost impossible task. A Private (John) Healey was next to me and he had discarded his entrenching tool with his pack during the uphill march and was getting a kick out of the rest of us trying to dig into the unyielding ground. But then it came, a continuing barrage of incoming artillery and he began to appeal for the rest of us to loan him our tool. The Germans zeroed in on the digging noise and began an intense artillery barrage. The incoming 88s and tree bursts were drenching the area. Between bursts we'd alternate sharing our tool with Healy, but it was of little solace because the ground was frozen hard. All we could do was ball up into a fetal position and pray.^[19] It was during this barrage that our battalion commander was fatally wounded and our first sergeant went either heroic or hysteric. He began running around our area yelling, "I guess I don't have to remind B Company men to put their helmets on now!"^[20] It seemed as if the barrage would never stop, but it did and amid the horrific cries of pain, dismembered bodies, pleas to "Mom" and out-loud prayers we were ordered to move out. In those days it was SOP that the dead and non-ambulant wounded were left behind, to be cared for by follow-up personnel. We were reassembled in an open area in the woods and I accompanied the company commander to a battalion escape plan briefing. We went into the attack plan formation to break out of the pocket and to rejoin division at St. Vith. From this point on due to the exigencies of the situation facts become disjointed.

To illustrate at a recent reunion the following reminiscences were described: What with three separate first hand accounts, including mine of where Captain Moore^[21] was that fateful morning as well as two accounts plus my own of where I was, it's obvious, the erosion of time takes precedence. Kelly Parkinson, a Staff Sergeant squad leader at the time had me wounded by shrapnel and evacuated while he was next to Company Commander Moore and our Battalion S-3^[22] Alan Jones Jr., while they were discussing surrendering the company because of the overwhelming enemy forces having surrounded the unit. In the same time frame then S/Sgt Rigatti says he was with the Captain who had him scout the strength of confronting German forces. PFC Phil Cox recalls me being with him in another sector with Lt. Garwood, our Platoon Leader during the lop-sided skirmish.

However, my recollection is that Garwood dispatched me to the Company Commander's CP^[23] as his communication link; that the S-3^[24] gathered the Company CO and briefed as to breaking out by way of the Schonberg Bridge. B-Company then moved out with two platoons abreast, 2nd on the right in a column of squads with Moore's CP between the platoons. I assumed Garwood had his moving CP between his lead squad and the two reserve squads; but his letter of 01/17/01^[iv] indicates the acting Battalion Commander commandeered him to another mission.^[25] At the moment of impact as we approached Schonberg I was positioned between the company CP and "Snake" Owens who was the BAR^[26] man of S/Sgt Cassidy's squad. I have no recall of anyone, including the captain surrendering the company. Just that as we stepped out of the tree line we saw what looked like a German anti-aircraft unit digging in to our front and they immediately opened up on us with direct fire ...then tanks on the roadway to our right front did likewise." Snake" and I dropped into a slight gully with Pvt. Ed Bradley and two guys from the adjacent platoon. Our return rifle fire was haphazard and useless as pandemonium took over what with the devastating incoming firepower and tree bursts. It was again an agony of pain and despair because we were on the exposed hillside subject to direct bombardment with no means of effective return firepower and without any artillery or heavy weapons support. The tactic of evasive running, dropping and rolling was almost ridiculous in a forest of evergreen pine trees. Everyone in our little defilade was hit; the worse being a private Everhart from the other platoon whose leg was blown off above the knee and Bradley, whose rump ended up with another opening. When the firing finally ceased, burp-gun laden Germans were all over the roadway yelling at us, eyeball to eyeball, to come out to the road or be killed. And, in apparent shock we melted away as a fighting unit as one followed another with our hands interlocked behind our necks. As I recall Captain Moore at this time was to my immediate left and when a captor recognized his rank, he was quickly separated from us and whisked away. Off in another direction, remnants of another 2nd platoon squad led by PFC Dan Gilbert who took over because of the loss the NCO leaders, came face to face with a Tiger Tank and were ordered to halt by the tank commander when PFC Fontaine Forbes cut him down with point blank rifle fire and the squad escaped back into the woods. Pinney apparently was cutoff from this group and ended up with Colonel Nagel.^[v] (They were captured later in the day and came together with me in a farmyard enclosure where the Germans had imprisoned their captives.) In all honesty I have no idea of how these events fell into place. It was a hectic time. In my subsequent talk with the then S-3, Alan Jones Jr.^[27], he indicates he was not with our company at the time or did he brief the CO's, but for fifty-some years I would have sworn he briefed the company commanders before we went into the Schonberg attack. (In retrospect it well may have been the acting battalion commander or S-2)^[28]. In a subsequent letter to me Lt. Jones (who subsequently retired as a Colonel) indicated he came upon some documentation that may well corroborate what I recollected. Now I often wonder if I lived or dreamed these happenings. In any event, it matters not how these accounts dovetail one another; the important outcome is that it took the Germans four days to dislodge us when they planned on erasing us in one. Therefore, those of us who were there can take pride that the youthful 106th had a vital part in Hitler's downfall. In losing...we actually won!

An immediate tribulation of captivity was the road march away from the front in a virtual death march of almost two hundred some miles from the point of capture on the German-Belgium border to [Stalag 12-A](#) (German prison camp), Limburg, Germany. The march started on December 20th and extended beyond New Years with overnight stops

mostly in open farm fields, except for a stopover on or about 23 December 1944 in an old German Panzer Camp at Dockweiler, where we had shelter and were fed some watered down soup on Christmas Day. We then were road marched to Koblenz, then on another overnight march starting at about 16:30 hours and arriving at Stalag 12-A in Limburg at about 1030 hours in the morning. The stop in Koblenz was memorable because the US Air Corps mistook us for enemy and we endured heavy aerial bombardment. We had received one hot meal during the ordeal; a cup of potato soup that we ate out of our helmet's on Christmas Day. It was immediately on or after New Year's Day that we entered the 12-A camp. But within days we were loaded into boxcars, about 60 men to a boxcar. We then traveled seven days, six nights in the 40 & 8 boxcars (Originally built for 40 men or 8 horses) to [Stalag 4-B, Muhlberg, Germany](#) (on the Elbe River). The top ranking non-com in my boxcar was Tech (1st Platoon) Sergeant Whitcomb who not only maintained order at the time but I recall as one of my best teachers in small unit tactics while at Atterbury. Due to bombing raids, strafing attacks^[29] and bad tracks our trip was much longer than normal. We did not get out of the boxcars during the whole trip. Our toilet facility for 60 men was a 5-gallon bucket. We were fed only three times during the trip; a slice of bread and a small, very small portion of cheese. I have no recollection of when water was provided. It is important to note that at the time and maybe because of my youth, diminutive size and athletically good physical shape, being deprived of water and food over extended periods didn't overly bother me. However, it did come back to affect me both physically and mentally in later life.

I spent approximately one week in Stalag 4-B, Muhlberg, Germany. It was here that I was stripped, searched, sanitized given a POW identification number, photographed front and side shoulder view with ID number across chest, a reminder of the criminal wanted posters in post offices and finally allowed to mail a postcard home through the International Red Cross. Then we were assigned to work details called *arbeits komandos*. Some guys were able to obtain those criminal like pictures but to my regret I was not.

In order to stay together six of us from B-Company, who found one another at 12A, volunteered for a work detail that was sent to Gleina, Germany. We were there assigned to work at rebuilding the Ot Buelitung benzene plant (near Seitz), which had been bombed out of commission by the US Air Corps. Without question our placement there was in violation of the Geneva Convention, but it didn't matter because we Americans learned from watching the old WPA (one of President Roosevelt's depression era "make work relief programs"^[30]) on how to "goof off" on the job and it drove the industrious Germans crazy. We were worked from sun-up to sundown, it was cold, we were virtually starved; it was certainly slave labor; to me it was purgatory on earth.^[31] Many died including Don MacDonald (he was a joy to go into town with because he had the knack to attract girls to the benefit of all with him whether it was in England or Indianapolis) with whom I had developed a very close friendship since we got together at Atterbury; again thankful to the three Hail Mary's I recited every day and repeated whenever under fire, I was among the survivors. But the ordeal was far worse than words can describe. As an example, one day on a work detail a German officer wanted me to do something that due to language difficulty I didn't comprehend, so he began to yell at me. I turned and yelled back only to be rifle-butted in the back of my head by the detail guard. It drew blood and knocked me out for a spell, but German medics sutured and did take care of the wound.

LIBERATION DAY was Saturday, April 14, 1945. I shall never forget that day. Among my liberators was a fellow letterman, an athletic buddy from South Side High, Larry Emmons who was a jeep driver with the 6th Armored Division. He wanted to give me a bottle of calvados, a strong French cognac, but all I wanted was a D-Bar. He gave me a carton full of the enriched chocolate bars. To this day, I have no idea if Larry survived the war.



I was treated, fed and rehabilitated at the 50th US Army Hospital in Commercy, France and journeyed home arriving at Hampton Roads, VA on July 4, 1945 (the picture to the left shows me after I had regained 20 pounds). I was discharged on December 3, 1945 at Fort Devens, Massachusetts after a 5-month period of sick and convalescent leave, rehabilitation at Lake Placid and light duty with the Transportation Corp at Camp Myles Standish. I had, during my Prisoner of War experience, lost about 50 pounds of my fighting weight of 135 pounds. It did not take long to regain my weight since my mother and family saw to it that I had a lot of food whenever I got home on pass and the Army was always generous with food when in garrison. I was discharged December 3, 1945.

Obviously, our Division, the 106th had suffered a great defeat by the Germans. The "Bulge" involved so many troops and yet for years I was of the opinion that we had failed. But in reality we severely delayed Hitler's timetable that in turn hastened the ultimate victory. Nonetheless, I buried my experiences, raised a family and tried to forget the war. In early 1987 I read a great book by Charles B. MacDonald ***"A Time for Trumpets: the untold story of the Battle of the Bulge"*** (published by WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY, INC., NEW YORK, N.Y.) I came out of my shell and decided to find some of my old comrades. However, several psychiatrists with whom I've consulted are of the opinion I made myself available for Korean War service as compensation for my self-deprecation.



Proudly wearing my "ruptured duck" lapel pin^[vi] I returned to Montclair State College in January 1946. Soon after graduating with a BA in June 1948 I submitted a request for the medals I was entitled to but had not yet received. The Department of the Army in forwarding the medals also notified me that I was still eligible to be considered for a direct commission. I followed up on it and on 16 March 1949 was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, Transportation Corps in the inactive reserves. Although not active in the reserves soon after the outbreak of the Korean Conflict on June 25, 1950 I was ordered to active duty training on 1 October 1950 with assignment to the Newark Recruiting & Induction Station. Soon thereafter I was ordered to extended active duty reporting on 20 November 1950 to the Transportation Corps Replacement Training Center, Fort Eustis, Virginia. My initial duty assignment was as platoon leader (basic training officer), Company D, 1st Battalion. As the senior lieutenant I often was called upon to serve as the acting company commander

The troops were newcomers to the Army and it was my responsibility to convert them from youthful civilian draftees into basic soldiers with infantry combat capabilities, preparatory to their further assignment to a transportation specialty; rail, truck or port. I took the mission very seriously being fully knowledgeable of how support troops had to shoulder a combat weapon when the tide of battle changed as it did in the "Bulge." It was my initial exposure to an integrated military and racial incidents did occur. On one occasion I made like King Solomon. We graduated recruits in 13-week cycles and as one class was preparing to depart one of my black recruits came to me with his barracks bag,



which had been apparently severely cut with a bayonet by another recruit, a youngster of Italian-American heritage from Union City. My solution was to have them exchange barracks bags and helped the miscreant by giving him a roll of tape with which to sufficiently mend his bag to hold his gear for transport.

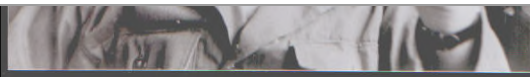
I was promoted to 1st Lieutenant on 23 April 1951. Colonel Arenz, the regimental commander was designated as Officers' Club board chairman as an additional duty and gave me an additional duty to re-write the club rules and then to chair a 4th of July club family day recreation program. I apparently impressed him with both my writing ability and recreational programming. He subsequently reassigned me to his staff as an Assistant S-3 with duties of Athletic Officer and Troop Information & Education Officer.

In the fall 1951 I was placed on 100 days temporary duty to Fort Slocum, NY to attend the Armed Forces Information School where on December 21st I was 6th in a class of 81 completing the Information & Education Training Program. Soon after returning to Fort Eustis I was alerted for transfer to the Far East Command and duty assignment Korea. On 9 February 52 I was temporarily assigned to the 377th Transportation Major Port for training as a Heavy Truck Command Officer with the 32nd Truck Company. Department of the Army special orders #41-dated 27 Feb 52 ordered me to prepare for overseas deployment and provided 30 day travel status effective 23 March.



I arrived at Camp Stoneman, CA on 23 April 52 for deployment to Far East Command by air travel from Travis AFB on 28 April. Arrived in Japan at Haneda Airport on 1 May in the midst of anti-American May-Day demonstrations by Japanese communists; however, our bus trip to Camp Drake was uneventful. About May 6th I traveled by commercial train through Hiroshima (the site of nuclear devastation) to Sasebo, formerly a major Japanese naval base (where the Japanese fleet formed up for the attack on Pearl Harbor in '41) and transported by sea to Pusan, Korea. I was then taken out of the pipeline and through 425th Transportation Traffic Regulating Group in Taegu assigned to the Transportation Section, Headquarters, Eighth US Army.

As of 12 May 52 my duty was as Chief, Technical Information Branch and Aide to the Chief of Transportation, Colonel Howard Malin. My duties were essentially staff and took me throughout South Korea visiting and coordinating with the various Transportation Corps major commands. The highlight of my duty tour in Korea was coordinating the 10th Anniversary celebration of the Transportation Corps with a centerfold byline historical article published in Star & Stripes. In early October I was reassigned to a similar position with the Headquarters US Army Far East in Yokohama, General Mark Clarke's command. My duties were varied and included travel throughout the vast command with visits to Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Philippines and Okinawa.





During Operation Little Switch; the exchange of wounded and sick prisoners of war, the Transportation Chief dispatched me back to Korea to coordinate military transportation support for the news media. This included providing the availability of railroad cars as office space and helicopters for aerial photography to major news media representatives from throughout the world.

Prior to departing the Korean War zone I was awarded and presented with the Army Commendation Ribbon with Metal Pendant

Throughout my stay in the Far East during the Korean Conflict I did not come under enemy fire. A far cry from what I encountered during World War II. My only close calls came when as the OIC^[32] of an overnight train movement of our headquarters from Teagu to Seoul we were subject to a guerrilla attack, but the MP guard unit handled the matter and I did nothing more than draw my weapon. My other close call came when the C47 I was on overshot the runway near Inchon and almost smashed into a mountainside.

I remained in the Far East until after the "Truce" was arranged and then on or about 5 October 53 returned to the continental US aboard the USNS General E.D. Patrick (departure date 14 Oct 53) arriving at the military port in San Francisco on 23 October. The next day traveled east by commercial air, reporting to Camp Kilmer NJ and separation from active military service on 4 November 53.



MILITARY AWARDS & DECORATIONS:^[vii]

Bronze Star Medal

The Purple Heart

Purple Heart w/First Oak Leaf Cluster

Army Commendation Ribbon with Metal Pendant

National Defense Service Medal

United Nations Service Medal

Korean Service Medal w/3 battle stars

Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation

European Theater of Operations Medal w/3 battle stars

American Theater of Defense Medal

Good Conduct Medal

American Prisoner of War Medal

World War II Victory Medal

New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal

The Combat Infantryman's Badge, a coveted and most prestigious award

I am now in the twilight of my years. It is difficult in looking back to my years of war service to realize that I survived to witness the dawn of a new millennium. An infinite hand spared me to have a loving wife and beautiful family. Why me and not another? I have no answer, but am and remain eternally grateful. I have been truly blessed.

My father before me served in time of war^[viii] and fortunately my son was not confronted with the obligation. Hopefully, the same will be true for the rest of my progeny. Then I can truly derive comfort that my wartime service was not in vain.

Pictured with my wife Helen at the 50th reunion of my high school graduation.



CAPTION: I'm at left with Dan Gilbert, Phil Cox, Fontaine Forbes & Art Vanmoorleham, surviving members of 2nd platoon at 106th Infantry Assn reunion in 1999.

^[1] The country was at war and all males had to register for military service when they reached 18 years of age. I turned eighteen on March 10th, registered at Peshine Avenue School the next day and was classified 1A- suitable for immediate call-up.

^[2] Port of Embarkation

[3] The local girls whose fathers were railroad locomotive engineers conveyed the information.

[4] Officers Candidate School

[5] Rifle, bayonet, duffle bag containing all clothing & field gear, full back pack containing blanket, field tent half, mess kit, soap, face towel, shaving gear, etc., gas mask, cartridge belt w/medical kit and steel helmet.

[6] This was an isolated mountainous sector accessible only by one bridge across the River Our at Schonberg. Our commanding general immediately questioned the deployment order because of obvious threat for two regiments to be easily surrounded if attacked; however, higher command allowed for no revision. "No yielding of conquered German homeland territory."

[7] We were put on work details outdoors during that terrible winter with one accommodation, a field fire in a discarded oil drum with rotating privileges to stand by it for a few minutes.

[8] Slit trench was a hole dug in the ground for latrine purposes.

[9] I think an adrenalin rush; stomach-knotting condition was a regular partner while under fire.

[10] Sharpshooter is better than Marksman, but not as good as Expert. My brother Nick achieved Expert while with the Marines.

[11] My definition for valor is to willfully jeopardize your life for the mission; merit is to obey any lawful order regardless of danger to life or limb.

[12] Command Post

[13] Ardennes Campaign; the Battle of the Bulge

[14] Similarly, with Sgt. "Kokomo" we made a night patrol into Brandscheid to "booby-trap" a sniper's nest.

[15] Packy Salerno, my Aunt Catherine's youngest of ten children; the only one drafted.

[16] A combat pack is limited to mess kit, tent half, bayonet, entrenching tool and raincoat. As combat condition worsened I later discarded this too except for the entrenching tool and bayonet that were affixed to my belt.

[17] This is what I consider real loneliness, but not total despair because the assigned mission is if you spot advancing enemy to give the alarm; with both rifle fire and shouting. If you have an avenue of escape and return to the main body you are allowed to take it.

[17] At the time I took this assignment in stride; however in reflection it remains with me as a recurring nightmare thinking about the what ifs. I had no idea at the time how fluid the frontline was. Just imagine had the German units infiltrated our areas. There I was wondering around with loud whispers calling for the 2nd platoon. Had an enemy unit infiltrated chances are I would have been jumped and throat slashed in order to maintain their tactical silence.

[18] Being on a roadblock is total despair because the mission is always to hold at all costs. In other words die on the job if necessary in protecting the main body. It was my good fortune to be relieved, but others were not as fortunate.

[19] A Catholic Chaplain at my last confession at Camp Myles Standish prior to debarking for the ETO counseled me to recite three Hail Mary's each morning to help me through. I not only beseeched the Holy Mother each morning but in every moment of crisis "over

there" as well. To this day I call on the Blessed Mother when confronted with any tribulation. I may not always gain satisfaction, but always gain comfort.

[20] A constant complaint during training was that of troops taking off their helmets because of the weight and discomfort.

[21] Captain Moore passed away before this writing and therefore could provide no verifications.

[22] S-3, Plans & Training Officer.

[23] Commanding Officer.

[25] This is further substantiated by Pinney's letter attached that indicates Major Cosby commandeered Garwood and his available command to a different battle mission unbeknown to Captain Moore.

[26] Browning automatic rifle

[27] Son of the Commanding General, 106th Infantry Division at the time

[28] My recollection has been subsequently verified by Alan Jones Jr. in his letter of 28 August 2000. Copy attached

[29] These attacks by our air corps wounded and killed many in the other cars, but the car I traveled in was not hit.

[30] When I was about 12 years old, my neighbor Jackie Rood and I sold bottled soda – nickel a pop- to WPA workers on road building projects from an ice filled bucket on a wagon we pulled around to the various worksites.

[31] My 20th Birthday came on March 10th and in a way we all celebrated it because we received our first and only Red Cross comfort parcels. Although we had to share we had canned food and cigarettes.

[32] Officer in charge

[i] Full Name: **Joseph Thomas. Salerno** (Confirmation middle name Thomas) Army Serial Numbers: Enlisted- 32 921 965; Officer- 0 969 893.

[ii] This was Army life at its best, in uniform while at a major coed university where the weekly highlight was the Saturday night dance. An incident worth noting occurred when the sorority houses were taking their yearbook pictures and one group locked the front door and the housemother didn't have the key. It just so happened that a second story window was open and we GIs fresh from infantry basic came to the rescue. Two of my buddies locked my knees and lifted me as I wall-walked up and into the window. It was the first time any male student entered the upstairs female dorm of any sorority house at AU.

[iii] This major counter attack was actually planned by Hitler himself and he called the campaign; Watch on the Rhine. The enemy plan was to take the transportation hub of St. Vith within 24 hours and within the week reach the sea, seizing the port at Antwerp and splitting the American and British forces. But among the heroic Allied units, "The Lion-106th was in the way.

[iv] --- **Sterling Garwood**
--- srgarwood@earthlink.net

January 17, 2001

Dear Joe,

December of 1944 is so far away that I 'm not sure what I can contribute. I recall much about the pillbox (Inside and out). I recall telling SSgt Ussery to take the sniper rifle upon top shoot anyone he could see. Then there was the night before we pulled out and a recon patrol to a house out to our right.^[iv] The snow was so frozen that it crunches with each step. I was sure some one would simply cut us down. The building was empty so we returned. Later, I was asleep in the pillbox when the sound power phone woke me. Sgt Neimela came over and told me that the carpenter (I have forgotten his name) was in a panic because he saw a dark figure just a little way from his foxhole. I remember grabbing the phone and telling him to pop the safety on his rifle and fire at the figure. I told the sgt. I had better go check. At that moment we heard a shot and some yelling. I rushed down to the right...and heard the carpenter moaning. He had a bullet hole in the toe of his combat boot...right between the big toe and the next one. I sent him back to the medics .I think Burley Wilson went with him.

A couple of days later, Major Cosby (Bat. exec) came to the pillbox and told me we (the platoon)^[iv]

were to stay behind. And the Bat was pulling out and moving to Schoenburg.I wanted to know how long we were supposed to remain. He didn't know. That morning we could see heavy German traffic moving right to left on the "Skyline Drive" about a mile or so away. I tried to call Captain Moore to no avail.

There was no way we could do anything about them so I decided to pull out and follow the battalion.

We hiked back to the area of the kitchen trucks were still there but no troops. We turned left on a forest road and shortly came up on a stalled column of regimental vehicles. We hiked along its length. Presently Major Cosby came up and started in on me about not remaining back in the pillbox position. I remember heading up a slope to the left through some fir trees until we found Col.Cavender and his staff. Early the next morning someone from Bat. Hdqs. came up to me^[iv]. He gave me a compass and a heading to go on. I got the platoon together and headed out. Just about that time the area was hit by a mortar attack. As I recall, one man was killed (not from my platoon). When we pulled up by the Schoenburg highway there was a German tank (a Panzer IV, I think.). The fir trees covered us and I asked Burley Wilson if he could hit the tank commander. Burley said his hands were shaking too much. I tried to sight the lousy "general motors" .45 submachine gun...and let fly. I really don't know whether I hit him or not. I jumped off of the highway shoulder and went around the front of the tank.

There I saw a bunch of 6-7 German bicyclist infantry. I pointed the submachine gun and squeezed then turned around and ran back around the tank and up the shoulder into the trees. I recall some 20mm automatic fire into the trees behind us. I don't know if any of the platoon were injured.

Later American officers were yelling to surrender etc, etc. With a short mortar attack again one man was killed (not from our platoon). We stopped when we came to. That's about it...

So long. Keep in touch.

(Lieut.) Sterling Garwood

[v] FROM **GORDON PINNEY** 07/05/2000

As for the last day or the 19th of December 1944, I have been searching my memory for months now, and it still isn't too clear. My best recollection is that we spent the previous day moving around and digging in about 4 or 5 times. Then at dark moved into a very heavy wooded area. We were told to dig in again, but everybody lay down in the snow and went to sleep. Then early the next morning, the 19th we were awakened with what we thought were tree bursts (88). We hastily dug in and when the shelling stopped we moved out. A bit of a sidelight, I watched on the tube this winter a story of the Bulge, and it showed several 88's lined up firing on a heavily wooded area some distance away. And these were not tree bursts, but proximity fused shells that were exploding well over the trees. No wonder it rained cast iron so heavily. We lost a few there.

The next move was to go out with Garwood, about two squads or so, in search of a route across the creek and back to St. Vith. Gil has related this story. We saw a couple of 6 X 6's at a bend in the canyon and assumed it was a village in American hands. Garwood and Burly Wilson were in the lead, and Burly had the Grease Gun. As they were progressing down the slope, a German stood up on the top of a Tank with a schmizer and yelled at them. Burly cut him in two at the waist. The next thing I recall was an order yelled out several times to withdraw. So we did. I never saw Garwood after that, but he told me several years ago when I called him to invite him to a reunion that he and Burly went over the edge and onto the road below them. We could not see the road, or even the top of the tank from where we were, not over 20 yards behind Garwood. He told me they were captured and separated, and he never saw Burly again. He asked me if I had ever heard from him, but I told him no.

We went back up that slope into the trees with machine gun and small artillery pieces raking the hill back and forth, and up and down. It's a wonder any of us made it back to the trees. We regrouped and decided to go back to where we started, and found ourselves back at Regimental CP.

The next step was to repeat the mission with two Lts. that I had never seen before. We took off again, and hadn't gone too far when we heard a German Machine gun firing across a low open area. The Lieutenants said we should surrender, but we all argued against it. Finally they ordered us to leave our rifles and follow them out. They had a white handkerchief on a stick waving it and yelling something in German. The Machine gunner apparently never saw us, as they were busy firing at something else. They then spotted some soldiers back to the right and proceeded to surrender, or try to except for Col. Nagel. I never heard anyone chewed out and swore at like they did that day. The next thing, Col. Nagel ordered several of us to go back up and get the rifles we had left, which we did. On our return we were put on the perimeter and dug in there. Gil and Taney and Mac were all there. That's where we threw away the machine guns I had been carrying and divided up the ammo anyone close by. Gill filled all his clips, and we all did. I remember I had a full belt and at least one bandolier.

That is where the officer who had given us the lecture on how to ace if you were hit in combat (call for a medic, but don't give away your position) He was laying face down and took a slug in the left BUN. You could hear his scream for over a mile. I crawled up and sprinkled the wound with sulfa and gave him my canteen. His was empty, and he said you had to take water with the sulfa. Anyway, a medic came and put on a compress, just after I had taken a pint bottle out of his pocket. I told him he couldn't drink any of it in his condition, and crawled back to my foxhole. To make a long story short, the four of us swallowed the evidence and threw away the bottle. Taney and I were in one hole, I had two rockets left for the Launcher I had on my M- I, and Gil and Mac were in a hole by ours. We spent the rest of the day there until Col. C Lavender gave the order to disarm our weapons and follow him out with our hands over our heads. End of story. The rest of the day and night were standing in a pigpen that you can recall.

I hope this fits in somewhere with the other stories you already have, and this is what I have written down after many nights of digging into areas of my memory that I haven't looked at since then. It was all one hell of a nightmare, and I still want only to leave it back there in the dark recesses of my memory, where they belong.

That's it Joe,
Gordon.

[vi] The Ruptured Duck Lapel Pin was issued to all honorably discharged veterans who served in World War II as a distinguishing symbol of those who had served.

[vii] In 1995 the New Jersey Deputy Adjutant General in formal ceremonies at LeisureTowne presented me with the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal in recognition of meritorious military service in time of war.

[viii][viii] The Italian Campaign to conquer Libya.

Alan W. Jones, Jr.
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28 August 2000

Dear Joe,
While sorting through old papers, I found a partial note, separated from a larger paper apparently, which recounts, in general, the following.

The attack order to the 1st Bn was delayed early 19 December 1944 when Lt Col Craig was fatally wounded. While Major Cosley was issuing the attack order to available units, I ran 150 yards across an open field (does that help orient us?) to reach the 3^d Bn CO, on our left, to coordinate contact at the line of departure and during the attack. While after completing a brief reconnaissance, I ran to meet the left company (why I said it this way I don't know) of the 1st Bn to bring its CO up-to-date.

That's it. Since A Co was

- 2 -

the regimental rear guard, and C Co. had been assigned as regimental reserve for the attack; the "left company" could only have been B Co. that I reached with the updated attack plan.

You were right; I was wrong, it seems. This will teach me to be so positive, though I doubt it.

Even with this information, I cannot visualize my movements in detail that morning. There are gaps, with periods of vivid recall, until we boarded the box cars. Then I remember too much. Anyway, I hope these comments will help to confirm your memories.

I do regret that I cannot be with you at the St Louis reunion, but I'll see you at the '2001 reunion in Washington.

Best regards,
Alan Jones