

Charles R. Bradford, Jr.

589th Field Artillery, HQ

106th Infantry Division

Dear Men of Company B,

"On behalf of the Bradford and Smith families, we would personally like to thank each of you for being with us today. Your presence in and of itself is a gift.

Instead of the typical eulogy, the context of what I have to say today is in the form of a thank you note—that would have been written by my father. But before I say thank you, I need to tell you about the life my father lived.

Dad was born on May 28, 1920, to Catherine Johnson Bradford and Charles Raymond Bradford, Sr. of Hollywood, Alabama. He grew up a country boy in a small cotton town. A person of small stature but big ego, who according to him was always getting into fights. He rode the train to Scottsboro to attend Jackson County High School, and then attended Alabama Polytechnic Institute (Auburn University) in 1938. Dad flunked freshmen English but managed to graduate magna cum laude, loved his fraternity, Pi Kappa Alpha and graduated in 1942. As one of the 4 highest ranked officers in R.O.T.C. at API, he, like all of his classmates, went off to train for WWII. 1944 found Dad a 1st Lt. in field artillery training with his officer classmates from AU. Having been denied permission for leave to come to Scottsboro to marry Ruth Moody, Dad went over his commanding officer and obtained permission from his post commander for leave. Upon his return, his commanding officer immediately transferred him to the 106th Division, a replacement division made up mostly of soldiers who had never trained together. He was sent to port of embarkment in Taunton, Massachusetts where he and mother spent the next few months awaiting his deployment to Europe. His division eventually arrived in Ardennes forest in Belgium in December 1944, to replace the 20th Division, a battle-hardened group that had been fighting since D-day.

His division, the 106th "Golden Lions", was on the front for 2 weeks before they found themselves in the middle of the largest German offensive of WWII. In a blinding snow storm armored panzer divisions advanced and surrounded the U.S. Army, forming a "bulge". The 106th Division was in the middle of the "bulge" and found themselves immediately cut off from the rest of the army. Dad, a forward observer for field artillery, along with his newly acquired friend, Eric Fisher Wood, found his division of 10,000 men cut off from the remainder of the U.S. Army. Dad was captured when they ran out of food and ammunition. His friend, Eric killed 100 German soldiers single handedly, but lost in the end and was buried a few miles away. Eric won the Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously. Dad spent the next 6 months in P.O.W. camps (Stalag IX-B). V.E. Day in May of 1945 found Dad weighing 105 pounds. When he returned to Hollywood, his homecoming wish was to have Christmas. Although, it was July, Dad's mother, Kate Bradford, had a Christmas tree, turkey and dressing and coconut cake.

For the next 5 years, like all veterans, he tried to put his life back together. In 1950, he and his best friend, Mark Skelton, recruited 164 eighteen to twenty year olds to join the local National Guard, Company B. Unbeknown to Mark and Dad they would soon be activated and sent as combatants to the Korean War. Dad and Mark were both given the

opportunity not to return to combat. Both elected to continue their commitment to their country and community and to these young men that they had recruited.

The Korean conflict was a series of advance and retreat from the 38th parallel to Seoul (the capital). The Red army would bring millions of soldiers for 3 day campaigns and drive the U.S. Army hundreds of miles before our forces could stop them and drive them back north. Jackson County Company B were combat engineers that put up bridges for the advance and took them down after the retreat.

On one such maneuver, Dad, Captain of Company B, found his company presumably cut off on a mountain. From all reports he could obtain from prisoners and soldiers coming back from the front, his company of 164 men would be surrounded within hours. He repeatedly asked for orders to pull back off the mountain from his commander who was located miles to the rear and who continually denied permission to leave.

Dad's continued attempts to inform his C.O. of the impending onslaught were answered with accusations of his company's combat inexperience. Dad remembered his similar predicament in Ardennes when his company captured German prisoners who carried orders that foretold of the German advance and isolation of his company. Based on this, Dad ordered his radio operator to send a message again asking for permission to pull back and then turn the radio off before they could reply. Risking court martial for insubordination, Dad made a decision that saved the lives of 164 Jackson County boys and in doing so endeared himself to each of those young men.

It is at this point where the Thank You note starts. Dad returned home in 1952 and tried again to put his life back together. It took him several years to convince himself that he had done his duty in the Battle of the Bulge. I think he felt that he should have shared the same fate as Eric Fisher Woods, since he was the only officer in his company to live through the battle. The men of Company B gave my Dad his life back by continually surrounding him through his next years with constant recognition of his role in their lives. The men of Company B have spent the last 59 years lauding and praising my father for bringing them safely home. They have been present in mass at every major event in my father's life and constructed a monument on the courthouse square in his honor. They have continually thanked my father for their lives. But in the end, it was you through your devotion who gave my father his life back.

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