

**Clement Kuhman**  
106th Infantry Division

POW memories rarely shared Chemical engineer Kuhman opened up in his 2003 interview

Elyria - Clement Kuhman squirreled away remnants from his prisoner-of-war days, stashed them in a peanut box and tried to forget. The retired chemical engineer, who died Jan. 27 at age 82, rarely spoke about his wartime experiences until his later years. His seven children grew up aware of the little box and mystified by its contents.

"He had a tin peanut box full of little pieces of paper [the POWs] could scribble recipes on," his son Tim said. "He had this wooden spoon and a makeshift wooden knife. It wasn't until we were all out of the house and he picked up with Barbed Wire Buckeyes" that the family learned more.

Kuhman shared more about that chapter of his life in a 2003 interview for a Library of Congress oral-history project called "Experiencing War."

He would have used the wooden spoon to eat strange soup made of unknown ingredients out of his helmet when he first arrived at **Stalag IX-B** in Bad Orb, Germany.

"I understand it was made from sugar beet tops," Kuhman said in the interview. "It was something we hadn't had before."

He implied that Russian cooks, who prepared the nasty concoction, used more than beets.

"When we first got there, there were dogs in the camp," he said. "They somehow disappeared."

Kuhman used a piece of bed slat to cut bread, which he believed was made with sawdust instead of flour. Unable to fill their stomachs, he and his comrades tried to satisfy their hunger with memories of their mothers' favorite recipes.

"Most of the time, we sat around and talked. Not about women. About food," he said.

He initially seemed headed for an easy stint in the Army. After abbreviated basic training, he entered an accelerated-study program in engineering at the University of Alabama.

But early in 1944, the Army needed more infantrymen and pulled the plug on the program. Most of the would-be engineers were sent to Camp Atterbury in Indiana for training with the 106th Infantry Division.

Ironically, Camp Atterbury also housed German and Italian prisoners of war, who were treated to field trips outside the camp and sometimes taken by escorts to visit American relatives.

By mid-December, Kuhman was driving a jeep in a convoy from Rouen, France, to St. Vith, Belgium. A few days later, the Germans launched a surprising final offensive, which became known as the Battle of the Bulge. They captured the company of inexperienced soldiers, forced them to march for a couple of days, then loaded them onto boxcars for the long ride to the POW camp.

Several hundred prisoners, who thought the war would be over by Christmas, were packed in a barracks with no heat, no windows and a hole in the floor that served as the only toilet.

"People got sick, pneumonia, whatever, and died," Kuhman said. "We were losing three or four a week. We didn't get out of there until April."

After the war, he returned to Weirton, W.Va., and took a job in a steel mill. In 1946, he enrolled at Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland. He finished his schooling at Fenn College, received a degree in chemical engineering in 1952 and began working at Harshaw Chemical Co. in Cleveland. He later transferred to the Elyria plant.

Whenever co-workers talked about war, Kuhman would simply say, "I was one of the first American soldiers to cross the Rhine, but it was on a prison train."

He was more comfortable discussing the war with fellow members of the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

"I guess that's because we understand each other," said Doc Unger, a former POW. "We really laugh a lot of times about the terrible things that happen. He was good at getting people to talk. The therapeutic value has been tremendous for the guys that have been active with us in our organization."

The more Kuhman talked about the things he wanted to forget, the easier it became.

"Since 1990 or so, he was pretty much an open book, telling you what he thinks, trying to make people laugh," his son said. "He wanted people to enjoy life like he was."

Clement Kuhman visited Camp Atterbury in Indiana seven years ago and posed in front of a wall commemorating the divisions that the camp housed. Kuhman was a member of the 106th Infantry Division, "the Golden Lions."

Caption/Lead: Elyria - Clement Kuhman squirreled away remnants from his prisoner-of-war days, stashed them in a peanut box and tried to forget. The retired chemical engineer, who died Jan. 27 at age 82, rarely spoke about his wartime experiences until his later years. His seven children grew up aware of the little box and mystified by its contents.

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