

Norman R. Schoon

*423rd Infantry, 1st battalion, D company (heavy weapons)
106th Infantry Division
Stalag IX-B (9-B)*

My uncle Norman Schoon was a member of the 106th Division during the Battle of the Bulge. He was a squad leader in the 423rd Infantry, 1st battalion, D company (heavy weapons). He was captured on Dec. 19th, 1944 and was released on Good Friday, a few months later.

Although my uncle Norm's interview didn't make it into Dr. Ambrose's book, his interview was the most vivid, and the most emotional. I wondered if it was because I had a new found respect for this older Dutch man whom I'd never paid much attention to before. Probably somewhat, but his story was so emotional and personal. He remembered every little detail, including some tearful recollections of his reactions when seeing guys he knew, laying dead in the snow, with their frozen eyes gazing at the sky. At this recall, he cried. I almost did too. I was sitting there talking to an old man who was once a young man fighting across the ocean in a dense Belgian forest. Thanks to my uncle and others like him, I'll never have to confront what he did. And he did it all without complaint.

During the interview, when he talked about how he'll never forget the sound of a German Tiger tank, you could almost see the fear on his face. I could almost feel the fear my uncle tried to express — it's hard for me to comprehend. I also interviewed a guy from the 99th Division, who was a survivor of an incident where enemy tanks rolled down a line of American foxholes and matter-of-factly machine gunned most of the GI's where they lay.

The 106th Division finally surrendered on December 19th, 1944. My uncle said that most guys didn't want to surrender despite being out of ammunition. He said many guys would have fought with anything they could, including sticks and stones. I believe that this now aging man, my uncle, would have done just that back then in his youth — if he were given the chance. But he wasn't; his entire division was ordered to surrender. He shed a few tears here too.

As a prisoner of war on the way to a concentration camp, his train was mistakenly bombed by British bombers, and many were killed. He was twice stabbed by German guards — once, for not shaving fast enough! He lost around 100 pounds in captivity, and the only reason he didn't lose more was because a kind guard occasionally gave him some watery potato peel soup. I now see why he never talked about it. It must have been unthinkable difficult. Until now, his son Tom, who sat in on the interview, had never heard him talk openly about it. It was a special night for us all.

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