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B Battery, 589th FABn
106th Infantry Division
Stalag 12-A

He was captured at Parker's Crossroads and wound up at **Stalag XII-A**, a place we visited in May 2012 on the tour. One would never be aware that a POW Camp was once there. It is now a German Army Base and the German GI's stationed there didn't have a clue.

John Schaffner

We rolled off the LST at Rouen, France in a 3/4 ton weapons carrier. The driver, an artillery mechanic, eventually got tired of driving and asked me to take the wheel. Not knowing how to double-clutch the vehicle I asked the Lt. to drive. He took over and we switched helmets. I returned salutes all over France. On Dec 9th or 10th we moved into the 2nd Division positions, taking over from the 15th FA BN of the 2nd Division. We moved into a dugout hut. I was put to work tearing out unused huts to use the timber for improving the road out in case we had to use it in a hurry. The way it turned out, we did!

Next day I was in charge of a wire group stringing wire across an open field from Bn. Hq. To Btry B so Capt. Brown could have electric lights like at Hq. I was in a party with Major Goldstein that fell back looking for a new position for when it became necessary to vacate the present one.

December 16, 1944

German artillery shells - before dawn.

Division spread over 25 mile front facing Germans. 5 mile front recommended best. On the morning of December 16th German artillery and tanks were firing direct on our howitzer positions before we knew about any attack and breakthrough. I was talking to guards at the Battalion Hq. When I saw soldiers from A Battery out on the hill in front of the howitzers. Shouts were made at them to lie down as they were in the direct line of fire from one of A Battery's guns. The howitzer had a direct sight on a tank coming over the crest of the hill and using two rounds knocked it out. The German attackers then backed off for the moment.

It was here that B Battery lost its first man. A soldier was sent out with a bazooka to stop a German tank. The tank fired first killing him instantly.

At that time Lt. Kiendl was wounded severely by a shell that hit a tree nearby and drove fragments into his neck and shoulder. He was brought into Hq. and his blood soiled the out-going mail and Christmas cards that I had made ready to mail. After about three days of moving around the remnants of the 589th were divided into two groups, one half going to Baraque de Fraiture to defend the crossroads and the other half going the other way out of danger.

Regrouped and moved back - stopped at what we thought to be an important crossroads - deployed with only three howitzers and about 100 men from the 589th. Joined off & on

by a few tanks and halftracks with quad 50 AA guns. The Germans came. On the night of Dec 20/21 Ken Sewell and John Schaffner were sent to a foxhole down the road to Houffalize as an outpost. About midnight the German patrol attacked toward the crossroads and the outpost brought down fire on them from the M-16 half-track and the 37mm gun on an M-8 This was only the first attack by the German 2nd Panzer Division. One night the word came to come out of the foxholes and go into the stone barn for shelter. Apparently Bernard Strohmer never got the word. He was still in his hole the next morning having killed a German soldier who was lying just in front of the foxhole. He told his relief, "I got my German." Bernard had let them know that we were still there. His being there could have saved all of us from an attack. We held the corner for 5 days.

We were joined by members of the 82nd AB Division, 325th GIR. We were to move back but the Germans dropped mortar fire on our positions and the 82nd men left our holes. We moved back into foxholes and the next morning (Dec 23rd) many German tanks cut us off. There was 2 doors to our stone barn - you faced a machine gun at one door and tanks at the other - we walked out facing the tanks after destroying our weapons. The Germans stripped us of our jewelry, watches, etc. and marched us to the rear.

We held up the German advance several days and earned the French Croix de Guerre and a very complimentary letter from Gen. Gavin saying that it was one of "the most important actions of the war."

It was the coldest winter in Germany for 50 years. The Germans marched us down a path into a wooded area, a dead end. They called "Willie" several times. Word came down the line - "Don't move or make a break for the woods." Like the Malmedy Massacre, no one bolted, so they marched us out.

My group, many from B Battery, spent Christmas Eve in a school house in Ulfinger, Luxembourg. We sang "Silent Night" with Captain Brown & others in English, German guards sang along in German on the other side of the wall.

For holding back repeated attacks at the crossroads, Baraque de Fraiture, Belgium, also known as Parker's Crossroads, after Major Arthur C. Parker, III, the battalion received several awards; The Presidential Unit Citation, The French Croix de Guerre w/Gilt Silver Star, The Belgian Croix de Guerre, and a letter of thanks sent to Major Parker from General James Gavin, CO of the 82nd AB Division, commending the men under his command for their stand at the crossroads. The action was later referred to as "An Alamo Defense."

December 25, 1944 - As prisoners were marched to Prum, then Gerolstein. Hundreds were jammed into a small building, a former factory, two stories high. Stacks of wooden bins were fastened to the walls that slept 5 or 6 guys. There was no heat, no blankets, and no food. Every one was starving. (I was not in a heated building until May 1945.) The city was in a valley with vital crossroads and railroad tracks. U.S. & British planes would drop bombs to block the roads and railroad and we were sent out in gangs to clear the streets and railroad for about 5 weeks. It was very cold working outside, very bad. I wore the same clothes for 5 months, having them off only one time. If you took your shoes off you would never see them again as many had no shoes at all.

When we were clearing roads and railroads, the planes would come over and strafe and bomb and our guards would run for cover. I was starving and would go into houses

looking for food or clothes to replace mine that were torn and dirty. One day I found socks and a handkerchief that I needed. One day I found a large jar of canned meat. I had a real feast. Another day I found a gallon jar of strawberry preserves - delicious - I ate it with my hands and had a huge red stain on my field jacket for the rest of my POW Days. I had left my overcoat, frozen, leaning against a wall back at the crossroads and was wearing a very large jacket I found on a bush with a 2nd Division patch. We also pushed huge sleds carrying pre-fab buildings stacked on them to the top of a hill! I found a knife, fork, & spoon. I only needed the spoon since all we had was soup. One day when the planes came over I went into a house and came out wearing a blue plaid overcoat, with 14 pockets and much too large for me. I had been without a blanket or overcoat in the dead of winter. I found a home in that coat! Only one guard ever asked me about it. I think that I told him that a nice German citizen gave it to me. I never felt that I was stealing. I thought that the Germans were supposed to take care of me. I wore it day & night until spring. I had seen German and Italian POWs in the United States. Their food, clothes, barracks, & P.X's were just like American soldiers.

February 6, 1945

Arrived at Limburg Camp XII-A shortly after allied planes had bombed and strafed the camp, hospital, & rail cars, killing many allied soldiers and officers. Starving soldiers were stuffed into boxcars. They were overloaded to where all could not lay down, or sit down. Little food was offered, a bucket was the toilet, many days the train waited in tunnel as planes flew overhead. Under freezing temperatures there was also dysentery, yellow jaundice, and body lice.

As the war was coming to an end the Germans walked us north and westward from camp to camp. We ended up at Camp X-B between Bremen and Hamburg. The end came when we heard cannon fire. The Germans asked for a truce, the English said, "No." After three days and nights of cannon fire and "screaming meemi's" the Germans left and a unit of Welsh Guards liberated our camp on April 28, 1945.

Important dates:

December 16, 1944 the Germans attack
December 23, 1944 captured at Baraque de Fraiture
January 31, 1945 left Gerolstein
February 6, 1945 Arrived at Limburg, Camp XII-A
February 12, 1945 Church service
February 25, 1945 Haircut
March 15, 1945 Arrived at Camp X-B
April 15, 1945 Arrived at (Marlog) Camp X-C
April 16, 1945 Delousing
April 20, 1945 Under U. S. Military control
April 27, 1945 Fighting near compound
April 28, 1945 Liberated
May 1, 1945 Some men left Morlag X-C
May 4, 1945 No more shipments, typhus in Polish section of compound.
War over in North Germany
May 8, 1945 War supposed to be over at 12:00
Eating well - food found here from nearby farms and the English mess.
May 10, 1945 Transit Camp near Depolg by truck

May 11, 1945 Flown to Brussels, Belgium in C-47
Bath & deloused.
Issued English uniform and 5 Pounds cash in Belgian money.
Billeted at 22 Rue Beillard
Ate at hotel - 63 Rue de la Loi
Remember mustard flavored food.
Sent telegrams from Red Cross
Toured Brussels, night club like home - all GI's

May 13, 1945 Left Brussels by train to Namur, Belgium - Now in U. S. Hands.
May 14, 1945 Left Namur for camp near LeHarve, ate all we could hold.
May 15, 1945 Arrived at tent city Camp Lucky Strike, France
May 31, 1945 Set sail on a Victory ship SS Eugene Hale loaded with American ex-POWs,
ate well & Often.

Bobbed along for 16 days to New York harbor, ate good, read books..

Processed in New Jersey & sent home for 60 day recuperation leave. Very happy to be home, needed a doctor to settle my stomach, and dentist to fix 23 cavities. Gained weight and strength.

Reported back to Army at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio. The Army sent me east to Ft. Bragg, N.C. Spent about 3 months in Secret Filing Office where we tested equipment from all of the armies of the world.

November 1945 As soon as I had enough points to be discharged I went home and back to M.U.

I was very happy to be home. I quickly got over my ailments and re-entered Missouri U. I married the girl from home, Betty. Our son, John Jr. was born while we were at M.U. We graduated in June 1949 and returned home to work in the family grocery store that was opened in 1878 by my grandfather. We kept it open for 111 years and then closed it. Our sons didn't want to follow in that business.

Most of us are scarred up a little, some inward, some outward. There are fewer of us now.

Source: John Rain and John Schaffner



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