

Leon J. Setter

*Headquarters Company, 2nd BN, 422 Regiment
106th Infantry Division
Unknown POW*

I was an ammo bearer and on December 16, 1944, I was quartered in a wood shack atop the Schnee Eifel in the first belt of pillboxes of the Siegfried Line which had been taken the previous fall. The 106th Division line extended north to include the 1st Battalion and the 14th Cavalry, attached to the 106th; and to the south by the 3rd Battalion and the 423rd Regiment with the 2nd Battalion in reserve. Continuing to the south was the 424th Regiment. Initial attacks by the enemy against our division occurred in the 14th Cavalry area and against the 423rd and 424th Regiments.

My shack was among several built around pillboxes. It was close to a pillbox that served as 2nd Battalion headquarters. In turn, this pillbox was located about two miles east of the town of Schlaussenbach which was headquarters for the 422nd Infantry Regiment. The shacks had been vacated on December 12 by men of the 2nd Division as they were being relieved by the 106th. Their new assignment was to move north and prepare for an attack by filtering through the 99th Division. This attack was in progress when the Bulge began. The shack was big enough to house two persons, myself and a truck driver. We were awakened early by the artillery fire on the morning of December 16. We had just finished preparing to go outside our hut when our platoon sergeant knocked on the door to inform us that the division had been placed on a Class 1 alert because of enemy activity in the area.

After chow the truck driver and I were given orders to go to an ammo dump somewhere in the Schonberg-St. Vith area to pick up a truckload of ammo. At the ammo dump we loaded the truck and were resting when a truck from the 423rd Regiment pulled up. The driver explained that his truck guard had just been killed when they came into contact with the enemy near a road junction between Schonberg and Bleialf. He then told us where the incident took place and suggested we be careful on the way back. This was the first time we had heard of an actual attempt to penetrate our lines even though we had picked up several rumors that an attack would occur soon.

We took off immediately with our loaded truck. We decided that it would be best for us to go back the same way we had come into the dump rather than trying to determine a different way back. I was in the back of the truck while he was driving. After driving for about an hour we arrived at 2nd Battalion Headquarters. During the trip back the driver kept a close lookout to the front as best he could while I kept scanning the area to the rear as we drove. The return trip was successful without coming in contact with the enemy even though we had to pass nearby the location where the initial incident occurred.

As we pulled up in front of 2nd Battalion Headquarters we learned that all available men from Headquarters Company had been sent to assist with responding to the activity at Auw. By this time the flank of the 422nd Regiment was exposed and the enemy was beginning to penetrate our rear. I spent the afternoon as a guard just outside the 2nd Battalion Headquarters pillbox. My orders were to keep scanning the area for the enemy and not to allow anyone outside to enter the pillbox without first getting the permission of one of the officers inside the pillbox. Late in the afternoon when I was on relief from guard duty, General Jones and some of his staff pulled up in a jeep. After talking to some officers in the HQ pillbox, he and his staff members proceeded on foot presumably to visit one of the rifle

company areas. Soon thereafter, General Jones, who was the 106th Division Commander, returned and continued his tour.

During the evening of the 16th our platoon sergeant told us that the company had been ordered to be ready to pull out just after midnight. We were not to take our duffel bags because we would return in a few days. Shortly after midnight we assembled on the logging road in front of the CP in columns of four. It was pitch dark and difficult to determine how many men in addition to my company were in front of us or behind us. After about 20 minutes the column began walking down the road we had used four days previously to enter the area originally. We walked for what seemed like one or two hours, stopping from time to time to rest and to allow the column to remain together or for other companies to join us.

Suddenly we stopped and found that the column had come in contact with a machine gun emplacement. As our part of the column came by the emplacement we talked to two soldiers, members of the 106th, who said they came very close to firing on us but wanted to identify us first as friend or foe.

We remained in our column and waited for a while before moving on for what seemed to be a mile where we came upon an intersection. We slipped into the woods and waited until daylight to dig foxholes.

Some trucks were coming along about noon on the 17th. They were having difficulty staying on the road because of ice and snow. Members of headquarters who were available helped the drivers get out of the ditches. Some of the trucks pulled up and parked while others moved on. By mid-day the cooks from Company Headquarters returned to our original emplacement area and gathered food supplies. They returned in about three hours and had successfully gotten back to the area to pick up the food supplies. They reported that they had not seen any of the enemy and that the enemy had not come into the area we had vacated. Meanwhile, the men from my company returned from the Auw assignment and were very hungry. On the evening of the 17th HQ company had a good meal because of the food the cooks had retrieved. After eating, it was almost dark. We were called together and told that the enemy was attempting to encircle us. We were given our hours assigned for standing guard throughout the night.

After duty assignments we were beginning to get quite concerned about what the enemy was up to because a couple of enemy scouting planes had passed over earlier at a very low level. Someone had captured one of the enemy which one of my buddies had spent most of the day guarding in the back of one of the trucks. I stood guard duty two times during the night and kept a lookout for an enemy patrol.

On the morning of the 18th we were assembled and issued rations. They told us that we were surrounded but that an air drop was to take place soon to provide us with food, ammo, and medical supplies. Also they assured us that an armored column was headed toward us and they would enable us to get back to our lines. We moved out about ten o'clock that morning single file. At this point in time we were still atop the Schnee-Eifel. Soon we spotted an enemy sniper standing in a tree. He was ordered down, searched, and taken along. We spent the entire day of the 18th walking single file up and down hills and finally we bedded down on a hillside. Apparently we were not spotted by the enemy all day. Either that or he did not choose to create any trouble since we were already surrounded. However after dark some flares were shot off in the valley below us. On the 18th we walked three miles as the crow flies and ended up a mile north of Oberlascheid.

On the morning of the 19th the 422nd and 423rd Regiments prepared to take Schonberg in response to division orders. This was the case in spite of the fact that no air drop had occurred. Still, we were hoping that an armored column would be able to get through to us because by this time both the 422nd and 423rd Regiments were surrounded. The enemy had already taken Schonberg and we had lost most of our artillery support which had been moved to other locations. Actually we were attacking against our own lines with the enemy in between.

As the attack proceeded our company moved out at a slow pace because the rifle companies were leading the way. At first we proceeded down the hill and crossed a road. As we crossed the road I saw some combat activity to my left. Then we proceeded about 500 yards and our squad leader signaled for us to get down. We remained in the prone position for about five to ten minutes until the signal was given again to proceed.

We were moving on when suddenly we came under very heavy machine gun fire and small arms fire along with .88's, tanks, etc. By this time we were out in the open because the advance had proceeded to a slope of ground leading to the Schonberg-Andler road. Colonel Descheneaux was pulling the 2nd Battalion back from the open area into nearby woods. Also the 2nd Battalion had, by chance, come in contact with the Fuhrer Begleit Brigade headed for St. Vith by not passing through the bottleneck at Schonberg.

After we hit the ground the machine gun fire was so heavy that the area was alive with tracer bullets. I thought, "My god, how many bullets are there, flying through the air?" I believe that for every tracer seen at least three non-tracers had to be flying through the air also. Then small arms became very intense. You could hear the bullets hit the snow because, as yet, we were completely out in the open. First, one bullet hit the snow just to my left. Then one hit just to my right. The third round hit the snow just in front of me. It was close enough to splatter snow in my face. I thought that a round was going to hit me squarely in the middle of my steel helmet and split me in half. It has been said that General Patton had a fear of being split in half by a bullet. Having a round hit this close certainly does create this impression in your mind. You think it will happen all the way down your back including the splitting of your tailbone in half. I was scared to death. Then suddenly a voice told me, "Leon, you will be alright. You will survive this." Suddenly I was not quite so afraid any more. It was as though the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, was talking to me.

Suddenly I realized that I had lost contact with my squad. I noticed that a soldier just in front of me had a Browning automatic rifle. Also, I knew he was not in my company because no one in my company carried such a rifle. Evidently he was a member of the 2nd Battalion who was in the process of moving into a wooded area. This soldier shot some rounds into a clump of trees to our front which reduced the small arms fire in my immediate area. One soldier got up and ran about 100 yards into the cover area without getting hit in spite of the tracer bullets flying in all directions. The second soldier ran the 100 yards into the trees. Next, it was my turn. The fourth man to run the 100 yards, I recognized as a member of my squad. Afterwards he showed me his mess kit on the back of his pack. There was a bullet hole through it. He had felt something hit as he was running and considered himself lucky because he was running with his head and shoulders down in a squatted position.

After walking into the woods about fifty yards, I saw Colonel Descheneaux, the 422nd Regimental Commander. Then I went into a shack used by the field artillery. This must have been the 589th Field Artillery Battalion as they were the support artillery unit for the

422 Infantry Regiment. There I saw a member of my platoon who had just had a bullet hit him in the front which had just penetrated his overcoat as he was standing parallel with the bullet as it traveled across his chest.

Next I saw my squad leader. He called my squad together and told us our situation looked bad. He reminded us that we were completely surrounded. He concluded by telling us to dig foxholes to protect ourselves from the shelling and that we would assemble after dark in an attempt to find our way to make contact with American lines again. I spent the next hour digging a foxhole and dodging the shelling. A small fragment hit me in the hand. It was about the size of a toothpick and about a half inch long. It stuck in my hand so I pulled it out.

As I finished digging my foxhole, my squad leader came to me and told me that the entire 422nd Infantry Regiment had been ordered to surrender to the enemy by Colonel Descheneaux and that we were ordered to destroy our weapons. Also, we were to form in a group within thirty minutes to talk down the hill in accordance with instructions given by the enemy. Needless to say I was confused. This had been my first day in actual combat. At first I felt relieved because of the combat pressure. Soon it began to sink in and another kind of fear set in, that of fear of the unknown. What was going to happen next?

I proceeded to dismantle my carbine after about ten minutes had passed, throwing the parts in all directions. As I walked toward the assembly area I saw an American soldier that had been wounded and apparently was in shock. A few of the men were trying to make him as comfortable as possible. By this time I saw a couple of the enemy soldiers who were lining us up in a column of fours to march us down the hill.

When we got down the hill and onto a blacktop road we spotted an enemy vehicle coming up the road. It was an enemy staff car in which the enemy General Von Mateuffel, commander of the Fifth Panzer Army, was riding. I had a different thought about General Von Manteuffel. After I had seen how short he was, I began to wonder how an enemy soldier with such a low rank as private could talk some officers in a command car into taking him on a tour. I almost laughed at him since I was mistakenly associating height with rank.

It took about 30 to 40 minutes for the column to get into Schonberg where we were placed inside a catholic church. As soon as the church was filled, the rest of the prisoners had to sleep outside on the ground.

On the morning of December 20th we were lined in a column of four and walked into Germany. I was a prisoner of war until liberation on April 14, 1945. My weight when captured was 160 pounds which fell down to 100 pounds when liberated 119 days later.

This is my story. When I left the Bulge area it was growing by the hour. Its containment and eventual elimination is the story of other men. God bless them.

Page last revised

[Print this article](#)