

## Gil Zbasnik

*106th Infantry Division  
Zeitz Work Camp*

"My brother, Anton W. Zbasnik, we called him Bill, was a member of Hq company as shown on the roster. Unfortunately, he passed away about three years ago and consequently never had an opportunity to enjoy using all the information you have preserved to relive the experiences he had. He carried many fond memories of the men he served with and talked about them often. It was not only through my brother that the 777th touched my life. I would like to tell you about it.

I was with the **106th infantry division** and was captured during the Battle of the Bulge. Skipping past all that happened after that-and it was a lot but it is not where I want to go with this story- I eventually found myself on a prisoner work detail of about 200 men that was stationed in Zeitz. We spent our working hours cleaning up after air raids, razing bombed out buildings, extricating trapped people and searching for bodies, repairing sewer and water lines and various other details that the local populace would prefer not to have to deal with.

On April 13, 1945 (Friday for the superstitious), with the Americans approaching (obviously, I didn't know at the time that it was the 6th Armored) and preparing to attack the city, we were quickly gathered and marched onto a road that would take us to Kayna, a small village I would guess about 12 miles or southeast of Zeitz. When we got to Kayna it became quite chaotic. We had stopped to rest at a picnic grounds on the outskirts of town and most of us sought shelter in the pavilion which was a large building with a dance floor, kitchen and other facilities that was used by the locals for community events.

Unfortunately, all of this activity attracted several American planes who were obviously under orders to shoot at anything that moved and no doubt mistook us for a German unit. They killed and wounded quite a few of us and we realized that we would have a better chance of surviving if we split up into smaller groups. By this time many of our German guards had deserted and we were able to persuade the remainder to surrender.

A dozen or so of us struck out on our own but were recaptured by a retreating German unit and forced to join their line of march. As it was getting dark two of us were able to sneak away without being noticed. With shells dropping in the area and the chance of being picked up by another unit we decided to take a chance and seek shelter from a local resident. We knocked on the door of a house on the edge of town, explained our situation and were taken in by the family and fed.

Afterwards, with no letup in gunfire we all went to the local air raid shelter to spend the night. My buddy, Bill Meyers, and I were a little apprehensive being in this small underground shelter with all of these German civilians but we were treated very well; I'm sure the proximity of the 6th Armored had something to do with it.

Shortly after daylight we heard tanks and other vehicles moving past the shelter and with no more gunfire we felt safe in leaving the shelter. Bill Meyers and I ran down the street, turned the corner and there was a task force of tanks, half tracks, jeeps and other vehicles. In my 19 years of life I had never been happier. The guys tossed out cigarettes, candy and rations which we shared with the Germans who had befriended

us. I looked at the bumper markings of the vehicle closest to me to see what unit I owed my freedom to and I could not believe what I saw - 6th Armored Division, 777th AAA Bn., my brother's outfit!!

I asked the men in the vehicle if they knew my brother and one did. He said Hq company was somewhere behind the task force. A senior officer had a staff car and believe it or not he gave me the use of it and told his driver to help me find my brother . In the meantime, someone got in touch with my brother and he got a jeep and started looking for me. I was standing up in the back of this command car going through the town square in Zeitz when I hear this yell, "Gil!, Gil!". It was my brother and what a reunion we had!.

He took me to his headquarters where I was supplied with new clothes by a great supply sergeant and fed until I nearly burst by an equally great mess sergeant. I stayed with Hq battery for a couple of days until the CO said I had to go back. It was a tearful goodbye but I will never forget the utter joy of the events that transpired those few days. If anyone went through Kayna that day even though they may not remember me I would enjoy hearing from them. Also, if there is anyone who served in Hq battery who may or may not remember my brother I would like to hear from you. Thanks again for starting this website. I only wish that Bill could have lived long enough to enjoy it. Sincerely Gil Zbasnik, brother of Anton W, (Bill) Zbasnik"

<http://members.aol.com:80/aaa777th/zbasnik.html>



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