

THE STORY OF
AMERICA'S
106th INFANTRY
DIVISION

Excerpt from a broadcast by
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TONIGHT for the first time, there may be told the story which, in its dual aspects, is one of the most tragic and yet one of the most glorious episodes in the history of American arms . . . the story of America's 106th Infantry Division.

Born New Division

The American 106th Infantry Division was activated at Camp Jackson, Mississippi in March of 1943. Major General Alan W. Jones, who commanded it at that time . . . told the 106th Infantry Division . . . "You are born new. You have no past history to live up to. You have no past sins to live down." Tonight the 106th Infantry Division has a past history to live up to, but it still has no sins to live down. It fought gloriously and it fought heroically in the full flush of German power on the 16th of last December. Two of its regiments were all but eliminated from the war. They were the 422nd and the 43rd. Three hundred men out of these two regiments were all who survived. Most of the others are presumed to be prisoners of war.

German Artillery Barrage

On the 16th of December the 106th Division was in a sector of

the front designated as "quiet." The division had not been in action. As a matter of fact the 106th Division had engaged in nothing more dangerous than a few night patrol skirmishes. Five days later on the 16th these men of the Golden Lion Division were struck by an avalanche of German steel and fire. The attack got under way just before six o'clock in the morning. In the battle that followed, the division suffered eight thousand, six hundred sixty-three casualties. 416 were killed, 1246 were wounded, 7,000 were missing.

Division Spared This

Circumstance can now reveal that the 106th Division was spared in a manner described as "pitifully thin," along a front of twenty-seven miles. It was holding a sector along the Schnee Eifel . . . the Eifel Forest which is just north-east of the frontier of Luxembourg, Belgium, and Germany. This was in the general sector of the Belgian town of Saint Vith . . . twelve miles southeast of Malmedy. The Germans first laid down an earth-shaking artillery barrage. They directed this against the 106th positions which curved to the north from the center of the Eifel woods . . . positions which were held

by the 14th Cavalry Group . . . an armored group attached to the infantry. A field artillery battalion, which was also attached to the 106th, was the next target. In thirty-five minutes more than one hundred rounds of German fire had landed squarely in the midst of this battalion. At six o'clock the Germans opened up on Saint Vith itself. Civilians of Saint Vith were all in their cellars. They were pro-German and the Huns had told them by radio that the barrage was impending. When the barrage was over at two o'clock in the afternoon, the civilians came out.

Tanks and Infantry Follow

The 422nd and 423rd Regiments bore the brunt of the German fire. This fire was followed by German tanks and infantry. When dawn broke the next day, December 17, the Germans had two divisions in the line. They literally engulfed these two regiments and they forced the 424th Regiment to retreat. Yet these two regiments fought on. At half past three in the afternoon of the 18th of December . . . radio communication with those two regiments was lost. The last word that they sent through was that they were in need of ammunition and water and food. The fog which blanketed the countryside made it impossible to send them supplies by air. Then they said: "We are now destroying our equipment." After that came

silence. Thus it is believed that most of these men are prisoners of war.

Supporting Regiments

Saint Vith and divisional headquarters were protected for a time by the heroic fighting men of the 81st and the 158th Engineer Battalions . . . under Lt. Col. Thomas Riggs of Huntington, West Virginia. They were outgunned and they were outnumbered. Their weapons consisted of three tank destroyer guns and three 57-millimeters. That was all. That was all except the raw courage which was theirs as they faced the foe. The 424th Regiment of the 106th had not been destroyed. This regiment was supported by a combat command team from the Ninth Armored Division and by the 112th Regiment of the 26th . . . the Keystone . . . Division. It had other support too. Back into the line of battle came the survivors . . . three hundred of them . . . the survivors of the 422nd and 423rd Regiments . . . and it was not until the 21st of December that the 106th went out of the line to reorganize. But on the 24th the emergency was so great that the valiant and broken remains were hauled into the line on the northern side of the German salient between Stavelot and Munsbay.

Shining Example

"If only they had a chance to fight . . . to prove themselves." Those words were spoken to me

on the telephone from Rochester, New York, two weeks ago by Mrs. Loan Brown the mother of a lad in the 100th Division. They did have the chance to fight and they didn't fail. They fought mag-

nificently in the greatest American battle of the war . . . their first battle with loss. The record they wrote is a shining example for all of the armed forces of the United States.



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