

The Heroic 106th



"To Make History Is Our Aim"

Reprints From

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR

FOREWORD

On these pages are reprinted some of the stories about the 106th Division, and a picture, that have appeared in The Indianapolis Star.

The 106th trained at Camp Atterbury from March to October, 1944. Among its officers and men were many from Indiana. Some others had been in the Army specialized training program in Indiana schools before being transferred to the combat division. All in the division had formed close Hoosier ties while training among us.

Their heroic stand and heavy losses at St. Vith were a matter of great pride and sadness in this state.

The Star has received numerous requests for copies of the paper in which these stories appeared from the men of the 106th and their relatives, and from other interested persons. It was decided to reprint the stories in this form so the memory of the heroic 106th would be kept fresh during the years to come.

106th With 8,000 Casualties Slowed Germans In The Bulge

By JACK REED

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1397 National Press Building.

Washington, Jan. 18—From the shell-swept, icy mud of northern France, where it crouched beaten to its knees by the might of Rundstedt's mechanized charge, the battle-broken but unbeaten 106th United States Infantry Division has risen anew to spearhead the Yankee armies at Malmedy.

The division, which bore the brunt of German attacks in the Battle of the Bulge and lost more than 50 per cent of its strength in the white-hot charge of the German panzers at St. Vith, has been reorganized, and with 8,000 replacement officers and men, has gone back into the line. Congressman Forest A. Harness of Indiana announced their return to action today, following inquiries at the War Department.

Earlier in the day War Secretary Stimson announced that the division, which included hundreds of Indiana boys, and trained at Camp Atterbury last summer, had suffered the heaviest losses of any American outfit in France, taking almost one-fifth of the total casualties of the Battle of the Bulge.

Missing List Comprises Bulk of Casualties

Its losses were 416 dead, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing.

Its boys, many of Indiana, many from Illinois, others from Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan and South Carolina, were familiar figures in Indianapolis for seven months last year when the division was in training at Atterbury. It left behind it, when it embarked for France last October, friends, sweethearts and relatives in Indiana who have been torn with the agonies of grief and fear for three weeks. German propaganda broadcasts reported the division decimated by Rundstedt's blow at St. Vith.

For three awful days, it had borne the hammer blows of Germany's ablest troops. Today Secretary Stimson said it made a gallant stand, but had been partially overrun. It held its ground until half its force had been rolled under the wheels of the German charge.

The secretary's formal statement said:

"The American 106th Division, which made a gallant stand in the Ardennes at the center of the German drive, but was partly overrun, sustained total casualties of 8,663. It is probable that a number of the 7,001 missing are in process of being identified as wounded, or have been found attached to other organizations, subsequent to this compilation. A great number of men above counted as missing from this division are presumed to be prisoners of war.

"It was the contribution of the men of this division and of other less heavily hit divisions in the area which helped to make possible the halting and repelling of the enemy."

Stood Test To Come Back

For many days Washington representatives of Indiana, Illinois and South Carolina, particularly, have been besought anxiously by the people at home for any crumb of news about loved ones in the 106th. Today the news of the division came. It was sad but glorious. It had met the test of awful fire. It had stood until it disintegrated under German might, and it had come back.

"It was the first American unit to meet attack," Congressman Harness said, "and it was the first American unit to deliver a decisive counterblow at the foot of the bulge."

Senator Raymond E. Willis, before whom the boys held their Camp Atterbury divisional review on June 3, 1944, remembered them for their youth, their vigor and their high morale.

"I thrilled to their soldiery that day," he said. "I have thrilled to it each day since as I kept touch with their gallantry and battle skill. All of us are proud of their wonderful record, proud of them because we regard them as a Hoosier outfit, and proud that they showed themselves in battle capable, well-trained and strong. I am struck by the fact that though they were swept by the fiercest German storm of this war, they

suffered only 416 known deaths, which is evidence that they could take care of themselves well.

"But there are two things I would like to suggest. These boys of the 106th symbolize American boys, our boys, on every fighting front in the world. They are all courageous, all great.

"And in this moment of pride, we must give a memorial thought to those who will not come back, sharing with those who suffer most, their prideful grief."

The 15,000 boys of the 106th were activated by War Department orders issued Nov. 29, 1942. The division was formed at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, on March 15, 1943, under the command of Maj. Gen. William H. Simpson, then of the 12th Service Command.

It is a coincidence of war that the outfit's junior officers came from the old 80th Division of World War I fame, and that the modern 80th Division (now fighting in France, came to the aid of the tortured 106th in the battle of the bulge, and healed its wounded flank, going on to the rescue of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne.

Congressman Charles A. Halleck, whose brother, Lt. Col. H. J. Halleck of Winamac, Ind., is the 80th's divisional surgeon, said today that the boys had undergone "something close to a literal hell."

"They were nearly six weeks without a bed to sleep in or a bath," he said. "They are the cream of the crop. They're championship stuff. And in their championship we take pride. They're infantry, and infantrymen are the finest types of youth who, by their physical and mental condition, have to be the kind of men we hope our sons will grow to be.

World's Champs Says Halleck

"I say to the American people today that the American infantry, as symbolized by the 106th, is the world's championship team."

After their early training at Fort Jackson, the 106th went to Camp Atterbury in March, 1944. They arrived in their own transport, by road, from maneuvers. And they were a tight-belted, clean-cut outfit of kids who knew their way around. When they checked in at

Atterbury, two-thirds of them were 22 years old or younger. Three-fourths of them had not attained their 26th birthday, the War Department said today. They had shaken out a lot of the boys who weren't "infantry." And they had to be recruited to battle strength there. They got the cream. At Atterbury they were augmented by 1,157 men from specialist schools. They were tuned to a fine edge last summer, in their last tour of training before embarkation. On June 3, Undersecretary of War Robert P. Patterson, Judge Samuel I. Rosenman, special counsel to the President, and Senator Willis reviewed them. That was old stuff to the 106th. They had been reviewed by three Governors, and by the late Lt. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, then commander of the army's ground forces.

Gen. McNair called them the "sharpest" division he ever had reviewed. That was while they were still down South.

"I saw them at Columbia," Senator Burnet R. Maybank of South Carolina said today. "You know they were truly a 'blue and gray division.' Many of their officers' families are still in South Carolina. A lot of our boys are in the outfit. We learned to love those boys from the corn belt.

"Today I am humbly proud at the thought of their gallantry and sacrifice."

The 106th became known as the "Lion's Head Division" while it was at Camp Jackson. It wears a shoulder tab of a lion head on a blue and red field.

"The boys told me," Senator Maybank said, "that their lion's head insignie really meant something. They said that its blue background stood for its basic complement of infantry, and the fact that it was basically an infantry division. The red in the field stood for its artillery wing. And the lion's head for the strength they knew had been built into them.

"They were right. And today the blue stands for their gallantry, the red for the blood they spilled, and their lion head for strength the world now knows was theirs."

For security reasons there are

certain facts that cannot yet be told about the division. They went overseas on an unnamed date in October. They reached France and went right into action. They captured Coulee and Henumont during the drive southeast of Stavelot. They were at St. Vith on the north side of what became the St. Vith salient when the Germans struck.

Nation Grateful Says Ludlow

They never were really out of the battle line. A high War Department official said today, "all casualties of the 106th have been replaced and the hard-hit unit now is a full-strength, self-contained infantry fighting division once again."

It was disclosed that the 424th Infantry Regiment was the first unit struck by the Germans at St. Vith, and that it was the first unit which struck back at Runstedt when the counter offensive began.

Congressman Louis Ludlow of Indianapolis, who said that his office was deluged with calls about the boys of the 106th, spoke great sorrow today of the men of the 106th who will not again parade the streets of Indianapolis as they did last Independence Day.

"I know," he said, "that sorrow is the unwelcome guest of many an Indiana home tonight, sorrow for the death or injury of boys we loved.

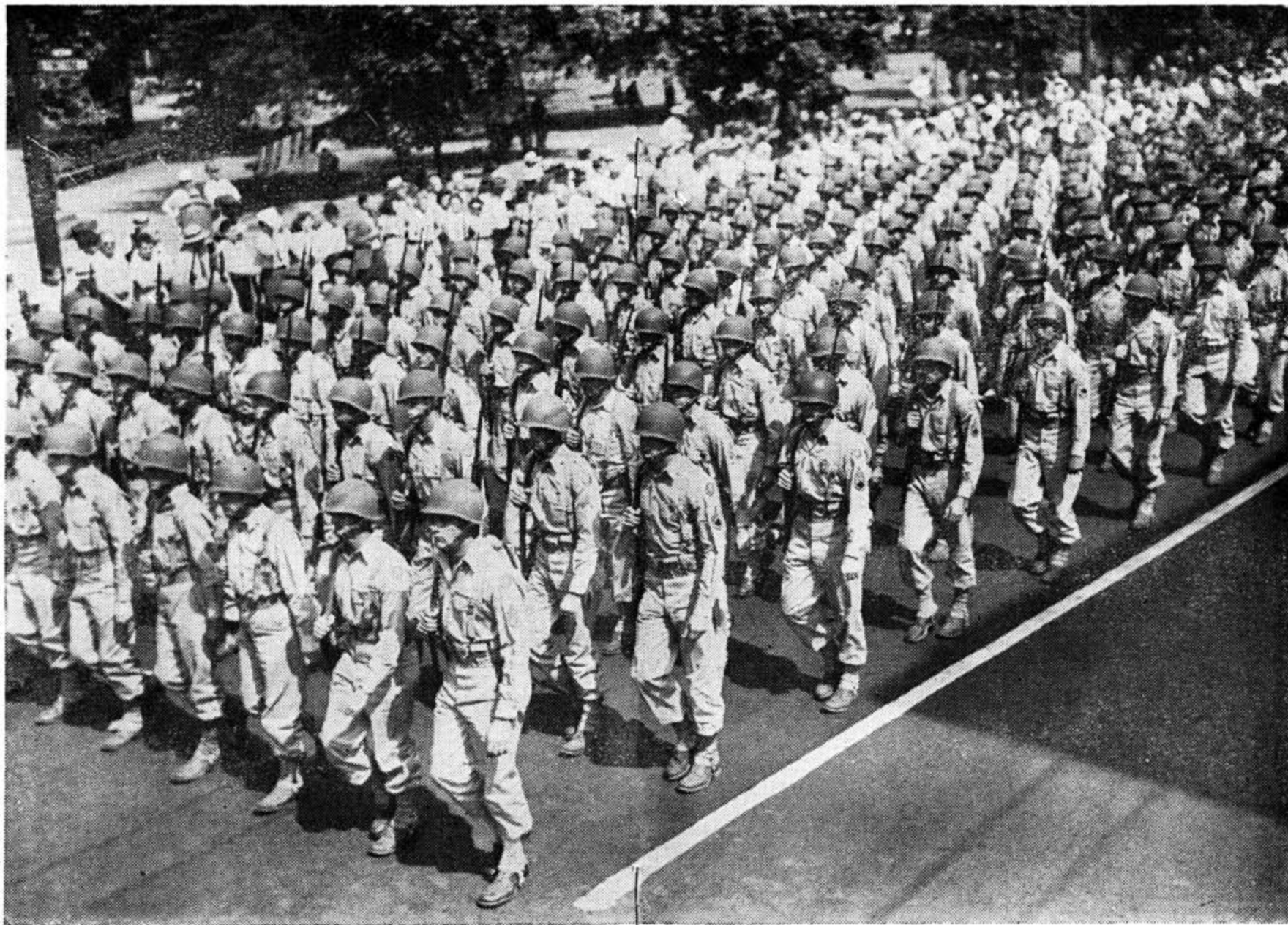
"It is not only the sorrow of those homes. A grateful nation, in pride and with affection, shares the grief of those bereaved. In deepest sympathy, and with a hope that pride in the gallantry of those who died, will in some measure ease their pain, the nation today offers the families of the men of the 106th their homage."

U.S. BULGE LOSSES 74,788

Washington, Jan. 18 (AP)—The heavy fighting along the Western Front during December cost American ground forces 74,788 casualties, boosting total losses on that front since D-Day to 332,912.

Secretary of War Stimson, releasing the figures today at his news conference, said the December losses included most of the 52,554 casualties previously re-

The 106th Division On Parade In Downtown Indianapolis



Some of the troops of the 106th Infantry Division are shown as they marched on North Pennsylvania Street in Indianapolis last Fourth of July when they were reviewed by Lt. Gen. Brehon Somervell, commanding general of the Army Service Forces, shortly before going overseas.

ported during the first three weeks—Dec. 15 to Jan. 7—of the big German counteroffensive in the Ardennes.

German Casualties 110,000

Against these American losses, Stimson estimated German casualties for the month at 110,000 to 130,000, including 50,000 taken prisoners by the Allies.

The December casualties on both sides covered the Allied drive against Germany early in December as well as the first two weeks of the German counteroffensive.

Overall army casualties during the war for all theaters as compiled by the War Department up to Jan. 7 and reflecting fighting up to the early part of December, Stimson said, are 580,495.

Coupled with the latest Navy total of 83,364, this puts United States combat casualties since Pearl Harbor at 663,859.

The 74,788 December total on

the Western Front included 10,419 killed, 43,554 wounded and 20,815 missing. Since D-Day, the losses on the Western Front included 54,562 killed, 232,672 wounded and 45,678 missing.

Stimson said that a great many of those listed as missing during December probably are prisoners.

LETTERS FROM 106TH

Two Indianapolis sisters, Miss Nancy Wilson and Miss Helen Wilson, both of 4317 East Washington Street, have received letters from friends in the 106th Division written from Belgium since the German breakthrough.

They are Cpl. Neal Gossom of Baltimore, Md., now in Belgium, a member of medical detachment in the Army Engineers, and Sgt. Ronald Lape of Portland, Ore., who wrote Jan. 2. Neither mentioned the battle with the Germans, but they stressed the low living conditions in Belgium.

The Lion Division

While training at Camp Atterbury, the 106th became known as the "Lion Division," adopting a lion's head as its battle insignia. Describing this symbol, a souvenir booklet set out, "The blue in the background stands for the infantry, the red in the border is for artillery support, and the lion's face represents strength and power." The division had no World War I history, so it was decided to let the future make the motto. Until then it was to be: "To make history is our aim."

A reproduction of the Lion's Head shoulder patch is on the cover of these reprints.

106th Casualties Turn Up On Prisoner Of War List

Many Of Division's 8,000 Lost Transferred From Missing Report, Department Says

By JACK REED

INDIANAPOLIS STAR BUREAU,
1397 National Press Building.

Washington, Feb. 25—In answer to a request from Representative Charles A. Halleck of Rensselaer, Ind., the War Department today announced that substantial numbers of men on the casualty list for the famous 106th Division in the "Battle of the Bulge" now are being reported from Geneva as prisoners of war.

"The casualty section of the War Department told me," Halleck said, "that each passing day is bringing to the United States new lists of men from the 106th Division whose names are being transferred from the missing lists to those of the prisoners of war.

Families To Learn First

"It is decidedly pleasant to bring this news to the families of our own Indiana boys who were with the unfortunate division, and to the grief-tortured fathers and mothers in other states who have suffered similarly.

"I do not want to raise any false hopes, and I am told that the families of the men reported will be advised first, but to those for whom good news is in store, I offer the felicitations both of a grateful nation and myself. While to those who yet must wait and pray, I send my regrets and the hope that they, too, soon will hear good news."

Representative Halleck said that he had been told lists coming in from Geneva frequently contain as many as 50 and 75 names of men from the 106th Division.

"As the casualty section runs through the lists they are first verified against the present missing reports; the serial numbers and other data are matched to make sure there has been neither error nor falsehood in the information. And the families are then notified as rapidly as possible.

Reports Expected Soon

"Lists now being prepared for publication contain the names of many of the men who were captured in those five lurid days from the night of Dec. 16 to the morning of Dec. 21."

Mr. Halleck said that he had been informed by the casualty section that a considerable number of prisoner of war reports from the "Battle of the Bulge" may be expected within the next few days.

The 106th Division was holding the American line near St. Vith when the Von Runstedt advance struck first on the night of Dec. 16. First among the American units hit by the German advance was the 424th Infantry Regiment.

The 424th, 423d and part of its artillery support, and other units of the 106th Division suffered a total of more than 8,000 casualties.

Disaster Of Fire And Steel Came In Foggy Dawn

With the 106th Division in Belgium, Jan. 21 (AP)—It was a "quiet sector" they handed the 106th Infantry Division, fresh to the front and rarin' to go, on Dec. 11.

The quiet ended in a shattering eruption of fire and steel five days later; in another two days two regiments and supporting artillery and armor of the Golden Lion Division were wiped out.

In those two days the men of the two regiments were engulfed by the overwhelming might of Field Marshal von Rundstedt's breakthrough spearhead. They went down fighting.

The First Full Story

Only a handful came back from the 422d Regiment and the 423d. This little group—less than 300—pitched in and helped the remaining regiment, the 424th, to make gallant delaying stands before and behind St. Vith.

Up to now, censorship has forbidden transmission of these details.

(Secretary of War Henry Stimson announced Thursday that the 106th suffered 8,663 casualties in the German offensive, including 416 killed and 1,246 wounded. He said most of the division's 7,001 missing men are presumed to be prisoners.)

(After taking part in Tennessee maneuvers from Jan. 20 to March 24 of last year, the 106th Infantry Division moved to Camp Atterbury. There it underwent nine weeks' training in unit and individual operations, physical fitness tests and platoon combat firing. Following this training, the division was reviewed by ground force generals and won high praise. Its movement overseas has been covered by military secrecy.)

The story of the 106th's disaster started in the foggy dawn on Dec. 16 as it occupied positions in and

around the Schnee Eifel, a rocky wooded ridge 10 miles long and two miles wide astride the Siegfried line.

The division was spread pitifully thin along a 27-mile front.

Barrage Opens Attack

The attack started at 5:50 a.m. on the 16th with a tremendous artillery barrage against the 106th's line, which curved northward from the center of the Schnee Eifel in a sector held by the 14th Cavalry Group, an armored outfit attached to the infantry. Then the barrage moved across a field artillery battalion, also attached. By 6:20 a.m. more than 100 rounds had hit squarely among the artillerymen.

Five minutes after the shelling of our lines started the Germans opened up against St. Vith itself. The civilians, most of whom had pretended to be friendly but actually were pro-Nazi, were in their cellars when the firing started. They popped out again promptly after the last shell fell at 2 p.m. The Americans later captured a radio receiver by which the Germans had notified the civilians of the impending shelling.

The Germans turned their guns then on the 422d and 423d Regiments and followed with infantry and tank assaults. By daybreak of Dec. 17 the Germans had thrown two divisions into this part of the front and by mid-morning enemy columns were swarming around the Schnee Eifel. They swamped the 422d and 423d Regiments and the 424th was forced to withdraw.

Reports Tell Of Disaster

All the time, until radio contact was lost, the two regiments continued to send back reports of the fighting. They were rou-

tine in nature but they all added up to disaster. There was no sign, however, that the men realized this or were overly concerned.

At 3:35 p.m. on Dec. 18, the radio sputtered that all units of the two regiments were in need of ammunition, food and water. Parachuting of supplies was out of the question because of the fog.

The last message came from the 422d at 4 p.m. that day and from the 423d at 6 p.m. They were addressed to Lt. Col. Earle B. Williams, Louisville, Ky., division signal officer, and were signed by sergeants who had had charge of the regimental radio sections.

Both messages were in code and were identical—"we now are destroying our equipment." That was all. Presumably most of the two regiments were taken prisoners.

Engineers Fought Heroically

The Germans then headed for St. Vith and were stopped temporarily by the 81st and 168th Engineer Battalions who fought heroically. They were outgunned many times over and it was mainly by guts that they held the Germans off all night with three tank destroyer guns and three 57-millimeter guns.

Early on the morning of Dec.

18, division headquarters began moving west out of St. Vith. Some units were halted by MPs who had on American uniforms and talked with a Midwestern accent. The MPs turned out to be Germans. One of them fired a rocket which signaled the opening of a terrific barrage against the halted vehicles.

After a stiff fight by the 424th, one combat command from the Ninth Armored Division which had moved up on Dec. 19, the fighting engineers and the 112th Regiment from the 28th Infantry Division, the Germans occupied St. Vith at 11 p.m., on Dec. 21.

Thrown Back Into Line

Exhausted and depleted, the 106th pulled back to reorganize Dec. 23 but the next day they were thrown into the line and helped halt the Germans finally on the north side of the salient between Stavelot and Manhay.

When Maj. Gen. Alan W. Jones activated the 106th at Jackson, Miss., in March, 1943, he told the division: "You're brand new; you have no past history to live up to, and no past sins to live down."

They still have nothing to live down and much to be proud of, those men who got caught in one of the war's major battles before they had done more than night patrols.



Soldiers and Sailors Monument

INDIANAPOLIS