

REMEMBERING WORLD WAR II

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BOB CAMP

AS TOLD TO

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on the wound, but they took me anyway. I went back to the Company which was now right at the German border and they were in some of the pillboxes. I got to the Company at 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon and they put me out on guard duty immediately. I was on duty until 10 o'clock Friday night. At 6 o'clock Saturday morning, I went back on guard duty again until noon, and then I was off until 8 o'clock Saturday night. Then I went back on guard duty again until 2 a.m. Sunday morning. From the time I got there on Friday, it had been snowing the whole time; we had 18 inches of snow. At 2 o'clock they called me in off guard duty and we started on a 25 mile forced retreat because the Germans had broken through the lines. This was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge.

On the way back, walking, I slipped on some ice, fell and twisted my knee. The thigh muscle is missing so it twisted. We went back to the area where we were to be and I was taken off duty for a week. By that time we had gone over into Germany.

We went to Frankfurt which had been heavily bombed and damaged. We did some "street cleaning," going from building to building flushing out any Germans who were still hiding and we helped patrol the city. The Germans had blown the bridge across the Rhine so we had to wait for the engineers to put up one. Then we went across on pontoon boats. From there we went to Mannheim and over to Worms which was quite interesting because in church history this is where the Diet of Worms was held. There were a few skirmishes with the Germans, but most of the fight had gone out of them and they were just retreating most all the time from there on.

We went down to Munich in Bavaria and did some patrolling. From there, we would go out on skirmishes to some of the outlying towns where the German

pockets were to take prisoners or just flush them out of there. We kept pushing them back all the time. We got down to Garmisch-Partenkirchen which is a twin city in the southeast corner of Germany and Bavaria. There we spent about three days waiting for the engineers to put up a bridge. After the bridge was put across, the engineers put up a sign: "The difficult we do immediately, the impossible takes just a little longer." We went into Austria chasing the Germans ahead of us all the time. We would go out on patrols and take prisoners or call in the artillery and clean them out.

From there we went on down to Innsbruck, Austria where the 1936 Winter Olympics were held. When we came into Innsbruck, all the street lights were on just like the war was over. We couldn't quite understand what it was all about. All of the trucks had their headlights on, and we found out that the Germans had surrendered there and we had captured three Divisions of Germans.

TRAINING FOR COMBAT

We were well trained. If a sergeant was killed or wounded, anyone in the line, in the ranks from a private up, could take over and take charge of the platoon or squad. You were to carry on even though you didn't have a higher rank. Anyone of us could step in and take his place.

With the Germans if their sergeant or lieutenant was killed, they had no idea what to do. They were just like sheep without a shepherd and they scattered. That was the reason most of them surrendered. And that was the difference between them and us--an American trained soldier could step in anyone's job.

FIRST DAY IN COMBAT

When you first go into combat you grow up in a hurry. You didn't know what to expect or what was coming. You didn't know where the Germans were

were through the field, we would detonate them by hitting them with machine guns or by finding the trip wires. If you stepped and heard a click, you didn't move because once you release the pressure, it goes off. You'd have to stand there until someone could dig around it and find the detonator and screw it out.

When we would go through a town, there would be a lot of booby traps. If a door was closed, you'd look all around the door for a trip wire. The Germans knew the Americans were great souvenir hunters, and they would wire a bomb or grenade to a helmet, pistol, camera, binoculars, or anything they thought we would pick up. It would be attached to a wire or pressure cap and it would set off a hand grenade. So we checked first before we picked up anything that looked like a fancy souvenir, because that could be the end of you and the camera too.

OTHER TACTICS OF COMBAT

One night we were out on perimeter guard and our communications line went dead. I followed the telephone line back to find the break. It turned out one of our own tanks had run across it and broke it not realizing where we were. But there was always the possibility that a German patrol would sneak in, find your communications line, cut it, and follow the line to see where you were. We used radios mostly, but in the mountainous territory the radio signals wouldn't carry. If they could find the frequency they'd listen in so sometimes we'd use a code. On an observation point where we'd have to get messages back to headquarters we'd have an American Indian Communications Team with us. They would use the Sioux or the Navajo language and send the information back. The Germans could never break it down; they could never understand it and couldn't find it written down anywhere. The Indians could talk back and forth in the clear without having to use a code.

WORST MEMORY

Our regiment helped break down the front gates of the Dachau Concentration Camp where the Jews were being held on April 19, 1945. This was the death camp where they would put them through the crematories and then sell the ashes to the families. The concentration camp was a very gruesome place and it really shook everybody up how they could be so hard, so ruthless. The gas chambers looked like showers but they were gas jets. They would put the people in there and then stack the bodies up outside like cordwood in front of the furnaces. A different crew each time would put them through. They knew what their fate was when they got that far. We released ten thousand Jews that were held at the camp at that time.

Some people think it never happened, that it was just somebody's imagination, but it is real. The horror is real.

When we captured the commandant of Dachau, we put him in the concentration camp prison, and in two days he went completely insane. He couldn't stand being locked up.

BEST MEMORIES

The best part was getting to meet the German people, getting to know them, and realizing they had the same interests we had. They were thankful when the war was over and they could rebuild again. A lot of them said that they believed it was their faith in God that brought them through and kept them from getting killed.

Just seeing the country was interesting because there were so many historical places in Germany that you read about and would like to see sometime. For example, we saw the cathedral where Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the door. Also I was on guard duty for two weeks at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. I was outside and I was also in the courtroom itself and saw the proceedings.

HUMOR

A funny thing happened when we were on perimeter guard in a house overlooking a little valley. The engineers had set out some trip flares so the enemy couldn't sneak across. Those flares kept going off, but we couldn't see anything or figure out what was doing it. In the meantime, the sergeant, who had been a chef in one of the larger New York City restaurants, would go out and catch himself rabbits for our dinner. Two days later we discovered there weren't any more flares going off, so we figured it was the rabbits that were setting off the flares instead the enemy sneaking across. They were already down the road another ten miles.

RELIGION

War strengthened my religious attitudes. I got closer to my faith during combat. We had a very good chaplain that would come up to the front line and have a short chapel time with us if we were in combat on Sunday. At times he even went from foxhole to foxhole to give us communion and read a portion of scripture. We had some chaplains that stayed back at the First Aid Station all the time, but this particular chaplain was right up at the front line with us. He would even go out on patrol with us from time to time so he would know what the soldiers were going through and he would double as a first aid man. When he came up to the front lines, he would set up his altar on the hood of his jeep and get half a dozen of us around him at a time. When he was done with us, another group would come up for their five to ten minute chapel time.

OFFICERS

Some of the higher ranking officers were very, very good. They knew what they were doing, where they were going, and what had to be done. They got the job done. Some of the officers were what we called ninety-day wonders; how they

WELL, THAT'S JUST AMERICANS

Once during the war we stopped at a farm house and one of the fellows picked up an accordian. We sat in the kitchen singing the old songs like "Pack up your Troubles" and "Smile, Smile, Smile". We were having a good old time. The two sisters were sitting there listening and tears were running down their faces. They said "How can you fellows be so far away from home, in a war, and in a foreign country be so happy?" Well, that's just Americans. They couldn't understand how we could divorce ourselves from the idea that we were in a war and could be killed any time, and yet sing songs, be happy and tell jokes like we had known each other for years.

Some of the fellows maybe you'd be with them for a month, then they'd be wounded and transferred out or killed. You'd be with them for awhile, then you'd find someone else. Once we were on a march, came around a bend, and a sniper got the fellow standing right beside me. We were walking in pairs and he got hit. You would never know from one time to the next. You might have a buddy one day and a different one the next day. You looked out for yourself, but you looked out for the other fellow too.