

My Father's War Stories From World War II

On the occasion of Veterans Day 2010, I pay honor to those who've served and/or paid the ultimate price in service to their country by publishing a series of war stories that holds a special value in my heart, because they were written by my father, Ted.

*He served as a low-ranking enlisted man in the U.S. Army during World War II, and the stories appear in his 1992 autobiography, *Some Events in One Life: Mine!**

Please know he captured these stories as a means to provide his children and theirs context for his participation in one of history's most harrowing events, World War II, not for any commercial gain.



The Front: Northwestern Germany

We left our reassembly area and loaded onto trucks. We were driven several miles to an area just over the border into Germany itself. The official entry of the Allies into the Germany homeland is listed as having occurred at a later date and by a different Allied unit. This general area consisted of a plateau covered with soil that was undergirded by thick chalk beds.

The terrain was nearly flat with the tillable soil used to grow primarily cabbages and sugar beets. This was kraut country! The farmers lived in little villages spaced a few miles apart.

During the day, they went out to their farms to do their work and returned to their village that evening. There were scattered towns of larger size which supported various industries.

Considerable amounts of coal were mined within the region. The mines were usually located near those larger communities where workers, railroads and improved roads were all available. The slag from the mines was piled in huge mountains close by the tipples.

These piles of mine tailings were very conspicuous on the flat landscape due to their height. As we were offloading from the trucks, we could hear the "swish" of large-caliber artillery shells passing overhead in both directions seeking the equivalent pieces of their opponent's.

With the shells streaking above us as we stood there waiting to move out, the hair literally stood up on the back of my neck. This feeling soon passed.

Most of the shells caused a shrill sound that gained in volume as they neared you, and then the sound faded after they passed over. Others caused a much louder noise with a constant change in pitch. These were shot from large artillery pieces and the change of pitch was due to the shell tumbling end over end as they streaked through the sky. These unfamiliar noises served notice that we were truly near harm's way.

None of the shells exploded anywhere nearby, so it made us feel like outsiders whom both sides chose to ignore. It appeared the fight was among giants while we were not worthy of their expending ammunition trying to kill us.

Shouldering our packs, we walked a short distance to an area where our company was to set up temporary camp. Canyons existed where the chalk had eroded deeply into the chalk formations.



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Our company was in one of these deeply eroded, east-facing box canyons which were about a block long, 30 to 50 feet wide and some 40 to 50 feet deep.

It was the eastern, weathered edge of the chalk plateau. The beds were made up of that soft material alternating with thinner layers of harder limestone interspersed between them.

We got there in late afternoon and ate a cold supper of K-rations, since our cooks and field kitchen had not yet arrived. We were told to dig ourselves into the banks of the chalk cliffs.

I took my G.I. shovel and dug horizontally into the soft chalk just above one of the limestone beds. This was about 10 feet up from the base of the canyon wall. I crawled in between my blankets with my feet away from the entrance. During the night, shells exploded nearby and shook the ground. I awakened to find myself with my head under my blanket which, to my surprise and dismay, was weighted down with fallen chalk fragments from overhead.

After a few moments of minor panic, I was able to dig and kick my way out. When I reached the fresh air, I made a mental note to relocate my bedroom. The next night, I slept beneath an overhang of hard limestone at the base level of the canyon. My new objective was to be able to roll out of my bed into the open without fear of being buried alive.

The second morning, we were awakened by a shrill whistling sound and then a sharp, ear-piercing, tremendously loud CRACK!!! The first round fired directly at us in our little canyon was an 88-mm artillery shell. The sound reverberated off the walls. That same shrill sound announced that another incoming shell was to be expected instantly. The same loud explosion was followed by the bluish-white smoke and the acrid smell of cordite which filled the little canyon. It was so nice of our hosts to act as our alarm clocks. I guarantee this will get you wide awake much quicker than any cup of instant coffee.

The Germans had found our location and were welcoming us to the real world of war. Approximately eight to ten 88-mm shells exploded around us or on the tops of the plateau surrounding our canyon. No one was hurt.

The cooks had arrived late the evening before and a temporary kitchen had been set up near the mouth of the canyon. A big container of oatmeal the cooks were preparing for breakfast became the only casualty. After the explosion of the first shell, the kitchen had been hastily abandoned. A few minutes later, a shell made a direct hit and nothing but fragments were left of the container.

We ate another cold meal of K-rations that morning and felt that we were lucky no one was hurt. The Germans knew the precise measurements of the topography of their country, so they knew exactly the elevations and azimuth readings necessary for their artillery to shell a specific geographic target.

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Allied forces had to guess at the range and needed observers up front to help them locate targets and verify when artillery shells had hit on or near their targets. Their quick shelling and retreats gave the enemy time to move on before they could be hit with accurate return barrages.

This was our first baptism into the fraternity of war – a baptism via artillery fire. How dare they shell us! We hadn't even said we were ready yet. We were not sure if we even wanted to fight. Now, the Germans were no longer a detached enemy known by name only. They were our personal enemy. We had made contact with the enemy.

Their forces, within the general area, were thought to consist of around 16,000 men and 70 tanks. This area was just north of a part of their industrial sector which was needed to produce the machinery of war. This was where their crack troops were located.

To the east of us lay a mostly flat terrain with some rolling, slightly higher locals. There were many marshy areas along with rivers draining toward the north. Sugar beets and cabbages were the predominate crops here. Coal mines were scattered over the land evidenced by their high slag piles. Rain in the region was much more abundant in the autumn and this held true in 1944. Main highways had been good but now were being beaten down by the constant use of heavy trucks and tanks. Secondary roads were often nearly impassable.

The citizens had left the frontline areas voluntarily or had been forced out by the German army. Before they left, many had been conscripted to build L-shaped foxholes, excavate trenches to be used as tank traps and fortify existing homes with heavy wooden timbers, concrete and whatever else the Nazi commanders thought necessary to delay or stop the Allied troops. The first floors of homes were first fortified by wooden beams. This was followed by pouring reinforced concrete 12 inches thick over the timbers. The damp, straw-littered, dirt floored basements served as bunkers for German soldiers and, later, Allied soldiers. During the rainy weather, the trenches and foxholes had turned into stagnant pools. Fields were now quagmires and foxholes were individual water traps waiting for victims who were seeking protection from the exploding armaments of war.

The 102nd Division was attached to the 30th Infantry Oct. 27. On Nov. 6, however, it was separated from the 30th and attached to the Second Armored Division. This armored division remained with the 102nd Infantry through much of the remainder of the war.

While attached to the 30th, our outfit, the 406th, began relieving other units that had been on the front lines for weeks or even months. The first to be relieved was the 117th Infantry near Hertzogenrath, Holland, but who were actually within the edge of Germany. On the way to our first relief mission, we walked from our box canyon hotel site to our newly-assigned front line position. We were walking single file through a rolling terrain and trying to stay off the skyline so as not to be easily seen. Apparently, the Germans did see us and fired a few artillery rounds at us. First, they bracketed us to get the range. As we walked along, we watched the shells leapfrog toward us and then overshoot our line of march. When the last shell went over I cringed because

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I expected the next to land amongst us. All went quiet and stayed that way. What a relief! They had established the range but for some unknown reason didn't follow up with a barrage. Everyone just kept walking as though the shells did not pertain to us. They were of a different world, an alien world of which we were still to become acquainted. Denial seemed to be a necessity because, if you let yourself become too scared, you would literally live a life of pure hell and would go bananas while on the front. Later, some did just that and were released with a section eight, a mental discharge.

The 117th Infantry outfit had been at the front for 89 continuous days. We met the first of them as they were leaving the area. They were carrying their weapons etc. and we were coming into it with our own tools of war. The thing that made me remember them so well was that many of them were unshaven and their clothes were naturally, very dirty. They walked with blank stares and engaged in no small talk among themselves or with our men. After one or two greetings of "How are you doing?" met with absolutely no response, our men respected their privacy and did not try to communicate further. If one were to compare them to anything, it would have been to the war cartoons of the "zombie-like" soldiers drawn by cartoonist Bill Mauldin. This lack of response was due to their complete and utter exhaustion and, no doubt, other sad effects brought on by the war.

Their area of operations had been centered on a small German village, the name of which I do not recall – possibly Waurichen. Nearly all of the civilians had evacuated it. Our company – E Company – set up its command post in the basement of a house at the edge of the village and facing the enemy. The platoon officers took over nearby buildings. Riflemen occupied existing fox holes or dug new ones. Since I was the captain's messenger, I was quartered in the company command post. Our regiment's job was to keep watch and to hold our position in case the enemy should launch an attack.

One of the first daylight patrols was made by company C of the 406th, our sister company. The patrol was under the leadership of 2nd Lt. Albertus Cone, a platoon commander. I believe we were in Wurselen, Germany, at the time. Though fired upon, the patrol captured Germans. Upon trying to return to friendly lines, they again come under heavy fire, this time from enemy rifles, machine guns and mortars. The Americans turned and fired back, resulting in two Germans being killed and five more coming out of their "fraidy" holes with their hands above their heads. Lieutenant Cone's only casualty was one man who was slightly wounded by an exploding mortar round.

A day or two after we arrived at the front, the morning dawn arrived bright and sunny. Everything was calm. Imagine our surprise when a beautiful, fair-skinned, blond German girl, 14 or 15 years old, in a bright yellow sundress came out and started flirting with some of our men. Of course, they were both surprised and amused at this gesture and, showing they were still boys and of the opposite gender, started laughing and trying to talk to her.

Our captain turned to see what had animated his men, and she caught his eye.

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His face immediately turned beet-red and he quickly strode over and told one of our men who could speak German to tell her, "Get back to your house and don't you ever come out again while we are here."

Although she probably did not understand his words, she did understand the tone of his voiced displeasure. Even as the translation began, she had turned to run for home. The youngster may have just been acting out a 15-year-old's idea of relief from the boredom of being shut up in the house due to the fighting in the area. A second possibility was she may have been sent to get some food for the family which had been trapped in their house for many days or – a more important reason – she was sent to get information concerning our outfit. At the time, the Germans called the Ninth Army "the Ghost Army" because they had very little information about us. All public information, even while still in the states, was kept to a minimum so as to confuse the enemy.

During the second night of relief, a rumor went out that two of our men had been captured at an outpost. They had disappeared during the night and were not see again. I think it was actually two men from the 405th Battalion. This had an even more dramatic and realistic effect on the rest of the men than the shelling. This was real war. A person-to-person war. No holds barred. Sneak night patrols expected.

One street near the center of the village was perpendicular to the front lines. We had to cross it quite often. The Germans had zeroed in on it with a machine gun. Sometimes, they would squeeze off a few rounds for no reason and, other times, they shot when they saw someone trying to cross that intersection. They probably thought of it as a turkey shoot. We called it "Suicide Alley" and were very cautious and quick when crossing it.

After our first relief mission, we had a few days to ourselves in a reserve area. I decided to try to hitchhike down to northern Luxemburg to see if I could locate my brother, Max, who was with a quartermaster group. One of my attempts for a ride found my thumb action directed at a small convoy whose second car, I saw as it drew closer, was flying the fender flags of a two-star general. I lowered my thumb. He didn't stop or even smile as he went by. How rude!

I didn't get to Luxemburg, but I did run across a barbwire enclosure where some guards had an American soldier digging a trench. One guard told me that the man had killed a fellow American soldier on purpose and had been sentenced to die by a firing squad. Whether this actually happened or if the guard was feeding me a line, I never knew.

During this trip, I did find a bank of shower stalls in which I took an enjoyable shower. Bathing in a helmet does little to improve one's self-respect or sociability and only slightly lessens his personal aroma acquired over time.

Our "E" Company's captain was from Paris, Texas. His name was Capt. John E. Czajkowski. He was a stoutly-built man who stood at least 5 feet, 11 inches. He weighed around 215 pounds or

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more and was of Polish descent. The man was a calm, methodical person with good temperament and judgment.

When we were on boat headed for Europe, he had called me aside one day and told me, "By the way, McCarty, you will no longer be an assistant to the company clerk, Corporal Lang. You will be my personal messenger. Right now, we do not have one, and we are supposed to have that position filled before we reach the front. Is that alright?"

Is that alright? Of course, I said it was alright. Who was I to think otherwise? It would be my job to get messages to and from our company platoon commanders, battalion or regimental headquarters if the Captain wanted them delivered by courier. He might decide this for various reasons, such as: if the telephone wires were not laid as yet; if they had been laid but were cut by tanks, shell-fire, etc; if the recipient just could not be reached via phone; or if the message was too important to risk being sent via phone.

In time of battle, the expected lifespan of a machine gunner was measured in minutes. Roughly the same time span was listed for the life of a messenger while actively carrying out his duties during combat.

On Nov. 1, 1944, our division was no longer farmed out piecemeal to relieve other outfits on the front line. We were considered a semi-seasoned fighting machine and had earned our permanent position on the front line. Whooppee! How lucky can you get? Actually, it increased our morale, realizing we were ready to do our part in this war.

From Nov. 6 to Nov. 25, 1944, the 102nd was allied with the Second Armored Corps.

Our last few days of holding the line were just prior to the major jump-off of the Allied forces which took place Nov. 16, 1944. Both sides recently had been pretty well laid back, waiting for something to happen. Only occasional bursts of firing were carried out by either side. Sometimes, we could see some of the Germans lined up for chow and could hear the clanging of their mess kits and their music being played.

The war had reached a pivotal stage. The Germans knew they had to hold us to the west side of the Siegfried Line. If this proved impossible, they would hope to keep us from crossing the Ruhr and then the Rhine Rivers, both natural barriers not far apart in this area. They had one million troops on their western front while the Allied Forces in Europe totaled two and one-half million. Not a favorable ratio of numbers for the Germans, especially since we usually had nearly complete control of the skies.

The general area from Aachen to Dusseldorf was the primary industrial region of Germany. If it was taken, they did not have enough manufacturing plants elsewhere to produce the tools of war necessary to carry on the conflict. The Allied commanders realized the precarious situation of the

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Germans. Therefore, the entire Ninth Army was assigned a segment of the front line which measured only seven miles in length. This was just to the northwest of Aachen. This industrial heart of Germany had to be taken to end the conflict.

This buildup within the area was “one of the greatest military concentrations in history”, so stated one of the leading American news magazines of the day.

The enemy hoped to stall the Allies until spring, thus giving themselves a breather in which to calculate a way out of the bad situation in which they now found themselves and their country. The weather was cold and rainy, resulting in much misery on both sides and barely passable secondary roads. Of course, the Allied commanders took these conditions into consideration but they wanted to keep pressing the Germans while the momentum of the war was in our favor. The sooner it could be brought to an end, the better for everyone – even the enemy.



On Nov. 16, 1944, the recent honeymoon of inactivity was over. The Allied Forces launched a major offensive all along the front. The nearest objective in our immediate area was the town of Immendorf. Two other nearby villages, Floverich and Loverich, which were in a roughly northwest-southeast alignment with Immendorf, were attacked at the same time. Immendorf was situated on both a main, generally east-west trending, highway and a railroad line.

The next major objectives after Immendorf were several other towns on the way to breach the nearby Siegfried Line fortifications. The 2nd battalion, in Task Force Ten of which the 406th was a part, was to attack on the left thus securing the flank of the neighboring Task Force Two. Once the town was reached tanks would take the lead, followed by foot soldiers, to furnish cover in house-to-house fighting and to mop up any remaining enemy.

The Siegfried Line was a generalized 940-mile line of defense built by the Germans. It was placed at varying but relatively short distances inside their western border. It was not one continuous line but a series of fortifications reaching from Kiev, near the Netherlands, down to the southwestern part of Germany which was a short distance north of Basel, Switzerland. There were 20,000 bunkers. Most were concrete pillboxes arranged so that machine gun, mortar or rifle fire from one would intersect with that of its neighbor, thus an area would be completely covered by this interlocking field of fire.

There were also areas occupied by artillery and antitank placements. Trenches, concrete “dragon’s teeth” tank barriers, barbed wire and mines fields were abundant. Some of the pillboxes were sealed air tight with a series of pipes running between emplacements to let in

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fresh air when necessary. Narrow slits were built into the pillboxes for the placement of machine guns, or even 88-millimeter rocket launchers. Located above the slits were three-inch-thick metal covers that could be lowered over them. Inside the larger pillboxes were tracks upon which heavy machine guns could be moved quickly from one slit opening to another. The pillboxes had a major defect: air ducts that exited directly above for use when no enemy was threatening. When the enemy was knocking at the door, these ducts could be forced open and explosives dropped inside.

The value of this line of defense depended largely upon reserve units that could be moved into position when needed. By now, however, the Nazi did not have unlimited mobile reserves to use for this purpose so the line was only a shadow of the impenetrable defense that it was originally planned to be. Allied troops captured some, blew up others and bypassed many in their swift advance in November 1944.

Many of the details have escaped my memory but, as I recall, we were in the town of Waurichen before the jump off to capture Immendorf. At the time, the name of towns did not mean a thing to us except that those ahead of us had to be captured. Forgive me if I sometimes do not correctly remember either the names of villages or the order in which they were taken.

We waited for our initial attack to start. The date was Nov. 16, 1944. It had been scheduled for the Nov. 10, but bad weather precluded the use of support bombers deemed necessary to help with the job.

There was a lot of built-up tension among our soldiers. No one knew what it would be like to attack since our outfit had never been ordered to be that aggressive up until then. The adrenalin coursed through our bodies. But we were as ready as we ever would be. I had spent about one and one-half years preparing for this while many others in our outfit had more time in the service than that.

At a time like this, several things enter the mind of each individual. Will I be a coward? Will I be able to shoot another human being if I meet him face to face? Will we, as a unit, prove our worth against the enemy who are probably much more experienced soldiers than we are?

During this time, Company A of the 407th Infantry – our sister company to our left – was hit with mortar fire and 88-mm artillery fire. An officer and five men exposed themselves to enemy fire in order to dig out three fellow soldiers trapped in the cave-in of their foxhole. For this brave deed, the rescuers were awarded the first Bronze Star Medals by the division commander, General Keating.

Orders had come down for the Allies to attack all along the front. History says the day we were to jump off dawned a cold, slightly cloudy sky but with fair visibility. The ground was still muddy from recent rains. The temperature improved and clouds lessened by noon. Our aircraft were now able to fly and deliver their bombs to the Germans.

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First, Immendorf and two nearby villages, Loverich and Floverich, were attacked by a squadron of fighter bombers. Later, prisoners said that all this did to their men was to force them into their fox holes during the bombardment. Just after the noon hour, our artillery began shelling those villages plus two other nearby villages, Setterich and Prummern. I would guess this lasted about 15 or 20 minutes to soften up the opposition. Everyone around me had their rifles ready. We were to attack at 12:45 p.m.

After checking his watch again, the "Let's go!" command of Captain Czajkowski boomed loud and clear, followed by a forward sweep of his arm. No doubt, this same order was given by all four of his platoon lieutenants at the same time as well as many other companies up and down the front.

Shouts of "Fire! Fire! Keep firing!" came from the commissioned and noncommissioned officers.

I have read since that it is hard to keep the common soldier firing since they often cannot see anyone at which to shoot. The objective is to make the enemy keep their heads down while we are rushing toward them.

Once the attack began, all doubts and butterflies in my stomach left me. Now, there was something more concrete to think about.

Company E, my company, attacked by swinging around from the southeast of Immendorf and pressing northwest toward the town.

After a short time, I was trying to find the Captain since I was supposed to stay near him. I stood up momentarily to look for him which was nearly a fatal mistake.

"Get down, McCarty, get down! Those are machine gun bullets you hear whizzing through the air around you," someone yelled.

I already knew that, but I had been so involved in trying to find the Captain that I disregarded them. Now, I realized that I really could hear the bullets making their distinctive zipping sounds like a swarm of angry hornets in the air around me. I immediately dropped to the ground. My head was lying against the base of a small tree. I lay there listening to the little lethal messengers of death poking holes in the air overhead. Within a couple of minutes, I felt an instant sharp pain and my right ear went completely numb. It had a ringing in it, and I could not hear any other sounds.

"Have I been hit already?" Then a second thought: "How badly am I wounded?"

I reached up to see if I still had an ear left. I could feel it there so I drew my hand back to see how much blood I was losing. When I took my hand down, there was no blood on it. This

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surprised me, because I was sure I had been wounded. What had happened? I turned my head and glanced at the tree my head had been against. A small sapling of about one-half to three-quarters of an inch in diameter was growing beside the tree, and this sapling was cut off just above where my head had been. Now, I realized a machine gun bullet had hit the sapling which, in turn, had whacked my ear a good, solid blow.

Enemy artillery rounds were also coming into the area. I was told that during this initial advance, the five man 60-millimeter mortar squad, of which I had been a member for a short time during basic training at Camp Swift, Texas, had been hit by a shell. It had wiped out the entire crew. I still do not know if that was just a rumor or a fact.

Our regiment took the town with the help of the others in our task force. There was a company of engineers, the 771st Tank Destroyer Battalion, the 2nd Armored and two field artillery battalions assisting us.

The initial resistance was overcome by 2:30 p.m. Since we were a relatively "green" combat unit, the Germans later tested us by counterattacking but they were beaten back. When we first took the town, the main body of the Germans retreated but left several snipers behind. It was then I saw my first enemy soldier up fairly close during an attack. However, he saw me first. He was one of those left to snipe at us, and he shot at me from the window of a nearby house. With all the noise and excitement going on, I did not notice what was happening until I saw puffs of dirt being kicked up around my feet. Then I realized I was a target of someone. I turned to see if I could locate the source and saw a German soldier pull his head back from the window of a nearby house. He had fired a quick burst before ducking back out of sight but had missed me. Then a 2nd Armored Division tank drove up.

I flagged the commander who was riding with his head and shoulders out of the turret.

"Hey, there is a sniper in that house over there," I told him indicating which dwelling.

As I was pointing to the house, he swung his turret gun around and then asked, "Do you want me to take him out? Without waiting for an answer, he continued, "Where was he?"

"He was in the window in the center of the second floor," I replied.

Almost immediately, there was an explosion as a shell penetrated just below the window sill and left smoke pouring from the gaping hole and the remainder of the window just above.

"That should take care of him," the tank commander said with a grin.

"Good job. Thanks."

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“Any time.”

The tank then drove off.

I thought about how simple it was to dispose of a man's life because he was an annoyance. Actually, he was more than an annoyance; it was either my life or his. The next time he popped up, he might have killed me. I chose to try to take his life before he could take mine. I don't know if the sniper was hit, but he never bothered me again.

Shortly after that, I saw one of our company's riflemen lying in the street. His shirt was pulled up showing he had been hit by a piece of shrapnel. It left a three- or four-inch wound on the right side of his abdomen. It looked as if the fragment had hit a grazing blow and had ripped open the skin but had not penetrated to any depth as near as I could tell. He was not bleeding much.

“McCarty, help me,” he said as he lay there gritting his teeth from the shock and pain.

Before I could reply, a nearby noncom said, “I have already called a medic, and he is on his way.”

There was not much I could have done for him except sprinkle a small bag of sulphur powder on the wound to help prevent infection. This had already been done. We had no antibiotics then so sulphur powder was the Army's way of instantly caring for any wound.

Since I had become closely associated with the captain, some of my fellow soldiers seemed to think I had influence with him and could get things done if they asked me. They were wrong. I found out that day it was going to be a difficult job just to keep the captain in sight.

This was routinely confirmed as time passed. I started looking for him but, after a short time, I decided to explore the basement of a nearby house. Curiosity can get you killed, but I lucked out that time. The concrete steps formed the outside entrance and led down to a door which was wide open. I had taken just a few steps down those stairs when two Germans stepped out in front of me. However, they had their hands locked together above their heads. Were they surrendering to me? Absolutely not, two men from my company were already there and had forced them to surrender. Now, they were following their captives with rifles at hip level and pointed at the men. We had been taught how to say “Come out with your hands above your head” in German.

The two Americans were a party to the search for snipers that had to be carried out. They had gone into the basement to get them, a task much more dangerous than waiting for them to come out. While still outside, the soldiers could have ordered the Germans to come outside. If they wouldn't come, then the operating procedure was to throw a grenade through the open doorway and stand clear.

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The two Germans were dressed in their winter uniforms of drab brown. They wore heavy overcoats and "soft" felt caps with visors as opposed to our steel helmets. They didn't look particularly frightened but just taking things as they come. The two prisoners paid no attention to me as they walked past ahead of their captors.

At the time, as I crept down the steps of the basement, I thought I was ready for any surprise but I know now I should not have gone into it by myself. We had been warned to always have a buddy to cover us, but I had no partner. I was a messenger, a Lone Ranger without a Tonto.

One of their captors grinned as he passed me, "You're a little late, McCarty."

I found nothing in the way of souvenirs down there. The cupboard was as bare as a baby's rear. We couldn't carry extra items with us anyway.

Including these two, our company had taken five prisoners so far that day, and one of the platoon lieutenant commanders asked me to take them off of his hands.

He saw me and said, "McCarty, take these prisoners back to the rear and turn them over to the military police."

"I am sorry, sir, but I can't do that. Captain Czajkowski told me that I am always to stay beside him as much as possible unless he gave me other instructions," I replied.

He looked at me as if to say, "But I'm a Lieutenant, you're an enlisted man and I gave you a direct order." However, he said nothing more, possibly because he did not want to argue the subject with the captain. A rifleman from one of our company's platoons was designated to escort them to the MP command post in the rear echelon.

After the war, when I started college at Ames, Iowa, I met another man from my company.

Following some small talk, he asked, "Say, do you remember the POWs you were asked by the lieutenant to take to the MPs the first day we pushed off? Well, the lieutenant picked another one of our men to escort them. He killed all five of them on the way back to the MPs post. Whether they tried to escape and the guard was forced to shoot them or if he just shot them for personal reasons, I don't know. However, there was a considerable stink about it and an official inquiry was ordered. I don't know what was ever determined, if anything."

By 2:30 p.m., the attack was over. Allied defenses around the town were set up and mine fields were laid. Our casualties had been light although four supporting tanks had been temporarily disabled by mines. Defense plans were set in place and all was secured by 7 p.m.

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Since we were still considered a green outfit by the Germans, they counter-attacked at 7 a.m. the next morning. They had approximately three companies of the 10th Regiment of a Panzer Division supported by ten Mark V tanks. The enemy was soon met by a barrage of artillery and mortar fire. After losing three Panther tanks, they withdrew. But at 11 a.m., a company of grenadiers tried to deceive our troops in that, as they approached, they brought out a white flag of truce. The company advanced and when they got much closer, the flags were quickly lowered and they started firing upon our men. Our side fired without mercy at them and those not killed were forced to withdraw.



In yet another counter-attack, the Krauts launched a heavy-artillery barrage at 5 p.m., a little after dark. This was followed by a battalion of infantry with eight tanks. Our newly-laid mine fields crippled two of the Mark V tanks which were then finished off by our accompanying tank destroyers. One lone tank was able to actually enter Immendorf along with foot soldiers. That tank also was blown up by a destroyer. One 2nd Battalion company being held in reserve was called forward to help throw back the enemy foot soldiers. The 771st Tank Destroyer Battalion received a Unit Citation for knocking out 16 enemy tanks during the battle for Immendorf and for helping to protect it from counter-attacks later.

A write up in *Life* magazine about the action at the front, part of which occurred that day, stated:

“Lt. General William H. Simpson’s’ U.S. Ninth Army (of which the 102nd Infantry was a part) beat off the first full-scale counterattack in its two-day drive northeast of Aachen, knocking out at least 11 of 45 Tiger and Panther tanks which paced the assault. It took more than 1,000 prisoners in the first 24 hours of battle”.

Our company captain, Captain John E. Czajkowski, earned a silver star as a result of the Immendorf battle for reasons as stated below:

“Capt. John E. Czajkowski, Co. E, 406th Infantry...inspiring leadership under intense artillery fire....directed the establishment of defense after a successful attack...”

I think our entire unit received a bronze star for the valor they showed that day. This was the action for which I received my bronze star.

In the field, we didn't know all of this had happened. In combat, the average foot soldier only knew what was happening within his field of vision. You often heard scuttlebutt about what was happening, but never knew if it was true.

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I believe the next village taken was Apweiler. An attack by the Allies Nov. 17 resulted in its capture. The next day, the Germans retook and fortified the town again as best they could. An Allied frontal attack was launched against the village. It was preceded by an air attack consisting of 407 sorties of strafing and the dropping of 117 tons of bombs and 5, 850 gallons of Napalm on the Nazi troops and installations. This, along with a rolling barrage of artillery followed closely by foot soldiers, shocked and overwhelmed the enemy infantry. They gave up without further fighting.

In the taking of nearby high ground, where the Germans had concentrated their forces, they lost nearly 750 of 1,000 men. Of these, 500 were captured and the other 250 were either killed or wounded.

I do not remember the name of the next town, but it might have been Apweiler. The area where I was, now used as the company command post, remained mostly intact. Several houses were badly damaged, but most came through in fair shape. My battalion, the 2nd Battalion, was left behind to hold our position there. That next town, Gereonweiler, was taken and secured after fierce fighting. The 2nd Battalion came forward and established themselves in the western portion of the town. Now, they were called upon to assist in defending against the counter-attacking Germans. The enemy was again repulsed.

We set up the company command post in the basement of one of the houses in a town, the name of which I also do not remember. It was in the very late afternoon. I was tired and after eating my K-ration, I spread one of my two blankets in a corner of the basement nearest to the action. I covered up with the second blanket. If a shell came through the roof or the wall, it would hopefully hit the opposite portion of the basement and miss me. I slept through until early morning. Then I got up, washed, shaved, using my helmet, cold water and hand soap. I ate my portable breakfast – cold cereal covered with water from my canteen. Upstairs, the morning was beautiful, lots of sunshine and everything was nice and quiet. Then I heard the “swish” of one lone motor shell. Instantly, it hit the roof of the building I was in, our command post at the time. Clay tile fell from the roof, making considerable noise. I waited for more shells to come, but all remained quiet.

Later, I was standing outside enjoying the late morning when I noticed an elderly German gentleman at his back door on the street behind where I was located. He was standing behind the bottom half of his Dutch type door. The man was dressed in a typical German gentleman's attire – a shirt, brown tweed coat with leather patches on the elbows and a snap-brimmed tweed cap. He probably wore knee-length tweed trousers but I couldn't see them. The man was smoking an expensive looking, curve-stemmed pipe. He, in turn, looked my way but made no sign he saw me. He seemed very intent on surveying the local area.

We had been told to take notice of any civilian we thought might possibly be gathering information concerning American troops and their locations. This man may or may not have been doing that, but I decided to put an end to it if that was his purpose. I yelled at him. Then he turned and looked at me. I motioned for him to go back into his house. He hesitated even when I

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yelled a second time and again motioned for him to go back indoors. Then I raised my rifle and pointed it at him. He slowly withdrew. In a way, I felt sorry for the gentleman, because he may have been only enjoying the unusual quiet and the sunshine as was I. If so, he probably had decided he could not change things so he was taking life as it come.

The house we were using for our headquarters had been inhabited by a German SS (storm trooper or Schutzstaffel) member. They were an elite military group that kept tabs on everything and everyone. If anything was not the way it should be, they reported it or took violent action themselves. They had the power of life and death. Some of his boots and uniforms, with insignias attached, were still in the closets. In the attic were bags of coffee, bolts of silk and other cloth. These and other articles found there were forbidden by his government. This SS member either was apparently given special privileges or was a hoarder of forbidden products.

There was a complete setting for eight of solid sterling silverware in a cupboard. One of our platoon commanders took it and a typewriter and was going to send them home. An enlisted man could not do this, and I doubt if the lieutenant was officially allowed to do it but he was going to try. All outgoing mail of the enlisted men was supposedly censored by our officers, and the articles confiscated from the Germans were removed by those officers before the mail left the unit.

We were told not to destroy the contents or the homes unless necessary. This order was not strictly enforced. One buck sergeant came into the SS member's house, took one look at a display of commemorative plates setting upright on the fireplace mantle. He raised his rifle and, with the butt, swiped the whole assortment off the shelf. The only attention paid to this was a brief glance by our captain who looked up from studying a map to see what all the noise was about. By the time we vacated that house, there was not much left of the furnishings for the SS man if he ever returned, which was doubtful.

It was about this time when our neighboring regiment, the 405th, got word that the 84th Division, with British tanks in support, would be coming through their area soon. General "Monty" Montgomery, commander of the British 11th Army, along with his staff – two colonels and a major – asked for a guide to observe the front lines in that sector. Needless to say, they were taken to wherever they wanted to go.

Concerning the action in this area, *Life* magazine reported:

“In the seething 25 miles facing Cologne and the Ruhr (River), the U.S. First and Ninth Armies and the British Second still worked ahead yard by yard. On the thickly populated plain, which leads to the Rhine, the Germans fought ferociously for every house and trench. The three Allied armies ground forward by the weight of men and arms in what the as-yet-unreleased casualty lists probably will prove to be the most-costly fighting since Verdun in 1916.”

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Getting back to the action at Gereonsweiler, I believe the attack began Nov. 20. My battalion – the 2nd – remained in Apweiler after its capture, but later was moved up to help defend Gereonsweiler from the onslaught of a fierce “Jerry” counterattack. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 406th Regiment were active at Gereonsweiler. About 200 prisoners were taken by the two battalions. German artillery and mortar fire remained intense and prolonged which resulted in much of the town being reduced to a pile of rubble.

In another area town, Linnich, a Ruhr River town, lay to the northwest. It was a transportation hub and larger than most urban communities in the general area. It was to be attacked at 1400 hours (two o'clock) in the afternoon. The 406th was to furnish infantry from the 1st and 2nd Battalions. Fighter bombers were to bomb the town at 1:15 p.m., but they came under attack by enemy fighters, which was uncommon at this stage of the war, and had to jettison their bombs wide of the target in order to engage in dogfights. The 2nd Battalion met with support tanks which were assigned to furnish assistance beginning at the line of departure. Artillery shells burst ahead of the advancing troops as they pushed forward across the flat plain. Mud and fierce resistance by German tanks and 88-mm guns – situated upon slightly higher ground outside the town – held up the advance of our troops. Our tanks were stopped by a ditch excavated by the Germans for that purpose. Our infantry, without tanks, surged into the edge of the town, passing the first row of houses. They met approximately 150 to 200 enemy infantrymen. It was decided that the troops would not try to advance further until morning.

When morning of the second day came, it was established by a reconnaissance party that most of the Germans had already left the city and moved across the river. A bulldozer filled a short section of the ditch, which had been established as a tank trap, and now the tanks were free to cross the averted trap and help the infantry again. After three days, Linnich was both captured and picked clean of snipers.

The tenacity with which the Germans defended Linnich gave warning that wresting these river towns – along the Ruhr or any other river – from the Germans would require our best effort. The Rhine would be the next river barrier after the Ruhr.

Another city our regiment helped the British capture, of which I do remember the name but not the date or sequence of capture, was the fortified, coal-mining city of Gelsenkirchen. This was a town of about 20,000 before the war. It was a major stronghold on the Siegfried Line and an important communications center. The town was situated astride a small river, the Wurm.

A *Life* magazine article at the time described the action for the city:

“Allied planes and guns battered the water soaked, coal-mining city of Geilenkirchen for three days before U.S. and British troops edged warily into the outskirts. Inside the town, buildings were completely demolished or turned into empty boxes of masonry. Outside, fields were pitted with hundreds of shell and bomb craters. The British first

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fought into Geilenkirchen at night but were thrown out by a German counterattack. U. S. and British troops had a firm hold on the city by noon the next day.

“In getting to the city of Geilenkirchen, the British had to fight their way through smaller towns. One of the towns was Bauchen. Before they assaulted Bauchen, they had pounded the town with a barrage of 10,000 mortar shells, reducing most of it to ruins.”

Actually, the British were not involved in the recapture of Geilenkirchen. The 102nd took it, with the help of 2nd Armored Division tanks and the Army Air Corps, sometime around Nov. 19, 1944. This town was taken during a cold, drizzling rain. From where I was on the edge of town, I could see a coal mine tippel located a few hundred yards or more outside the city limits. A tippel is the structure that serves as both an entrance via an elevator and as the place where the slag is brought to the surface and then dumped in an elongated, tall pile on the ground. It was about 45 or 50 feet high and the Germans were thought to be using it as an observation tower to direct their artillery fire. I watched a lone American dive bomber come in high, dive almost straight down then pull out of its dive after dropping its lethal load on the structure. It then went back for more bombs and returned to drop them also. This continued until the tippel was completely destroyed.

The streets were lined with continuous buildings that had touched one another before being partially demolished. Upon leaving the city, we were walking single file on the east side of a North-South street hugging a continuous wall of buildings, most of which in this immediate area had been left standing. Fallen roof slates lay broken on the narrow street. Each man was spaced about ten feet from the next. As we walked in a cold drizzle along the water-puddled street, the Germans opened up with a mortar barrage. You don't hear a mortar shell until it is almost upon you, then you hear a brief 'whoosh' followed immediately by a big explosion. Mortar shells, coming in at random, hit buildings nearby, causing some of the roof tiles to again rain down onto the brick-paved street. This makes a heck of a racket. Then came a swoosh just before a round hit the side of a building directly across from me, a very short distance of only 15 feet or less away. It fell to the street, where it threw off a shower of sparks as it spun around. It was a dud which then lay there as useless as a discarded baby rattle.

Everyone had already hit the brick street, and it was as quiet as could be expected for a sergeant who kept yelling, "Stay down! Everybody stay down!"

That round, elongated piece of metal looked as big as a house to us for we fully realized its potential lethal power and its closeness. Everyone waited, hugging the wet bricks, some with hands over their ears, frozen in their position. Would it explode? Does it have some kind of a delayed fuse?

"Everyone up. It's a dud. Let's get out of here," came the command from the sergeant, echoed by an officer.

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The wet and chilled soldiers rose, looked at one another and walked away from the now- inert missile. Again, I, as well as many of my fellow soldiers, had been lucky, just plain lucky!

Some of the narrow escapes I have listed are only to show that the infantrymen lives with constant danger while on the front. The lifespan of a machine gunner was approximately 12 minutes when actually in a fire fight. At first, an infantryman feels anxious and wonders if he will live through another day. After awhile, those thoughts became suppressed into the subconscious. His mind knows the danger is there but chooses to ignore it. If not, he would soon become a basket case.

The Army Air Corps personnel were required to fly only a certain number of missions before being rotated stateside. The infantryman's only means of returning to the states before the war was over was to be either wounded or killed.

The British were immediately adjacent to the north of one of our regiments. They were allowed to build fires to brew their tea whenever they had the chance. Our troops were usually wet and cold and very much wanted to make themselves some hot coffee. This was not allowed. They finally realized that this was definitely not going to happen so they finally gave up on the idea of brewing the hot drink.

Later, our outfit took another town, the name of which escapes me if I ever knew it. Our company command post was immediately set up on the ground floor of a house on the east edge of the town. The captain then went to our left, or north, to participate in setting up the company's new line of defense.

I went with him as far as an orchard where he said, "I am going up the line a little way to check on things. I will be back in a little while."

This implied I was to stay where I was. With no further instructions, I sat down and started eating an apple. It was now about 2:30 p.m., and I had not eaten lunch that day. Soon, a platoon of five or six of our tanks pulled up into the orchard a few feet from me. They pointed their guns eastward toward the Germans, elevated their guns and shot off several rounds. One round hit a tree to the east of me. It made a nerve-shattering noise but didn't explode. The tanks then turned and traveled north in the direction the captain had gone.

The Germans were able to calculate from where the fire had originated and, within a few minutes, they began to return it. At first, the rounds came in several hundred yards north from where I was. This appeared to be nothing to worry about so I continued to eat my apple.

Then the first of several 88-mm shells come screaming in and landed within a couple hundred yards to my left. Dirt and metal flew and acrid smoke curled up from the crater it created. This was getting too close so I rolled over into a shell crater. I did not realize that it was neither wide

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enough nor deep enough to entirely protect me. Then the shells came down into my immediate sector in a barrage. I didn't want to expose myself by raising up to dig my "fraidy" hole deeper. Consequently, my feet must have been slightly above ground level when a shell hit about 12 or 15 feet away. The noise of the explosion was literally deafening.

My right foot went numb as though something heavy had dropped on it. I looked at it and could see a hole in the top of my shoe on my right foot. The shell fragment had nearly severed the toe next to my big toe and broke the smaller one next to it. Both pant legs were slit in three or four places by the fragments. The one that went through my shoe had also sliced the skin on the calf of my right leg before taking off my toe.

A replacement soldier, new to combat, had come in that morning and the captain told him, "Stick with McCarty until I decide where to place you."

When the 88 rounds started coming close to us, I told him to get into a shell hole as I had. He didn't. Luckily, he was not hurt seriously by the exploding shells and escaped with only a very minor cut on his lip. How he escaped relatively unhurt I will never know. With his help, I limped back to the command post.

Another man had also been wounded and we both waited until evening for a medical team to pick us up. They were carrying us out on stretchers to load onto a Jeep when mortar rounds started coming in nearby. The two men ran back to the safety of the building and left us lying there on the ground. We briefly discussed what would be best for us and decided to stay where we were, on the ground. This turned out to be a wise decision. We were then loaded onto the hood of the Jeep and were driven to a field hospital.

By Thanksgiving Day 1944, the Allies in the local region were within five to six miles of the river Ruhr (Roer).

Editor's Note:

My father's "million-dollar wound" earned him a trip home and, more importantly, a chance to become a husband of more than 60 years (still going strong), a father of seven children, grandfather of 12 and great-grandfather of two (at last count). Additionally, four of his children -- myself included -- served in the Armed Forces or married someone who did.

