

"A Hill Where Two Infantry Regiments Made Last Stand"

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by Carlyle Holt, Globe Staff War Correspondent

Schonberg, Belgium

"Not a Thing to Show They Had Anything to Eat and Practically Every Canteen Found There Was Empty"

I came to this town on quite a different errand, but while here I met Lt Col John J. Brown of Eastman, Ga., and so for an hour or so I neglected my original errand and listened to his story.

This town marks the spot where the trapped units of the 106th Infantry Division made their last stand after they were cut off by the German attack in December. Outside Col Brown's billet on a hilltop stand two wrecked anti-tank guns. They are mired, broken and useless, but they still stand back to back as they were when they fired their last shots at the Germans swarming up the hill.

Across the valley, narrow alley, is a pine-clad hill. On the brow of the hill standing white against the dark trees is a religious group centering around a giant crucifix. These are religious people and such wayside shrines and spots are common. This one looks down the valley over Schonberg and along the bloody road to St. Vith, where the tide of battle ebbed and flowed during the recent great battle.

"That hill, in those woods," said Col Brown, "is where the two infantry regiments made their last stand and where the remnants finally surrendered."

"I have been all over that ground. Of course I had a more personal interest than most people because my brother-in-law, Lt Col Joseph F. Puett, also of Eastman, commanded a battalion of the 423d Infantry and I hoped to find out what happened to him. He is reported missing in action."

"Well, I did not find him," said the Colonel, "but I did find his battalion records and some of his personal correspondence and the rubber stamp he used as a battalion commander so I know he must have been on that hill."

"I have been through all of the records of the bodies recovered in this territory and I personally looked over the bodies that we found on the hill after the snow melted and he was not among them so I think that he is probably a prisoner. The townspeople here say that something more than 1,000 men were marched away to Germany after the regiments surrendered.

"That wooded hill with its torn and splintered pines is called Linscheid Hill. It is on the southeastern outskirts of Schonberg and overlooks the town. From it the soldiers of the cornered American units could see the road winding down the valley toward St. Vith, with their only road of escape, firmly held by the Germans. I had already seen the litter of rent and twisted jeeps and trucks, burned out tanks and scattered helmets, belts, and other discarded and lost personal equipment on that road and others in the region.

"I kept my brother-in-law's rubber stamp," said Col Brown, and I am going to have a swell time kidding him when the war is over. I will make him sweat to get that stamp back."

But the colonel did not speak with much conviction. He sounded a little wistful. He spread a map on the table.

"I spent a good deal of time going over this territory," he said, "and I found some of the 106th situation maps so I think I can reconstruct what happened pretty well. The Germans broke through over here on the division's left flank. There was only a light cavalry screen. By breaking through there they got to Schonberg behind the outfits in the line who were trying to fall back to this Schonberg-St. Vith highway. Well, by the time the regiment in the line got back to this region the Germans already had that road, and there is no other way out of here. So they stood on that hill.

"At first the ground was covered with snow. The whole area was sprinkled with personal equipment of all kinds. Now down here" (pointing to spot southeast of hill) "is where artillery gave up. I don't know how they did it but they did a wonderful job of blowing up their guns, believe me.

"The Krauts did not get one gun that was useful. Every single gun was blown up. Most of the tubes were burst and in some cases the breech blocks were blown off too, and that takes something. I think they must have rammed a shell not the muzzles and the fired the gun. Anyway they did a wonderful job and every gun was useless.

"Funny thing about this litter that was all over the place, these fellows has some ammunition left, not much but just enough to keep fighting, then going a few days longer. But we did not find anywhere on the hill any kind of ration and that is extraordinary. There was not an empty can or ration box or anything to show that they had anything to eat." And another peculiar thing was that practically every canteen he found was empty or held only an inch or two of water. "So I think it was not ammunition that made them surrender but lack of food."

Later in the day I heard the story of a major general who came to Linscheid Hill looking for his son. The general tramped all over the hill and looked over the bodies. He went through all the records. But he did not find his son until he was about to leave. A he walked down to the hill toward his car his party came upon the body of a 2d Lieutenant face down in the mud. When they turned the body over the general found his son.



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