

Story of 106th: '2 of 3 Regiments Wiped Out'

But Many Are Probably Prisoners, Says A. P. Dispatch.

With the 106th Division in Belgium, Jan. 22 (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.

Only 424th Remains.

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.

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 100 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 6:30 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 friends 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.

Report by Radio.

All the time, until radio contact was lost, the two regiments continued to send back reports of the fighting. They were routine in nature but they all added up to disaster. There were no sign, however, that the men realized this or were overly concerned.

At 2:35 p. m. on Dec. 18, the radio sputtered that all units of the two regiments were in need of ammunition, food and water. Parachuting 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 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 prisoner.

Engineers Check Nazis.

The Germans then headed for St. Vith and were stopped temporarily by the 51st and 188th 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 M.P.'s who had on American uniforms and talked with a Midwestern accent. The M. P.'s 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.

Reorganize on Dec. 22.

Exhausted and depleted, the 106th pulled back to reorganize Dec. 22 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

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jimdwest

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