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Eyewitness

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spirit and raw courage of troops who had been just three days in the line as a "combat" outfit.

That division, which caught the brunt of the combined might of the Von Rundstedt drive, was the 106th infantry division, which had just come on to the continent at the conclusion of a period at Camp Atterbury. These men, who saw German soldiers for the first time through the sights of their rifles, and whose families were the men whom the people of Indianapolis and Indiana had seen on their streets or had entertained in their homes.

The mission of these men was to hold and protect a twenty-seven-mile arc of mountainous area dominating the Siegfried line. That line formed a bulwark between the Germans and the pretty little Belgian town of St. Vith, which, like a lot of other Belgian towns, looked in its wooded setting like the design in frosting atop a bakery pastry piece. But here was a different pastry. It was a key pastry, on the road to Liege, Brussels and points west. And the Germans wanted it.

Ordered to Hold Line

The 106th had orders to hold that line. The regiments were disposed as follows: The 422d on the left, or north, flank of the division; the 423d in the center and the 424th on the right (south) flank. On the left of the 422d was the 106th reconnaissance troop near Malmedy, which now stands as a monument to the ingrained cruelty of the German soldier.

At exactly 5:40 a. m. on the 16th, German artillery all along the 1st army front opened up in full force. Concentrated on the 106th sector was fire from mortars, 105-mm. cannon, medium artillery, even the heavy railway guns which had been brought secretly in for the night before. Added to this, of all the awful weapons of war, the "jerry-mie" rocketgun; the amazing 88-mm. artillery, and even behind zookas—anything to lay down a fire which would panic and disrupt the American troops. At 5:50 the enemy infantry attacked.

As the morning progressed, the pattern of the German drive became apparent. The enemy struck at the diagonal across the front of the 106th from the southwest, cutting across the 424th and attempting to breach the lines between the 424th and the 423d and striking in force again at the 422d and the reconnaissance troops.

Resupply was a problem, and there were instances of cowardly individual heroism on the part of men driving ammunition and food and water trucks that they never will be all recorded—men who forgot the crash of artillery and the sickening whir of shrapnel—men like Pvt. Robert O. Rupe, Logansport, a 424th infantry driver who piloted a truckload of ammunition through a town dominated by the Germans, holding the throttle wide open and grasping a rifle ready to fire trough the windshield.

One German officer captured that day admitted the caliber of the Americans' fighting already had irreparably upset the Nazi timetables. He was speaking of the fight put up by men like Sgt. Leland S. Lynch, 1520 East Ohio street, Indianapolis. A member of a heavy weapons company, Sgt. Lynch manned a machine gun and kept it in action during and during the first crueiest hours of the attack. The gun emplacement was ankle deep in water at freezing temperature, yet he stayed there under constant artillery and small arms fire. After he was relieved, he had to be evacuated to the hospital because of frozen feet. He is still in Europe awaiting transportation home.

Germans Outflank Division

Saturday night, then Sunday, and the lines still held. On Sunday afternoon, the Germans succeeded in making a penetration around the right flank of the division. At the same time, on the extreme left flank, the unit on the north had been taking a smashing and had been forced to fall back, leaving the 422d and 423d open and dark in behind the 422d and 423d infantries.

Late Sunday, Col. A. D. Beck, Sioux Falls, S. D., commander of the 424th and later wounded in action, saw the Germans were closing in behind his regiment. That night, under orders of the division, the regiment pulled out of its positions which the men had held for thirty-eight hours under the most intense attack.

The 424th struck off cross-country, fighting a constant delaying action. To the north, the Germans had got their foothold behind the 422d and the 423d. When they prepared to withdraw, they found their way blocked and elected to stay behind and fight it out.

One of the most dramatic stories of the war was the result. While the Germans tightened their ring on those two regiments, those men fresh from the states, those men whom the Germans thought would "scatter like straws in a tornado," hung on in their modern Thermopylae. Their food was gone, but that didn't matter. Their ammunition was dwindling too, and that hurt. An attempt was made to resupply the two regiments by parachute. But the weather blocked all efforts. Finally, their ammunition was gone. Their last radio messages were appeals for more.

Those two regiments were lost, along with their attachments, the 589th and 590th field artillery battalions, the 81st and 820th medical battalion and Companies A and B of the 81st combat engineers. Not all of the men were lost, though for days after that action, men individually and in groups were beating their way back through the enemy lines to reach our ranks again. They brought their own brand of courage, too. Like T-4 Paul Stevens, Bloomington, who fought with five different outfits in eight days while making his way back to our lines.

The 424th in the meanwhile drew back to a defense of the St. Vith-Liege road. Tying in with the 7th armored division, a perimeter defense was set up at Commanster, south and east of St. Vith, while elements of the 422d and 423d formed a rear guard for the 7th and the 9th armored divisions as they came by store out of the town.

When the regrouping of the 1st army began, the 424th regiment was pulled north to Harre, Belgium, around which the American counter-attack was centered. As the 82d airborne and the 7th and 9th armored divisions prepared to strike back, the 424th joined them on the right flank and again closed in with the Germans in the vicinity of Manhay. That town dominated a vital cross-roads, and was the control point on the St. Vith-Liege road, and was one of the first important points retaken on the road back for the Americans. Allied high command praise for the division was enthusiastic and spontaneous. During the dark days at Christmas a commendation was given to the division by Gen. Eisenhower. Gen. Montgomery expressed his admiration for the fight of the defenders of St. Vith. The 1st army commander, Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges, directed that his appreciation be given to all four attached divisions and the 424th regiment for the part they played of the fight they had waged.

An Indianapolis member of the division was 1st Lt. Paul Seehausen, 744 North Dequincy street, forward observer for the 591st field artillery battalion. He was with a unit surrounded and cut off by the Germans December 18. He escaped under cover of darkness. At another time at Manwell, Belgium, three tanks overran his observer's position. A bundle of sticks, a bundle of bundles and a sewing bill, ordered the 105-mm. cannon to turn on the tanks even though it meant firing at Lt. Seehausen. He escaped that, too. At Coulee, Belgium, however, he wasn't so lucky. There a shell fragment wounded him and he spent three months in a hospital. He now is at Camp Campbell, Kentucky, out in the snow again, on field maneuvers.

There Were Lighter Moments

The history books won't show it, but even in the bitterest warfare there are lighter moments. During the bulge battle, for instance, a replacement fresh from the states joined a company of the 424th infantry regiment. He immediately was placed in the lines. That night he was wandering around in his company area and was challenged by another member of the company with: "Who's there?"

"Ah," replied the neophyte in the darkness, "you wouldn't know, I just got in tonight."

Captain Thomas Mingey, Upper Darby, Pa., didn't exactly appreciate the amiss he got from a soldier of the Third Reich in the matter of his mail delivery. The wife of the captain had written that she had sent a picture of herself, but he never received it. During the fighting his company captured a German soldier and in his possession—you've guessed it—was the picture. It was figured the German had been in some captured American mail stores and had admired the attractiveness of Mrs. Mingey. But the captain wasn't at all pleased.

Pvt. Frank Wakeham, Hancock, Mich., came running in excitedly to the forward post to his company commander.

"Lieutenant, lieutenant," Pvt. Wakeham panted. "There's a cow in the next building having a calf. What'll I do? What'll I do?"

"Take it easy," advised the officer. "That happens every day in some form or another."

"Yes," spluttered the guard, "but this one's lying on a 105 shell duff."

Captain Lee Berwick, Johnson's Bayou, La., is a graduate of Louisiana State University, but had some trouble in keeping up with the doings at the school during the war — trouble, that is, until he went on a reconnaissance one day and started probing around a knocked-out German tank. There in the tank was a copy of the Louisiana State "L" yearbook for 1944-45.

Series

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broadcast from 5 to 5:15 p. m. Tuesday.

The programs on the Circle will be offered at 12:05, 5 and 7:30 p. m. daily except on the opening and closing days of the series. Most of the Indianapolis school and independent music groups will participate and the series will include three cantatas as well as "Christmas Pageant," a plaisique in dance movement.

Decorations already are in place and the committee in charge of the series will meet Tuesday to consider any changes which may be necessary following the first program.

The opening program will include a trumpet fanfare from Ft. Benjamin Harrison; the Arsenal Technical High School Boys Concert Club, with William Moon, director, and the Nurses Choral Club, with Helen Thomas Martin, director.

ENJOY EXTRA CONVENIENCE.

1945-12-15 Eyewitness to Bulge PART TWO

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