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Vets recall Battle of the Bulge

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The fighting continued for weeks in bitter cold and snow, the Americans knowing this may be their last chance to contain the Germans and prevent them from reaching the North Sea — their door to conquering the rest of the world.

Though Martin and Smith's roles in the war were quite different, they were fighting for a common cause.

Martin, a sergeant in the 9th Armored Division, was primarily involved in war-related government.

"I was trained in military government in England and joined the 9th division in 1944," he said. "We were expected to maintain military control over civilians, including spies and refugees."

Martin explained that governmental control was essential during the battle, particularly when towns were being bombed and people were scattering.

"The only way this battle, like many others, could be fought was to move tanks and equipment through these towns, and when scared citizens were fleeing in fear, it was mass confusion," he said. "The roads would be blocked, and it was our job to restore some semblance of order and handle displaced people."

Martin's division also reorganized government in towns that had been broken up by the intense bombing.

Not too many miles away, Smith, a machine-gunner in the 16th Infantry, was resting behind enemy lines, waiting to be sent into the heat of the German defensive.

When the order came to send his infantry to the front lines, Smith marched in with the rest of his comrades, not knowing what was in store.

His division was sent to relieve the 106th Division, which had been battered by the Germans.

Smith well remembers the trickery the Germans used to divide and confuse the American forces.

"When we were sent in to replace this division, we found out only much later that the Germans had taken the uniforms off of our men in the 106th," Smith said. "They put on American uniforms and were posing as MP's (military police)."

Smith's division, looking for the 106th group, was actually being led in the wrong direction by the Germans dressed as Americans.

Since it was dark, his division could not distinguish faces, and

trusting the familiar uniforms, the American forces followed the Germans in disguise.

Upon tricking the Americans, the Germans closed the lines behind Smith's division, cutting them off from the rest of the American forces. They were on their own.

"I remember at that point our division began shooting in all directions. We didn't know our men from the Germans. We would shoot in front of us for a while, then we would turn around and shoot to the back of us for a while," Smith said. "We just didn't know until daybreak where anyone was."

Smith's division found a Catholic church about 15 miles outside of Bastogne, Belgium, where they began moving the wounded. They could move only at night in 15-degree, snowy weather.

Smith's division found a farmhouse and decided to "dig in" behind the house, which was occupied by three Belgium women.

The seven men in Smith's unit dug foxholes from four feet to seven feet deep, allowing them just enough space to rise up and shoot their machine guns.

Food and supplies were virtually nonexistent for Smith and his comrades during their stay at the farmhouse.

"The clouds were so low, the planes could not get in to drop supplies to us," Smith said. "They would drop our food and supplies in the wrong place, usually to the Germans."

Smith remembers having to eat emergency rations called "D-Bars," chocolate candy squares that contained all the essential vitamins.

He also remembered what happened when the D-Bars ran out.

"We were chasing every chicken we could find," he said.

At one point, the men found a spotted milk cow on the farm. Smith had every intention of killing the cow for food, but the Belgium women cried so much that he agreed not to kill their sacred animal.

Hunger soon defeated compassion, and Smith and his men hung the cow from a tree and cut it up for food. It was the only way they were going to survive.

"The Belgium ladies cried for three days, but we couldn't help it," Smith recalls.

When the skies did clear and the American planes were able to get supplies in, they did so by loading 240 Houser bombshells with the supplies and firing them down from the planes.

Meanwhile, Martin and his division had made it to the hills of Luxembourg, a small country that adjoined Belgium. They were sleeping in shelled-out buildings.

During this time, Martin had become acquainted with a Cpl. Werner, a soldier under his command.

"He was a full-blooded German, and he was fighting for the Americans. He knew he was going to die, and he asked me to send his belongings home to his family when he did," Martin said.

Two weeks later, Werner was killed in a building that was bombed by the Germans.

Martin recalls the impact of these unannounced bombs. "They came without much warning. You could hear them humming only a few seconds before impact," Martin said. "By then, it was too late."

Martin experienced one of these bombs virtually firsthand, having been knocked out of bed by a B-1 rocket.

"These rockets were designed to follow a preset course, like much of our sophisticated weaponry today," he said. "They were a little bit more primitive, though. This particular rocket

that sent me from the bed to the floor was originally charted for England, but it malfunctioned and landed on us in Mursch, Luxembourg."

As Martin and his division made their way through the hills and on to England, they traveled only at night in Jeeps painted white.

"We had to blend in with the snow, and we drove only at night with no lights on," he said.

They fought not only German armies but subzero temperatures. The only way they could see where they were going was to look at the sky and see the gap in the trees, indicating a clearing they hoped was the road.

Martin also remembers putting a gadget on his Jeep that resembled wire cutters and served the same purpose.

"The Germans knew we traveled at night, so they stretched wire across the roads in hopes of cutting off our heads as we drove in pitch-black darkness," he said.

Not to be outsmarted, the Americans welded the wire cutters to the front of the Jeep to cut through the traps.

"While war is hell, you do what you have to in order to stay



HAROLD SMITH TAKES A REST IN BELGIUM IN 1945
Retired businessman was a machine-gunner in WWII

alive," Smith said.

Martin was 23 when he was shipped off to learn judo and hand-to-hand combat in England and later joined the American forces in Europe.

"We were handed books on the boat that taught the German language, and we had a bad feeling about that," he said.

Smith was 19 years old when

he was placed on a boat for England.

"I was scared to death and I didn't know anything. On the way over, our fleet of ships was attacked several times by German submarines," he said. "We didn't know anyone; all we knew was we were replacements for men who had already been

killed, and that was scary."



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