

**Hugh Colbert
Company B, 422nd Regiment
106th Infantry Division**

Each time I see the figures of the losses of the 106th Division, and it is mention that there were 7001 missing in action, I consider myself as being the “one” and there were seven thousand others.

The realization of war did not truly hit me until we marched down that road after capture and I saw the dead beside the road, At age 19, that was my first experience to see a dead person outside a coffin. Your diary seem to confirm that I was not alone with my feelings. Seeing the bodies of two medics at the ends of a stretcher with a GI on it and all three had been stripped of their shoes, really brought the realization of the cruel war to me.

I was captured on December 19th about noon and marched to Pruim, spending the night in a bombed out school building. As we moved out the next day, more prisoners had been added to our group. Marching on to Gerolstein on the 20th, about dark we were put in a warehouse where I found sleeping space in the attic. The next morning looking out the window we could see that even more prisoners had been moved in the area during the night and I recognized our supply sergeant and others of the first battalion motor pool were in that group. They had taken the roads as we marched cross-country on the 18th. We called down from the attic window and talked with them. From your notes, I feel that this was your (John Kline) group which ended up that evening sleeping in an open field near Gerolstein, Germany” on the night of December 20.

Later that afternoon, we were moved to the railroad to board the train. If they had put five more on that ill fated train that night, I would have been in the group. As it was, we were turned away following the guard, to Dockweiler Dries. I started that march in the lead of the column. I remember how cold the nights were as we marched on to Koblenz and then were thankful for the stone barracks at Koblenz which would give as a protection from the bitter wind.

God, what are You trying to teach me?

During a two weeks revival meeting the spring of 1938 at the First Baptist Church in Electra, I accepted Christ. The following Sunday

night, I was baptized with three of my Sunday School Classmates. Just before my baptism, my pastor repeated the Great Commission. Those words stuck with me. I especially remembered the last part as he repeated “And lo, I am with you always even to the end of the earth.” I know Christ was speaking to his followers that day for them to go out as missionaries, but I also know that those words were meant for me.

Six years later, five thousand miles from Electra, Texas, those words came back to me as I looked up that snow covered hill to the German Tiger Tanks, Helplessly, we laid down our rifles, raised our hands and moved toward those tanks, Suddenly I felt alone, cut off from the world. As I walked up that snow packed hill, seeing war and it’s destruction all around, my morale was low and I began to feel the impact of my situation. About half way up the hill, I heard in almost an audible voice saying “I am with you as I promised, you will be all right”.

Almost a month later, after a 150 mile forced march in two weeks, without food and very little water in sub zero weather at times, a Chaplain read from Hosea 1:15 “the valley of Achor is the door of hope.” He explained that when we got right with God, when we ‘found the answer as to why God had us there, and what He wanted us to learn, that would be our Valley of Achor (our valley of troubles) and then we would find Hope. Thinking on this, I begin to have hope, for the future, realizing God’s promise of being with me everywhere I went. During those four months, I learned what it was to be COLD, truly HUNGRY and THIRSTY, to feel GOD’S PRESENCE as the German Messerschmitts strafed so close to me that snow and dirt kicked up inches away from my feet, God’s presence as bombs fell from the allied planes - God’s hand directing those falling bombs away to spare the building where the POWs were housed, and then learn the true feeling of being deprived of a religious worship service. GOD taught me that I should not take my religious worship for granted. That was my valley of Achor. I did have hope for the future. He did provide me with sufficient food, water and shelter to survive. He was with me and with that I could depend.

During the laborious march from the battle field to interior of Germany, we felt at times the next mile or even few feet would sap the last of our energy. I had two major things that helped carry me thru. You see I had my home church, The First Baptist Church of

Electra praying for me. I knew the women of the W H U had me on their “prayer list”. Then I had God’s promise. These helped carry me on. I had two buddies who were with me and we leaned on each other. One of these fellows told my mother later, that it was me and my attitude that gave them the courage to keep going when they thought about quitting. He said that my outlook carried the three of us thru those difficult times. Little did I know that they were riding on my faith in God and his promise which was keeping us going.

When I heard the Iraqis had placed civilians and maybe prisoners in some strategic military target areas, I recalled how the Germans had placed us in a building located within two blocks of the main bridge crossing the Rhine River in Koblenz, a block of a radar tower, and a half mile of a V-2 launcher. Twice daily at 11 AM and 11 PM we were bombed. And the prayers of my church reached God and He directed the bombs away from our building. Oh! we lost windows, doors, plaster from the explosions a few feet away, but no direct hit. God’s hands sheltered that building for three days and nights.

During the 150 mile forced march with no food and little water, we all lost weight down to near 100 pounds. That was a loss of about 80 pounds for me. Many men did not make it but died during this time. My two friends and I had showered together in England in November. 19 years of age and a true physical specimen of American youth, but then on January 6th in Muhlberg Prisoner of War Camp, we showered together again and it was hard to recognize those skinny, grey bags of bones as the same bodies as those in England. This was after a six day train ride across Germany in locked box cars that was demoralizing as well as a physical and mental strain. Words can not describe the depressing conditions of that ride.

The Germans forbid us holding a devotional or even one person leading in prayer. They would allow a Chaplain to hold services under their watchful eye. Since we did not have a chaplain in our prison, we were denied religious services. Although each night at roll call, when we were dismissed by the guards, we remained in formation and repeated the Lord’s Prayer in unison and this they respected.

Our liberation came three days after the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945. Six weeks later at Sunday Noon, as the Trail— ways Bus turned onto Main Street in Electra to the bus station, the sidewalk full of people waving at me. You see the pastor had been given an ultimatum; many of the church were going to meet my bus and would leave at 11:50 even if he was still preaching. He had dismissed early.

Never did I ask “God why are you punishing me?” I did ask Him what did he want to teach me with this. I promised God only to try to live a better Christian, and I would not forget my “valley of Achor” . To this day, every problem, large or small, I try to relate to my “valley of Achor.” God has been good to me and I am thankful for the lessons He has taught me with this experience.

Hugh Colbert

Nothing before or since has given me concern for my safety as did those days of bombings in Koblenz. As I think of the march from Koblenz to Limberg, I wonder how we had the strength to endure those cold grueling miles. The inhumane treatment on that box car ride to Muhlberg is hard to realize that it truly happened to me.

It was at Muhlberg I recall, as we moved into the stalag, we were instructed to toss our helmets to the right and helmet liners to the left. It was hard to give them up because of the utility of the helmet. I was astonished to see my friends’ bodies as we undressed for the showers. Did I look that bad? Yes, but I did not want to believe it. I was registered as “Stalag IV B 315 385”. I have my German Prisoner of War dog tag in a shadow box and it still has the dirt and grime from those weeks of wear on it and I dare anyone to try to clean it. Then in the middle of January it was announced that all Non—Commissioned Officers, medics and Jews were to be moved. So it was at this point we parted. I was sent to a Arbeit Komando in Werdau Germany on February 2 where I remained until I was liberated on April 16th. We realized that the NCOs were being separated from us because we were to go to work camps. At that time I felt discrimina-tion, but after reading your diary and hearing of others, I realize how much better I was in my small group at Stalag IV—F Werdau. I was there in February when you passed thru Altenburg which is located about 25 miles due North of Werdau.

Several times I have been asked to relate my experience in my Church, the last of which was about a year ago. I wrote out what I thought I should say to my Sunday School at that time and I am enclosing a copy which will show one lesson a 19 year old learned from being a prisoner of war.

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