

Bud Bridges' War Story



Mr. & Mrs. Bridges

Norma and I, were married in 1937 during the Great Depression. We struggled and lived on \$1.00 a day wages. In a couple of years, we had a little business of our own--- selling and delivering ice (there were no refrigerators then) in the area, and we had a grocery and supply route for the merchants in Battle Creek from Norfolk. That led going into the Livestock Hauling Business.

We had our precious Bonnie in May of 1940. War clouds were hanging in Europe--- little did we know it would ever effect our lives. We were overjoyed to have our Rodney in November of 1941. We came home from the hospital on a Saturday afternoon, December 6. on Sunday, December 7, my folks stopped after church to pick Bonnie up so I could rest for the afternoon. We were resting and heard a SHOCKING news bulletin on the radio. PEARL HARBOR was bombed by the Japanese and were expected to continue on to the west coast of California. WE WERE SPEECHLESS.

The next 2 to 3 years we were in war with Japan. America was also an ally of Russia who was fighting Germany, being led by a radical Hitler---as you have read in your history books. It wasn't long 'til English and American ships were being attacked by Germany and Japan both, so we were in war all over.

American men were being drafted in large numbers each month. By 1944 most of the young men were gone, so married men came next. I went in February, 1944. We sold our truck for a small price, it was a blow to say the least. Norma couldn't go with me like most of the other younger women did as we had 2 babies. She didn't want to go back to her folks too badly as they had 3 children left at home. Her dad had just gotten the Schott house, so he said she should live there and we could buy it. I got \$50 a month in the army---\$21 for him and the rest for Norma, so I had to do something. I had two school girls, one school teacher and one office worker living with her, and she cooked for four more teachers at night. Four for breakfast, four at

noon and eight at night. They were a blessing to Norma---good company and they kept her busy with her two little ones. She sold the car, as she couldn't afford it. She rode her bike after Bud's letters in morning, and pulled the kids up town every afternoon for groceries.

The War

I took my training in Camp Roberts, California and got in the truck division, hauling supplies. I came home on Furlough in three months and was sent to Fort Meade, Maryland. From there I was sent back to join the 106th division at [Camp Atterbury](#), Indiana. I was there about a month. Norma came to see me for a few days, and then I was sent to a camouflage camp in Boston (Camp Miles Standish). I left from there to spend four weeks on a ship eating only orange marmalade, and we landed in Ireland. We went by train to Stratford on Avon, England. At that time, England was entirely under BLACKOUT orders. There were no lights---windows were covered, as they were being bombed day and night by the Germans.

From South Hampton, England I crossed the English Channel and landed in Cherburg, France. We had to go up the Seine River to sandbars in order to drive the trucks off the ships. Ammunition was needed on the front lines of fighting so trucks were sent to Italy several times to take ammunition, food, etc. for the soldiers. I was to take a load of overshoes, blankets, and food to St. Vith, Belgium as the fighting was hard there. The snow was heavy. When we arrived in St. Vith we couldn't find the front lines, only abandoned gas dumps. We waited in a dense forest until a Captain came by and said a soldier was wounded badly by snipers, and I was to take him back to a hospital. On this trip my truck was blown up by machine guns; and my assistant driver, an alcoholic who drank medic alcohol, was killed as he sat in the seat next to me. I kept driving until I ran out of gas. I got to a small town and got back with my division and got a new truck. Then I went back to St. Vith.

The next major event of the war that I can remember is the BATTLE OF THE BULGE. We met a whole Negro Artillery Division on the run. They should have been up in front of the foot soldiers. We knew something was wrong. I went up to the Infantry where I met my buddy Chet Moss who I hadn't seen since we landed. They were all digging fox holes, so Moss and I dug one big enough for the two of us. By now all the trucks were demolished by machine guns mounted on tanks, and the firing was day and night. At night we would send out scouts to try to see what the situation was, even though we knew it was bad. The Germans were continually calling out for us to surrender as we were surrounded by 88's mounted on tanks. The 422nd division surrendered. We were marched past the 423rd regiment to show us the destruction and the dead soldiers. We were marched across Germany for 14 days and nights without food, and a handful of snow for water. We were searched for valuables - I taped my pocket knife and German translation book between my legs and managed to keep it until I got home. It was bitterly cold, and during the march if someone couldn't go on or fell, he was shot and left there. There was no way but to walk from St. Vith, Belgium, through Cologne, Germany to a P.O.W. Camp [Stalag IV-A](#) at Muhlburg. We started out with about 1700 men and arrived with about 500 weak men with frozen feet. The lice in the camp was very bad.

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Recd 302 Pm Wm		NO 42 30VT	
Washington Dc 315 Pm 18			
<p>Mrs Norma C Bridges, Battle Creek, Nebr.</p>			
<p>The Secretary of war desires me to express his deep sympathy that your husband Pvt Ray B Bridges has been reported missing in action since sixteenth December in Germany if further details or other information are received you will be promptly notified.</p>			
<p>Dunlap Acting General</p>			
<p>THE COMPANY WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE</p>			

At this point in time, my dear wife received a telegram with disturbing news. Much to her dismay, I was missing in action. At this point I believe that she feared I would never return. I wanted so badly to write to her to ease her pain. During my time at war, my father-in-law received only one postcard from me. All the other postcards I sent to Norma, I retrieved from the mail after returning home.

I volunteered to work with the hope of maybe running across some food. They moved me to [Stalag IV-B](#) near Dresden. A guard once in awhile would bring me his mother's potato peelings, which I ate. The regular Germans hated Hitler and Nazis as much as anyone and would be good to us if they could. I worked in a furniture factory, and the rich German owner would take us to his house to do odd jobs. I had a chance to get in his cellar one day and took some kraut from one of his big barrels and put it in my pocket to eat later. When I got back to camp the salty brine from the kraut had run down my leg and had taken all the skin off.

Late one night American bombers did an all-night bombing raid over the city of Dresden---just down the hill from us. They killed 250,000 in that one night, all being civilians. It was either day or night when they moved us in some boxcars. The Americans also bombed us because they didn't know American soldiers were in those boxcars. The doors were locked so there was no way to get out. Many men were killed that night. We took the dead bodies to make shields for the ones that were left. There

was much praying going on that night. After the bombing of Dresden, we were to go down to help clean up the city and bury the dead. We were too weak, and it made us all sick to see the disaster.

Slave laborers worked in the furniture store and wore suits that had S.L. printed on them. We wore P.O.W. on our clothes. When these laborers came to work they took their suits and ran them up on a chain so they wouldn't get lice on them. Several times I would try to sneak upstairs to get a nap, but they would always catch me and run me back down. I wanted a map so I would know where I was located in case I had a chance to escape and run to safety. Two Africans, another American, and I watched these men come, hoping for a size about like our own. We stole these clothes one day and walked right out past the guards. We walked in a solid grove of trees for about 2 days. We ran out of forests, so we had to cross the road, where we ran into the Hitler Youth Nazi's. They captured us and took us to a British P.O.W. camp in Czechoslovakia, at Bruz which is south of Prague.

Conditions there were no better---many sick, dying, and starving. Lice were also feeding on their bodies. One day the Russian army pushed through and captured our German guards. We were now free, but with no relief of the conditions. We went into town to try to steal food to bring back to camp. We got 100 lb. bags of oatmeal and some sugar cubes. We found a cow in the area and milked her. We also got some poor lady's geese, but we were too weak to kill them so we had to use a knife, and then we cleaned them to cook for soup as there were so many to feed. I caught a goat and also cooked some soup from it. The American planes bombed a German kitchen (a tripod with a big iron kettle hanging in the middle) and killed both horses. We had been locked up again by the Russians as the British were getting into the Russians wine, so I had to get permission from the Russians to skin the horses and bring the meat back to make soup out of it. The broth was like sugar water and the meat coarse and sweet. When 1500 ate from it, none of us got much.

In about a month the Russians left so we were free to go. Me and this guy from Oregon tried to break into this lady's house, but she fought us off with a broom. I searched for a bathroom to get rid of my lice. She thought we were Russians because Russians had already been through and raped her and her two daughters. It took us awhile, but we finally convinced them that we were Americans, prisoners of war. She gave me her husband's cane because she saw my walking stick was old. We were too weak to walk and the train tracks around us had all been bombed out. We did find some gondola cars that a British soldier thought he could run, so we got a steam engine running and plugged our way to Pilsner, Czechoslovakia where there we came across some Russians. They helped us to contact the American army. The Americans sent two C-47 planes to take us to Camp Lucky Strike in France. The camps were named after cigarettes for privacy reasons. This way no one knew what we were talking about. They thought we were talking about cigarettes all the time. First of all, they ran us through dip up to our chins to delouse us. Then the Red Cross took care of us. They offered us egg-nog to drink for strength but we all got sick with dysentery. We had to get used to food very slowly. Here is where I wrote a letter to Norma. One Sunday morning at 6 o'clock there was a knock on her back door and there stood Frances Barkdoll with tears running down her cheeks. She handed Norma a letter and said, "I think this is what you've been waiting for." That was the first indication she had that I was alive. I had weighed 75 lbs., and it took awhile to regain my strength,

but one day a captain came by and asked if I thought I was ready to get home. So I went on a hospital ship for home. It took 30 days and we landed at Newport News, Virginia. I stood in line to call home. Many men received the worst shock when they found out their wives had not waited for them, and had remarried or just left.

I rested 'til I was strong enough to ride a train to Leavenworth, Kansas. From there I went by bus to Norfolk. Norma borrowed her Dad's car to meet me with Bonnie and Rodney. I was a complete stranger to them and they shied away when I wanted to touch them. When I got home the whole neighborhood welcomed me. Rev. Decker was one of the first to run down the street.

After three months at home with food and love, I was sent back to San Antonio Hospital to get my teeth fixed (they had rotted) and to get a medical discharge from the army. After having missed so much with Bonnie and Rod, we decided to complete our family with loving Beth.

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