

I REMEMBER

My short taste of combat

By Pete House ©

A Btry, 590 FA Bn

106 Infantry Division

From the time we landed on the Seine River near Rouen, 8 December 1944~ until I was captured my mind is a blank except for a few vivid scenes. Here is a list of my memory snapshots of that terrible time. Until late 18 December, I rode in the back of a covered 6 x 6 truck. Had never seen a map, viewed the scenery. In fact, when I was debriefed at Camp Lucky Strike after being liberated, I couldn't even tell them where I was captured. I found out in prison camp the our beloved 1st sergeant completely felt apart and wouldn't even leave the basement command post, and our battery commander was killed the afternoon of the first day. What a way to begin a war!

Pfc. Pete House

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Division**

I remember where we stopped that 8 December night in a tiny French Village after leaving the LST (landing ship tank). I enjoyed the cognac in the village café and a farmer plied **James W. Hill and myself with much hard cider. Also remember helping **Roy K. Dixon** roll **Captain Pitts** bed roll. Roy was very upset because I included some indigenous rocks, grass, and snow with his blankets.**

I remember some of the guys filled gallon size food cans with dirt and poring in gasoline. When lit, it provided some heat and a lot of black soot. These guys had black faces.

I remember one of the guys, **Thomas Krzan, had diarrhea and was standing in the deep snow trying to cut off his under shorts with his dull mess kit knife. I loaned him my sharp hunting knife.**

I remember the morning of the 9th the lead jeep stopped. **Warrant Officer Collins got out and was standing between his jeep and a weapons carrier. A 6 x 6 following the weapons carrier could not stop because of ice on the road. Collins was killed instantly. I often wonder why we weren't told to put the tire chains on. Who was in charge of our column?**

I remember our convoy stopped in a town. (Could it have been St. Vith?) I got out and went into a store to buy something. The natives laughed because all I had was French Francs and they wouldn't accept any. When we arrived in England we turned in our US money to be exchanged for English. We got it on the LST and received French Franc. There must have been a joker somewhere!

I remember when we pulled into bivouac on the 9th before I could get my shelter half (half a tent) and blankets from my truck it was sent some where else. Had to sleep in the snow with one blanket. My section leader was sure looking after me.

I remember after dark on the 10th mounting two of the large machine gun ring mounts on our trucks. Must have weighed over 1000 pounds. Our tools had not arrived from the States. The rings were tightly packed in plywood, plastic, paper, and the awful Cosmoline grease. We had to use gasoline and constantly warmed up our hands in a wood fire. Without tools it was impossible to secure the mounts so they could withstand actually firing the machine guns. They never were fixed. I wonder where the Artillery Mechanic and Motor Sergeant were.

I remember on 11 December two of our new 6 x 6 trucks would hardly run so they were abandoned alongside the road. Four of us were detailed to guard the contents until they could send a truck back to pick the gear and us up. Of course we were not given food or water. It was warming up and the snow was melting in the trees and falling like a light rain. There we were no food, no shelter, no ax to start a fire. Where was our section leader?

I remember arriving after dark in Oberlascheid. We were taken into a farmhouse that was our mess halt. Surprise, surprise, they had food for us. Then we were taken to another empty farmhouse and told to guard the cross road with a 50 cal machine gun. I really hadn't sleep since leaving the LST on the 8th, and being cold and wet most of the time, we built a fire in the kitchen and all went to sleep.

I remember the next day being taken to a 50 cal machine gun position several hundred yards to the east of the town. There were already two men there. A 50 cal machine gun needs a three man crew. There was a tiny dugout with a home made stove and one cot next to the machine gun pit. We decided that two men could man the position, allowing the third man to have twenty four hours off. As I was the last to report, I was the last to get 24 hours off. It is funny, but I have no idea who the other two were. I guess because I was an "official" machine gunner, I was in charge. Had been issued binoculars and machine gun cleaning case just before we left Camp Atterbury.

I remember 14 December was my day off. I went back to the village. Our ammo or fifth section occupied a farm house at the road junction. There I met James Hill from the other machine gun post. The section was already settled down and wouldn't give us a place to sleep or even share their hot water with us to clean up. Where was our friendly section leader? Hill and I found an outside room and forcibly took a couple of helmets full of water to shave and bathe. James was from Maysville KY and knew something about moonshine. We found a large pile of potatoes in the cellar, copper tubing on a tractor and planned on our own beverage. Got some sugar from the mess hall. Afterwards we visited the wire section, maintenance section, and mess hall. Latter I gathered materials to provide an enclosed watch area for our machine gun post. It was great! Rather than have to stand out in the cold we could stand inside the warm dugout and look out through four windows.

I remember Capt. Pitts introducing me to his sister, Jill. She worked with a Red Cross Clubmobile and came up to visit her brother. This was the last time she saw her brother.

I remember sometime after dark on 15 December we received incoming fire that destroyed our phone line, our only link with the US Army!. Here we were, way out in the middle of a field, out of sight of our battery, in sight of the German line. And

under fire. Standing orders were to shoot any thing that moved after dark.

I remember as soon as it got daylight running back to the Battery to see what was happening. Of course my section leader was of no help. I got some breakfast and returned to the position. My partner went for breakfast. The wire section ran a new telephone wire over the hill to our position. This was tied in with the command post phone rather than to the switchboard. We could now hear everything the battery commander said including messages to battalion.

I remember being called and told that they were sending three more men with another 50 cal machine gun to our position. Also our third man rejoined us.

I remember the battery commander, Capt. Pitts, following the telephone wire to our position. He asked me if I would become supply sergeant. Of course I said yes.

I remember around 1400 we received a lot of incoming fire. One round, about 155 mm, skipped and slid right up to the sandbags, nudging them in. It was a dud. This same incoming fire killed Capt. Pitts, our battery commander.

I remember later that afternoon the battery called and had me send the other machine gun crew back to the battery.

I remember watching American forces in the valley below us to the east leaving in what seemed like a hurry. We wondered if there were any Americans left between the Germans and us?

I remember that supper on 16 December was the last meal that I had. If our cooks did prepare any meals the next three days I wasn't included. Where was my section leader, who was leading the battery? I never saw any emergency rations.

I remember sometime after dark 16 December getting a call and asking how long it would take us to leave our position. I asked if they would send a jeep or weapons carrier down the sunken road to transport our gear. They said no.

I remember hearing [1st Lt. Rex Roden](#), our acting battery commander talking to [Lt. Col. Lackey](#), our battalion commander, begging for more ammo. We all knew that our phone lines were not secure. Lackey did not seem to understand Roden. Finally Roden said we didn't have any ammo and to send more immediately. I am sure the Germans overheard.

I remember our phone was disconnected around 2000. Here we were isolated, just being told to be prepared to leave, and it looked like there were no friendly forces in front of us. It turns out that some clown wondered why there were two lines to the command post phone and removed one, so I remember running back to the village at day light 17 December. It seemed to be total confusion. The battery was moving out of the village. I do believe they would have left us behind if I hadn't appeared. I was refused any transport to get our gear. We had a 50 cal machine gun, bazooka, ammo, hand grenades, phone and our personal gear. I ran back and got the other two men. All we were able to bring was the machine gun. We just made it as the battery was leaving. Where was our section leader?

I remember pulling into position sometime that night. I was sent on a patrol. No instructions, no map, no compass, Of course I didn't go very far. Slept in a fox hole with another guy the rest of the night.

I remember the afternoon of 18 December going with a battalion advance party representing A battery. This was my job back in the States, Battery Agent. We were driving along a road in an open weapons carrier. We were passing through an advancing Infantry unit. Soon one of the infantry guys yelled out that he was the point, there were Germans in front. We continued on. Finally our officer in charged stopped the weapons carrier. He and several others moved into a field on our right. There were round pieces of sod about 12" in diameter popping up all over the field. We yelled at them that they were in a mine field. We were across a field from the village where we started, Oberlascheid.

I remember being told to put Battery A in the field on the left. I seem to remember that I was put on guard duty that night.

I remember later that night we moved into Oberlascheid. The truck I was in stopped near the barn used by our motor maintenance section. I had seen a roll of Gerry cans full of gas when I visited on the 14th. Got out and told 1~ Sgt. Bartley about the gas. He said to get some men from one of the gun crews. What a joke. How was a mere Pfc to get some volunteers. One guy did. Could it have been [Francis Meilcarek](#)? We brought 20 gal. gas back.

I remember still later that night receiving the order to destroy all the gear as we were going to walk out. I had a great deal of pleasure using a pick on two of our radios. They never seemed to work. Then we got the order to get back in the trucks. We lost another 6 x 6 because the driver could not find the rotor. We now had to tow a howitzer with a weapons carrier. Somehow I was a passenger in the weapons carrier. We had two 50 cal machine guns, bazookas, the gun crew, and the people who were assigned to the weapons carrier. I can't remember who it was assigned to.

I remember that night I was leading the weapons carrier down a dark road in a convoy. The driver was night blind and after almost running over me several time, I got mad and took the wheel. It was biting cold.

I remember after daylight on 19 December I was told to pull my howitzer to the left up a hill. At the top the gun crew put their piece into firing position. This seemed rather stupid as we only had three rounds and they were with another gun. Our other three guns were also in firing position below us.

I remember a terrific incoming fire. I ran deep into the woods to find a stream bed for protection. When it was over [Joe Krause](#) came by. He said we were surrendering. Joe and I continued to run in the same direction until we came to a clearing or field. I thing both [Lt. Col. Vaden Lackey](#) (CO 590th FA) and [Col. C. C. Cavender](#) (CO 423 Inf. were there. They said that we were surrendering. They said we could try to get back to our lines. About twenty of us including Krause and [Lt. El Creel](#) left.

I remember after what seemed an hour we came over the crest of a ridge and started down the other side. The trees suddenly became very small and we were in an open field. At this time shells began hitting us. Creel stood up and waved his handkerchief.

The firing continued, he dropped to the ground. The firing stopped and he stood up. The Germans at the road below motioned for us to come down. I don't know if any of us were killed. We carried two wounded down. Part way down the Germans met us. Most were kids. They did not take any personal articles, even letting me keep my pocket knife. These Germans had a 20 mm anti-aircraft unit and were aimed towards the way we came. Evidently they were expecting Americans trying to escape.

I remember as Joe Krause and I sat by the side of the road he shared a "D" bar with me, the first food I had in three days. A "D" bar was a large chocolate type bar designed to provide 1/3 of the minimum energy requirements. It was hard as a rock.

I remember after being captured the Germans were getting their guns into march order. A German officer told one of the Americans to help with the weapon. He refused. The German Officer pulled his pistol and shot the American. So much for the Geneva Convention!

I remember we were marched through the mountains in groups of 100. The road was narrow. There was German men and equipment back to back moving up to the front. We had a grand view of the real German Army. Much of the artillery was pulled by horses and had hard rubber tires. Some armored infantry rode bicycles. Their mess trucks were a two wheeled cart pulled by a horse. There was a place for a fire and a smoke stack. They looked like the tar wagons we use for roofing.

I remember constantly having to clamber up the rock sides of the road to pass the German tanks. The German in charge of us was riding in a small car. He would be held up by tanks and then come roaring up behind us honking his horn for us to get out of his way. Finally I decided to hell with it and refused to get out of his way. He got out of his car and aimed his pistol at me. There was a loud click, the gunner on a tank had cocked his machine gun and yelled something in German. The officer put his pistol back in his holster, and returned to his vehicle. The man on the tank had a black hat with a silver skull. The SS saved my life.

I remember taking off my left combat boot. There was a lot of blood due to the back of my heel bleeding. The boots were new and had never been broken in. This bothered me most of the time in prison camp.

I remember as we marched deeper into Germany the terrible plight of their transportation system. Almost all trucks were pulling another to save gas. Many trucks had a boiler rig on the back where wood was heated in a sealed tank. As the wood got hot, it released a gas. This gas was piped to the carburetor to run the motor. When there was no more gas the driver opened the sealed compartment, put fresh wood in and repeated the cycle. The wood he took out was put in the lower section and burned to drive the gas out of the upper compartment. Of course the driver was constantly searching for wood. Sometimes this rig was on a trailer pulled by a truck.

The POW experience is another story.

I Remember 7/28/96

Page last revised 11/28/2006

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