

Don Cooley

106th Infantry Division

Don Cooley was taken prisoner of war at the Battle of the Bulge, a famous amassing of German and American troops along the German-Belgium border in December 1944.

More than one million men, both Germans and Americans, fought in the battle — a greater number than those who fought at Gettysburg during the Civil War. Roughly 19,000 Americans were killed, but Cooley was one of the luckier ones as a private first class in the Army's [106th Infantry Division](#).

"We were in the middle of the bulge and the Germans circled us, had us surrounded," said Cooley, now 81, an Indiana native.

In April the following year, Cooley was liberated by the 104th Infantry Division around the time the Russians and Americans famously met near the Elbe River in the heart of Germany, signaling the unofficial end of the war and German resistance.

But it wasn't until a few weeks later, 60 years ago today, that hundreds of troops in his infantry received official word that Hitler's Nazi regime had fallen.

"We raised hell," said Cooley, barely 21 at the time, who went on to work for IBM for 37 years then retired in Watsonville. "We were celebrating like crazy. After four years, the war was finally over."

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