

HENRY CANN (4) In November 1944 we went to near New York and then to Europe. We went on the Mauritania to England. My sister lived in England. And we were supposed to be on a 6 weeks delay. But because of the bulge we went straight to Leuven.



D-day was June 1944. The bulge was December 1944. We went straight to Belgium.

First we went to Portsmouth, England. That was on the south coast. Then we went across the channel.

In one of those flat bathtubs, transports. Kaiser built them. We all got sick going across the channel. The sailors on the boat said: Hey soldiers, would you like a nice steak.

We went straight to Leuven, outside of the Bulge, a week after we got off the boat. That was unexpected. We didn't have any winter clothes. We were a new outfit. Unproven soldiers. Our boys sat in the foxholes. The Germans threw in grenades. A lot of guys in the infantry got killed.

My job was to get the ammunition and the dynamite to the front. Then I turned around and went back behind the front. My job wasn't difficult compared to the other guys. They had to put the minefields up between the German infantry and the American infantry. Some of those guys had never been in combat. They came right out of training. They made a lot of mistakes. And a lot of them got killed. That was the battle of the Bulge where the Germans almost made it, again.

I used to go out on patrol with our captain. He was young, 25 years old. His name was Leo Walker. He wanted to be a hero. He never shaved. Everybody loved him. He got into a jeep and went on reconnaissance. He came back half frozen. We had to lift him out of the jeep and warm him up, thaw him out, so he became human again.

Sometimes I had to go out on patrol with him. If you came to an infantry station, the guy would ask the password. Cold--Winter. Good-morning, and stuff like that.



But the Germans were coming so close that they changed the password frequently: At first every four hours. Then every 2 hours. One time, I remember the password was wreath--wrapper. I still can't pronounce it. That guy said: Henry, I'm not going out with you tonight. You stay right here. He didn't want to take a chance on me.

We were getting plastered. The Germans were all over the place. I remember the day after Xmas the weather cleared. The Americans had control of the air. But they couldn't fly because the weather was so bad. The Germans had seasoned troops. They knew what they were doing. We didn't. We had green troops. In fact the 106th Infantry was half murdered there. The Germans came along side in American trucks with American uniforms and massacred those guys. Because they were trained in warfare. The American soldiers were accused of taking German prisoners, taking them behind bushes, and shooting them, which was against the Geneva Convention. But the Americans were so mad. And the Germans were in American uniforms, which is also against the Geneva accords Captain said.

America invaded Europe at Normandy France in June 1944. The army fought their way through France and as they approached Germany it seemed as if the war would soon be over. Then the Nazis counter attacked. On a wintery mid-December day in 1944, three powerful German armies plunged into the semi-mountainous, heavily forested Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg. Their goal was to reach the sea, trap four allied armies, and impel a negotiated peace on the Western front.

American soldiers of the 75th Division photographed in the Ardennes during the Battle of the Bulge.

Thinking the Ardennes was the least likely spot for a German offensive; American Staff Commanders chose to keep the line thin, so that the manpower might concentrate on offensives north and south of the Ardennes.

The American line was thinly held by three divisions and a part of a fourth, while the fifth was making a local attack and a sixth was in reserve. Division sectors were more than double the width of normal, defensive fronts.

Even though the German Offensive achieved total surprise, nowhere did the American troops give ground without a fight. Within three days, the determined American stand and the arrival of powerful reinforcements insured that the ambitious German goal was far beyond reach.

In snow and sub-freezing temperatures the Germans fell short of their interim objective - that of reaching the sprawling Meuse River on the fringe of the Ardennes. All the Germans accomplished was to create a Bulge in the American line. In the process they expended irreplaceable men, tanks and material. Four weeks later, after grim fighting, with heavy losses on both the American and German sides, the Bulge ceased to exist.



BATTLE

FACTS• The coldest, snowiest weather “in memory” in the Ardennes Forest on the German/Belgium border. • Over a million men, 500,000 Germans, 600,000 Americans (more than fought at Gettysburg) and 55,000 British.

• 3 German armies, 10 corps, the equivalent of 29 divisions. • 3 American armies, 6 corps, the equivalent

of 31 divisions. • The equivalent of 3 British divisions as well as contingents of Belgian, Canadian and French troops.

- 100,000 German casualties, killed, wounded or captured. • 81,000 American casualties, including 23,554 captured and 19,000 killed.
- 1,400 British casualties 200 killed.
- 800 tanks lost on each side, 1,000 German aircraft. • The Malmedy Massacre, where 86 American soldiers were murdered, was the worst atrocity committed against American troops during the course of the war in Europe.

• My division, the 106th Infantry Division, average age of 22 years, suffered 564 killed in action, 1,246 wounded and 7,001 missing in action at the end of the offensive. Most of these casualties occurred within the first three days of battle, when two of the division’s three regiments was forced to surrender.

• In it's entirety, the “*Battle of the Bulge*,” was the worst battles-in terms of losses - to the American Forces in WWII.

After the battle of the Bulge, our outfit built a bridge over the River Rhine. The Germans fled across the river. They left France but they were still fighting. Only the Riemagen bridge was still standing. Remagen was eleven miles up river from my home of Koenigswinter and the people of my town thought I protected my home town.

We came back from the Bulge into Germany. Dusseldorf was on the west side of the Rhine. We were located in a bank building in Rhinebach, on the East side of the Rhine. The artillery were shooting over our heads into Dusseldorf, getting ready for the assault. We were the engineers. We were building a foot bridge and a vehicle bridge across the River Rhine. We had to put in a boom, upriver, to stop the river. The current was fast and the boom kept the bridge from swaying too much.

We were there for 3 or 4 weeks. Everything around us was burning. Our brick building was shaking all the time. Every night the artillery was shooting over our heads.

Later, we went across the river into Westphalia on the bridge. The Rhine canal ran near Muenster. It separated us from the Germans. We were on one side, they were on the other.

We had trailers with dynamite and TNT. We thought the



Boops of the U.S. Third Army paddle assault boats across the Rhine at St. Goar. In the background a smoke screen settles over the town and riverbank

war was over. We had our trucks lined up in rows along the banks of that canal. We were in houses there. The civilians had fled.

They started bombarding us from across the river.

All my stuff was on a 6 ton truck. We had gas masks, and all the equipment. That stuff was burning. We had 2 rows of gasoline trucks in front. They were full of gasoline and they were burning. They were looking, for

volunteers to pull those trucks out, because the trucks were full of TNT. If a shell hit them the whole town would be destroyed.

We were so scared, the whole company could have been captured by 2 guys. We hid in a cellar. We were so inexperienced in warfare.

There were some fools who grabbed those trucks and drove them out of town into the countryside, where they could explode without doing harm.

CROSSING THE RHINE

That was the last fighting part of it. That's when we moved into Siegen.

In Siegen I found a Nazi flag in the attic. I put it right across the street. I said to the civilians "Go ahead, walk over the damn thing."

They still didn't trust us, even though the Nazis were gone. You should have seen them gingerly going around the flag. They were afraid to step on the Nazi flag.

Some townspeople brought over a fat guy who had been distributing food for the Nazis. I brought him to the young captain. We were staying at a beer place, a restaurant.

I said "Captain, what are we going to do with this guy? He's a real Nazi."



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He was writing something, and he said "Shoot the bastard!"

He was a young guy. He didn't give a damn.

I thought we can't shoot him. The war was over. But we did give him a good scare.

He understood enough English to understand what the captain said. He was sweating and rolling.

So we scared him and let him go.

Our group was in charge of putting back the railroad transportation. I spoke the language. The Captain was in charge. We called in the old Germans who knew how to run the trains, and we got the trains going.

There were a lot of Russian prisoners in Germany. We had a post sticking out of the jeep. It used to be the mount for a machine gun. One day we were driving. We came too close to the curb and we hit a young Russian woman and knocked her down. She wasn't hurt too much, but we took her to the German hospital in Siegen. It was underground.

They were still uppity up.

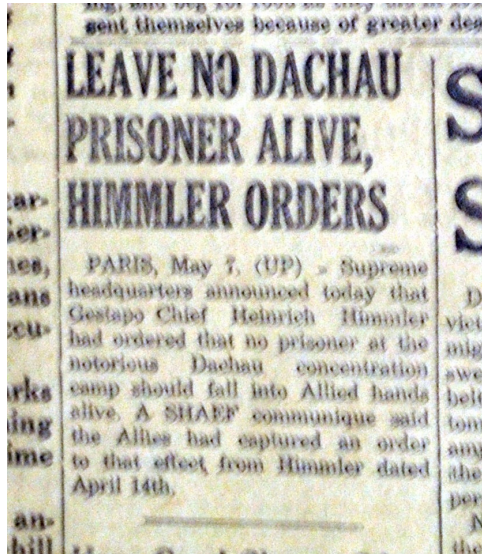
I went in there and said "where's the doctor?"

"There's no doctor."

"I want to see a doctor." I said. "I have a woman here..."

"She's only a Russian."

"I have a woman here and she was hurt. I want her taken care of."



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