

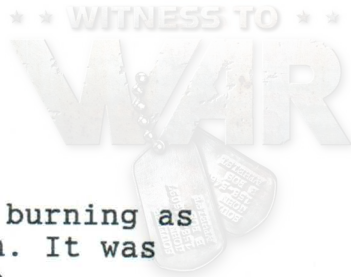


MY MILITARY CAREER

(SOME REMEMBRANCES OF SERVICE IN WORLD WAR II)

by William J. Newman

As recalled in September 1994



## MY GERMAN PRISONER

Back to the front from Felsberg. Many fires were still burning as we drove down into the Saar valley and into Saarlautern. It was obvious some bad things had happened while we were gone.

The troops we replaced told us that the Germans had broken our lines in the Ardenne Forest in Luxembourg. To mask the attack they struck hard along all fronts. That was what we heard and saw when we were back in Felsberg.

They told us that a few days before the attacks began German soldiers infiltrated our positions, sought out empty basements and were instructed to disrupt any movement of Americans commencing at certain time on a certain day. This was the time the main German attack was to break through the Ardennes and push to the English Channel.

It was a desperate, last gasp effort by Hitler to split the Allied forces and hopefully drive us into the sea. Initially they had great success. Only one American division, the 106th held the line through the Ardennes. The 106th had just arrived from the U. S. It was untested and because our high command never expected an attack in that area its line extended about three times what would normally be the coverage of a division.

The German attack spearheaded by a new and by far the best tank on either side, the Tiger tank, blasted right through the 106th. In a matter of hours the division was destroyed.

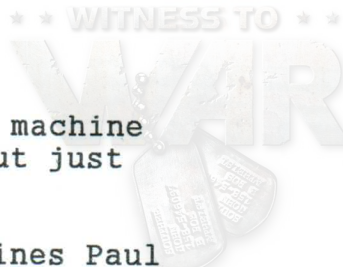
The Germans had chosen a few days before Christmas to launch the offensive. Their weather forecasters expected cloudy, cold weather for an extended period. They needed this to prevent our air force chewing up their initial advance. They got the weather they needed.

But for the fact that the 101st Paratroop Division was in reserve near the Ardennes, the Germans might have prolonged the war. The 101st was rushed into the broken line and held the key road center, Bastogne, until other reinforcements could contain the German advance.

It was touch and go for a couple of weeks. The 101st took an awful pounding but they held. Then the sun came out and our air force started to chew up the German supply lines. Our reinforcements were first able to contain the breakthrough, then by the end of January 1945 gradually push the Germans back into Germany. And so ended the Battle of the Bulge.

The Germans had used up their last resources. Although we took many more casualties we never again felt the fierce resistance that the enemy had previously given.

The troops who replaced us took a lot of punishment in the few days we were in Felsberg. They were now taken off the line for replacements and rest. We resumed our positions pretty much as we



had left them. The artillery duels continued. Sporadic machine gun fire swept the streets. Our telephone lines were cut just about every night. It was business as usual.

On one of our early morning running of cut telephone lines Paul Stoicheff and I located a broken line in the middle of a deserted street. We half crawled and half crouched our way to the break to start the repair.

The procedure was for one man to splice while the other stood over him as a lookout. Since we were in the middle of the street totally exposed to enemy fire, we knelt down and each of us took one of the two wires that made a pair and started to splice them. We got the job done in a minute or less.

As I started to get up I saw a pair of shoes and legs right behind me. Jumping up I looked up at the face and rifle of a big, 6 and a half foot German soldier. Both Stoicheff and I pointed our carbines at him.

He surprised us by dropping his rifle and putting his hands in the air. I saw 3 fingers missing on one of his hands and I noted that he seemed ancient, 35 or so, and pretty bedraggled.

We picked up his rifle, pointed him in the direction of company headquarters and with weak knees we marched him past a number of infantrymen who were surprised to see a couple of artillerymen haul in a prisoner.

We got a lot of pats on the backs at company headquarters as we turned our prisoner over for interrogation

Unfortunately our hero status was short-lived. The interrogator told everyone how the capture came about. He said the German soldier told him he had been sent into our lines as part of the plan to disrupt us during the Battle of the Bulge. The German said he had been in the war from its start, had been in Russia and escaped when Stalingrad had been surrounded by the Russian army. He said that was where he lost his fingers.

He had enough of the war. When he got the chance to hide in a basement in our lines he decided he would look for a chance to surrender to the Americans. When he saw Stoicheff and I both bending over the broken wire, he decided we were harmless. He was certain he could sneak up on us and surrender to us before we had a chance to shoot him.

When our infantry buddies heard the real story, Paul and I went from instant heroes to instant dodos.

Glory is such a fleeting thing.