

The Bulge in the Ardennes and the Ruhr Valley

After I came back from the field hospital, they put us on a march up through the Ruhr Valley of Germany. It was really tough. We went from town to town up through the valley, fighting and fighting. It was winter now, and we had to walk and walk through the snow. We would walk in our sleep. You could tell when your feet got off the path. You would wake up. Then they would stop and give us a break. I would lay in the snow and talk to God, saying “Thank you Lord for this opportunity of rest.” They would give us fifteen or twenty minutes. We were in the Ardennes Forest for about two or three weeks, or longer. I hear that this battle lasted six weeks.

Every time one man got wounded we would get a new replacement. They would put the replacement together with an experienced soldier, so I would always get a replacement. We shared a fox hole. We took turns guarding. I would stand guard while he slept, then he would guard while I slept at night. One time a guy said to me, “What do I do?” I said, “Well, look and listen and if you hear something wake me up.” He said, “Well, I don’t see anybody, all I see is shadows.” I said, “Well, you look for the shadow that moves.” Just young kids, full of vinegar. Then we would sleep. It was so cold some of the guys froze to death. They didn’t have enough covers. I would take the jackets off the dead Germans. Boy, they were good overcoats. I got two. I would lay one coat down in the fox hole as a shelter half, to protect me from moisture in the ground. On top of the coat I would lay my blanket, lay down on that and pull the other end of my blanket over me. Then I would cover myself with the second coat. And boy was that warm. That’s the way I would stay in my hole. One guy said to me, “If the Germans ever catch you with one of their coats they will sure as hell shoot you.” I said, “They will have to catch me first.” It was so cold I saw guys carried away looking like ice cubes. It was bad, cold. The Germans shot their big 88 guns at the trees to cause tree bursts in the forest. The strikes would shatter the branches into sticks and splinters falling like knives, wooden shrapnel. That was as dangerous as the bombs. It’s hard to tell you what it was like.

One very important thing was to keep my feet dry. I would rotate my socks. I had about three pair. I would keep two pairs of wet socks under my shirt close to

my body so they would dry from my body heat. I rotated them. I would stick the wet pair of socks under the right side of my shirt and pull a drier pair out of my left side. I wore the dry pair until my feet got cold and wet, then I would change my socks again. The Germans had better boots than we did. They had better everything. Warmer jackets too. One time my feet got so cold I couldn't walk anymore. The Germans were advancing through the Ardennes and we were retreating. The guys were running and moving equipment out of there. My feet got so cold I could hardly run and couldn't keep up with the troops. So I hid under a broken down tank. The guys piled up snow around it. At least I was out of the cold wind. I stayed there the rest of that day and night rubbing my feet. I could hear the Germans marching by. Very late the next day Tony came and got me. And I don't think I would be alive if he had not come back to get me.

After the Bulge we came to the Rhein River in the Ruhr valley. We stayed in a beautiful place along the Rhein River. There was a highway with grass on both sides along the river. We would go fishing in the Rhein River. Throw in a grenade and watch the fish float to the top of the water. Then scoop them up with our helmets. We took turns using the binoculars to survey across the river to see what we could see. There were no bridges, and I thought, "My God, if we have to cross this like we did the Saar River, it's going to be really bad." The house we stayed in was so beautiful with a big parlor. There was a grand piano in the parlor and a lady would come and play music on it. Every evening she would come out of her room and play a soft song. Every song was different. Bennett came by and told her to get out of here. He was tough. Tough as nails. He pulled a pin out of a grenade, opened the lid of that piano and dropped the grenade right inside the piano. And, "ka-boom," that was the end of that piano. He said, "That damn woman will send a message. She's not going to do that here." She could be playing certain songs to send messages. Those who hear it will know what it means. Bennett was tough and experienced. That guy went through Africa, Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy and through France with us. I hear told that he had plates in his head from being wounded.

Another time we were in a battle and I was sleeping on the floor. Bennett came by and kicked me and said, "You go upstairs and watch through the window to guard the other squad in the house across the street." I was looking out the window of an "L" shaped building which had two rooms. I was watching out the

window and a kid came by to peek in the window where the other squad was staying. I shot close to him to try to scare him, I didn't hit him. Then he went away, but he kept coming back. I shot at him three times to warn him. But he kept coming back. Bennett came in and said "Who are you shooting at?" I won't tell you his exact words. I said, "That kid down there keeps coming over to bother that squad." So Bennett sat there and waited for him. Sure enough, the kid came back again to look in the window, leaning against the wall. Bennett shot him right in the head. Bennett said, "That damn kid will throw a grenade in the window and kill the whole squad."

In this same window where I was on guard, another German stuck his gun out the other window around the corner of the "L" shaped building where we were staying. He was in the next room. I turned my gun around and pointed right at his face. It was that close. I said, "Kommen Sie hier." He slid his gun out on the roof and got rid of it. I said, "Kommen Sie hier." He said, "I come in the back." I said, "No, you come here." He didn't want to crawl out his window towards me because he was afraid another American might shoot at him. But he did. I took him downstairs and gave him to the guys and they took him prisoner.