

Battle Experience:

I was drafted immediately after graduating from High School, and was always teased for being the youngest in my outfit. I received almost 16 weeks of basic training at Fort Blanning, Florida. While in training, I met Alfred J. Hoffman from Charlotte, N. C. and we became good friends. After basic training, our outfit was sent overseas so fast that we never were issued any winter clothing.

We crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Mary ship, and had to shut down the engines several times because German Subs got too close. We landed in Northampton, England, then crossed the English Channel by boat to Larve, France. We were put on a train in a boxcar we called "40 & 8", meaning the boxcar would hold 40 men or 8 horses. It took us seven days to cross France to Luxemburg. We had to take turns sitting down on the floor of the boxcar and sleep anyway that we could.

It started snowing when we were halfway across France and was extremely cold. The weather was so bad the American planes could not fly over and drop ammunition and supplies to the 101st Airborne troops who had been cut off near Bastogne. Our outfit was being sent in to rescue them.

We were taken to the front lines on a kitchen truck (still dressed in our Florida clothes) and dropped off behind a huge manure pile beside of a destroyed home. (Germans use manure to heat their homes). The snow was three feet deep, and it snowed each day on the battlefield.

We were there less than an hour when I saw my friend take a direct hit and was blown to pieces. I was also wounded in the leg at this time. I fired shots into the area where the attack came from, but I was never forced to shoot anyone in a "face to face combat". However, survival meant "kill or be killed", and that was a horrible lesson.

Finally the firing stopped and I looked around and could not see another living soul. I decided to crawl to the hedgerow surrounding this open field. Little did I know there were German SS Troops on the other side of the hedgerow. They were considered the toughest German soldiers-- all hand picked, same size, blue eyes, blond hair, and specially trained. I found a foxhole and crawled in, putting branches over the top which caught the snow and gave me some protection. At night you could hear the Germans talking as they walked near the foxhole.

I would have been an easy target in the snow if I had left the foxhole, so this was my home for 12 or more days. I ate $\frac{1}{2}$ of a D-bar each day and snow for water. About the 10th day, an American Medic soldier fell into the foxhole with me. He had a walkie-talkie, some aspirins, but no food. I shared my last D-bars with him. After our food gave out, we decided we had to try to find some more Americans. As soon as we exposed ourselves in the snow, the Germans who were hiding up in the trees started firing at us. Two other Medics who were in a foxhole nearby joined us for about 200 yards, but the firing was so intense they decided we might have a better chance if we split up again. The Medic and I crawled along a ditch in the snow until we reached a safe distance, then he helped me walk.

We wandered for several days before we found some more Americans in a house that had been destroyed except for one room. They had some D-bars, a few supplies, and a Jeep. One of them drove me to a Field Hospital

in the Jeep. The driver seemed to be lost part of the time and it took several more days. The Medic and I parted here and I realized that I did not even learn his name.

At the Field Hospital they put me in a rubber suit packed with ice to keep me from thawing out too fast. I had severe frostbite and my toes, ears, nose and fingers had cracked open. I had a high fever and gangrene had set-in in my leg. I only weighed 87 pounds.

Then I was taken by Jeep to an Evacuation Hospital near Paris, France where the doctors treated me with sulphur drugs. From there, I was flown to a hospital in England where I stayed for nine months.

With high fever, I cannot be sure of the time lapse between hospitals because I was in and out of consciousness, but I do know it was 21 days before I received any medical treatment after I was wounded. After thawing out, I sat on the bed and combed my hair and it all fell out. That was a shock, and I was very self conscious about it when I came back home.

The doctor came in on Friday and told me they needed to amputate my leg. Amputation was the standard treatment for gangrene back then, and to lie in bed and listen to that saw was almost unbearable. I asked the doctor to please wait until Monday and if my leg was no better, I would sign the papers for permission to amputate then. With a lot of prayers and the new drug, Pennicilin, my leg was better on Monday and was saved. The climate is so humid in England that wounds did not heal fast. No one soldier received much time during psychological treatment because there were so many who needed help.

After a long recovery, I was released from the hospital. Being the only survivor of my outfit, the Army did not know where to place me. On my records, they saw that I had driven a school bus in high school, so they assigned me to Truck Detail. I hauled Troops and supplies through France and Germany until I was discharged.

Time never let me forget that I had fought in one of the toughest battles during World War II, "The Battle of the Bulge".

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