

R/26/00

PX (870) 492-0754

Aug. 22, 2000

Dear Mr. Martin,

Enclosed please find three
 memoirs, which, I have put into
 reasonable shape the Album you
 have so graciously undertaken to compile.
 It should be of greater interest to all
 our comrades and their families.

As we WWII veterans grow
 fewer in number year by year, this
 should be of interest to the historians, particularly
 to those who have written about GI's and
 WWII. I have a few more memories, some
 a bit amusing. See you in Little Rock,

Sincerely,
 Jack Ceflon

More WWII

I was assigned to E CO of the 405 Regiment, 103rd Infantry Division and went up on line December 1, 1944. We were trucked in to our combat units. My first encounter with combat was the noise of artillery coming through the town of St. Disibode that had very recently been liberated by the 103rd. They drove through a large plaza with ~~many~~ ^{many} ~~men~~ ^{men} ~~being~~ ^{being} held down on chairs were screaming as their ~~heads~~ ^{heads} were being ~~shaved~~ ^{shaved}, presumably for collaborating with the Germans during the occupation. Then we found our unit, E CO, and were up on ~~line~~.

As a new replacement, ^{a Pfc} I found it an exciting yet bewildering experience. It was loud, the artillery shells landing in massive numbers. Were they theirs or were they ours? Nevertheless, none struck close to our position. It must have been American fire shelling Selestat in preparation for the infantry assault.

Our "jump off" entailed crossing a stream. A platoon scout assured us it was ankle deep. Apparently he hadn't crossed over to the other side, because suddenly we were waist-high in water, scrambling our way out on the other shore. We were soaking waist-down. Albeit it was December 1st, the day was sunny and warm.

We ran down the hill and were now in battle on the streets of Selestat. David ^{of the 3rd} and I took turns. I covered his crossing the street, he'd cover me. We were in a city. No foxholes to dig.

On or about December 10th, I was promoted to PFC, a rank I held until I was mustered out in November, 1945. We were now north of Strassburg, the capital of Alsace. I had a growing concern because at home, my wife was due to deliver our second child. Whenever we drew ^{leave} and I could get to the chaplain, I made inquiry as to when the new child had been born.

It must have been around Christmas and we were lodged in a farm. We chatted with the farmer's with some frequency. (My German was fluent.) She said that she noted my visits to the chaplain and said that because I was such a good Catholic and was engaged in such a dangerous task, she had something to give me and presented me with a medallion of a saint. She said it would bring me good luck. She said they had a sick sow, so her husband went to the Cathedral in Strassbourg, prayed for the pig's recovery, and brought the saint's medallion. The sow recovered. The medallion was blessed and was given to me. If it did it for the pig, why not for me.

Of course I didn't tell her that I was Jewish, that my new baby was due any day and that it was my concern. My son, Danny, was born on ~~the~~ ^{the} 3rd. I got word shortly thereafter. Now I had to survive the war and return home to see my son.

We stayed in an apartment house, apparently belonging to a highly ranked German officer. The signs bespoke a hasty retreat, food left around, equipment and a partially stocked liquor closet. So

we liberated the liquor. As the newest member of the squad, I had to take last choice, a lovely bottle ^{containing} a few ounces of Benedictine liqueur, a delicious after ^{drink} drink that pleased me immensely.

A few days later, we were relieved by the 36th Division and started up north. After a brief German mortar barrage, we were on our way.

Somewhere in my reading on WWII--it must have been some military history of the war--it was stated that when the Germans knew that they lost the Battle of the Bulge, they attempt yet another surprise offensive to the South. One of these days I'm going to look into it. If that is the case, that was our experience when we had to make a run for it from our forward position on Jan. 19th and that was the nature of the German action which overran Kindweiler and captured the ~~platoon~~ *3rd* Platoon.

Those of us in "E" Co. who "ran" that Saturday night over those icy roads will never forget that night. We were stuck out there about 25 miles in front of our lines with the Germans on three sides of us--in front, on our right, and on our left. The 409th was out front with the 2nd Battalion out front in the 409th--"E" Co. in the forward Battalion position, and my Platoon (2nd) in the Point. Four of us had made a dugout (Shattuck and me--I can't remember the other two guys) with the rest of the Platoon placed behind us. So I believed I had made the longest trek back to our lines. We were told to reassemble at the village a few km behind our line in the evening. All afternoon I was waiting for some outfit to relieve us, but they never appeared and we abandoned our forward position.

I couldn't keep up in that retreat and didn't get back to "E" Co. until the Tuesday (22nd?). The 2nd Platoon was in Kindweiler then and we relieved them. Before we went up to Kindweiler, we got our mail, beer ration, and packages. A group of us gathered in a dugout to drink our beer and live it up a bit. Bob Musser was teaching us the Muscatine H.S. Flight Song.

We passed the 2nd Platoon headed back to Co. lines as we (3rd Platoon) took over in Kindweiler. There was the usual banter between our platoons as we passed, and the usual warning to us, "you'll be sorry." In a more serious vein we were told that there were peculiar noises, the Krauts were up to something.

I believe our three squads were holed up in three different houses in the village. Platoon HQs (Lt. Ellison, Sgt. Barnes and Platoon runners were with us--our position).

There were noises coming from the German positions--tanks moving up?, other equipment, trucks. A German soldier was laying telephone lines right up to our HQs. He was SS and we took him prisoner. He was an arrogant S.O.B.

We were doing our "2 on, 4 off". I drew the 2-4 am guard, and the noise from the German position was clearly audible. The sounds, the feel that something was brewing I found unnerving. Usually when I came in from guard, I headed for my sleeping place and was asleep before my head hit the "pillow". But, that night I couldn't sleep. It was scary. The sounds weren't right. Wasn't that being battlewise? I read, wrote a letter. At 5 am the guard (I can't remember who it was) came running in to say we were under attack and to get out and defend our position.

I was with Jack Raines. We put on our "coats," bandoliers, picked up our grenades, helmets, and weapons. As I got out the door, about 3 or 4 steps above yard level, the tracers were all around us. Some of us returned fire in the direction of the incoming fire. We couldn't see any targets.

Someone said that Ellison and Barnes were drunk and couldn't be roused. I later learned from Barnes that that was not true. Barnes told me that Lt. Ellison hated the 2 on, 4 off so he and Barnes would take alternate 24 hour-shifts. Then Ellison would sleep deeply. Barnes couldn't wake Ellison that morning so they were both captured in the HQ house.

The Germans came down the main street of Kindweiler, on our left, and cut us off from our lines. I could see some Germans on the fields to our right in white Parkas. I was with Rainey and yelled to him not to let them get behind us and proceeded to climb backyard fences to keep the Germans in front of me. Rainey wasn't with me. Perhaps he didn't even hear my warning.

I didn't quite go to the end of the village. It was still dark so I could cross the road undetected. There was a line of trees, spaced about 25 yds. apart running down the hill to the creek and our position. I stood beside a tree watching two Germans standing guard at the edge of Kindweiler. They were about 50 yards away and I could have shot them, and I don't know how long I stood there trying to decide whether to shoot or to leave. My main concern was that if I got them, the Germans might take it out on our guys who were surely captives by then. There were no sounds of firing. I unlatched my rifle--I can't tell you how many times. In the end, it was dawning and I decided against shooting and dashed from tree to tree back to our position.

When I got back, I found our CPL in hysterics with our medic trying to calm him. Capt. Stevenson wanted to know why I didn't stay and fight. (We had a difficult relationship after he'd sent our platoon into a trap in Dec. That's another story.)

Later, when I saw Andy Barnes at the 103rd reunion in 1976, he said they found the Platoon roster and couldn't account for me. They thought I might have been shot. Ellison and Barnes were separated from the enlisted men and Barnes never saw any of the other captives. Rainey called my wife on his return to the States. They were freed in late April. Mainly he wanted to know if I had survived Kindweiler and beyond.

I would never permit myself to become a POW under the Germans. As a Jew--it was on my dog tag--I saw all kinds of possibility that the Germans would kill me as they were killing the Jews of Europe. That was a powerful motivation for my escaping Kindweiler.

I have never written out this account nor recited it in this detail before. Mainly, this may be a boring incident for one reading it. Also, it was a very pain

By Lou Sefkin
PFC (RET)
For each reunion we hope to have someone
relate an experience from the big one. POW's
who have attended a reunion are August Sipes,
Jack Rainey and Robert Musser.

1901 Mohawk
Fort Collins, CO 80525
August 20, 2000

Nina Rosenblum and William Miles, authors
Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, Publ.
111 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10023

Dear Ms Rosenblum and Mr. Miles:

I am a veteran of "E" CO, 2nd Battalion, 409th Infantry Regiment which you allude to in The Liberators (pp.208ff). I avidly read your book about the 761st Tank Battalion and have also seen the video tape about them.

You have written a great book about an exceptionally good fighting outfit. The theme of segregation and abuse of African-American soldiers needed airing. I'd like to believe that many white soldiers were also aggravated by racism in World War II. It bothered me to hear white GIs boast about beating up blacks - always outnumbering the African-Americans they attacked. It made me conscious of outspoken bigotry. I'll return to that theme below, but let me tell you about my experience with the 761st and the break through of the Siegfried Line.

"E" Company twice fought alongside the 761st. I can't remember the date or the place of our first occasion. It would have been in northern Alsace, perhaps driving the Germans out of Selz. My Company came in behind the 761st. They battered the Germans so thoroughly that it became an easy, casualty-free occupation of the town for us.

You write about the 761st fighting with the Second Battalion (pp. 208ff.) in breaking through the Siegfrieds to reach Klingenstein. My recollection of that operation, March 24-25, is vivid to this day. I watched the bombardment and shelling of a fortified village. Then we got word that we would be deployed on top of tanks for a breakthrough to Klingenstein. For me the important information was that "E" would be on the point and that within the Company, my platoon and my squad would be in the lead. Our Company had already suffered heavy casualties. In my squad, I was the only remaining soldier from the squad I had joined, and from our platoon only two or three of us had not yet been casualties. Thus, I wound up sitting on the lead tank.

Perched on top of a tank was a daunting prospect. However when I saw that it was the 761st, my spirits soared because they were such an outstanding outfit. We started our action in the evening. The tanks were shooting up everything in sight, nothing coming in against us. At one point, after midnight, we overran a retreating German Division. The 761st ran right through them. Men, equipment, even horses were scattered all over the place. (I do recall reading a report of that operation in either Time or Newsweek). On we drove into Klingenstein.

I may have been the only casualty of that operation, but I was not wounded. I had contracted hepatitis, had been unable to eat much of anything for a week, but because I was "battle-wise" and needed, I hadn't been evacuated. In Klingenstein which we reached at dawn, I remember some

tankers firing at a German emplacement on a hill overlooking the town. I proposed going up the hill to clean them out. Evidently, at that point I collapsed, and it was afternoon when they came for me and evacuated me to a hospital.

That "E" Company soldiers were riding on top of the tanks of the 761st was not noted in your account of the drive on Klingenstein, but it is part of the story you allude to on the breakthrough.

One impact of that experience is that it put to rest, particularly for us in the End Battalion, the canard that the African-American troops couldn't fight. The video tape claims that the 761st were the best tankers in the ETO. I don't have a personal experience which could verify the truth of the assertion, but they were awfully good. I do believe that they saved my life in a hazardous situation. Denying the 761st the highest commendation is a scandal.

It is also worth noting that after the war, there were many vets who favored an end to segregation in the armed forces. When I returned to civilian life in Los Angeles, I joined the American Legion, and we WWII vets tried to desegregate our American Legion post. We were a few votes short and that effort failed. However, many of us then abandoned the Legion and formed a post of the American Veterans Committee (AVC). That organization - "We are citizen's first, and veterans second" - included African Americans and also women.

In this respect, the struggles of the 761st gained success on both fronts, in the ETO in the struggle against the Nazis and for first-class citizenship for African American servicemen.

Sincerely yours,

J. Leo Defkin, formerly PFC, "E" Co, 409th Regt., 103rd Infantry Div.