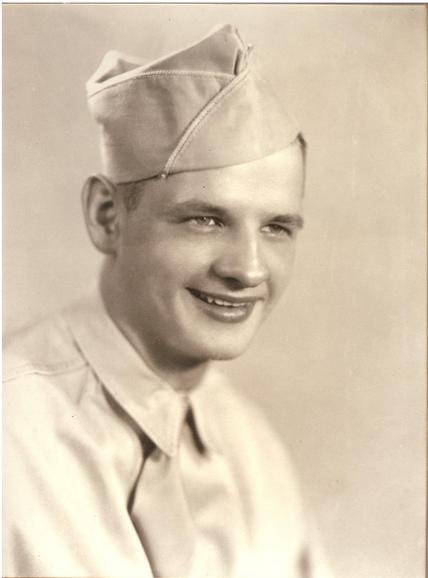




Pvt. Charles M. Sallman

Company A, 1st Battalion, 409th Infantry, 103d Infantry Division

By his widow, Eleanor P. Sallman



It was suggested that I write about my husband's World War II and later life experiences to be included with other "stories" of 103d veterans. I felt that his story was no different than that of thousands of other young men who enlisted or were drafted right out of high school. However; I have decided that it might help other veterans or their families who are going through similar experiences to realize they are not alone. The last two years of his life were fraught with paranoia due to reliving some of his harrowing wartime experiences. He was officially diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to these events. This condition was made even worse by dementia.

Charles had enlisted on September 3, 1943 upon graduation from Lane Technical High School in Chicago, Illinois, and was placed in active service on October 20, 1943 at Fort Custer, Michigan. He was later sent for advanced infantry training at the U.S. Armed Forces School at Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi. Because the Army was in such need of riflemen replacements, this training was cut to three months for him. He and six other men were transferred to Camp Howze, Texas and assigned to the 103d Infantry Division on September 1, 1944. He was a rifleman in Company A, 1st Battalion, 409th Infantry when the division departed the U.S. for Europe October 6, 1944 on the *USS Monticello*.

I did not meet Charles until the year after he graduated from Purdue University in Mechanical Engineering following his medical discharge from the Army. We married two years later. He talked very little about the war (which I have learned was common for World War II veterans) and I didn't question him after his reaction early in our marriage when I thoughtlessly asked him if he had killed any Germans. By his reaction to the question, I realized that he had and it bothered him that he did. Occasionally, he would tell some things. He told about the long, cold, night march out of Marseille. They were so tired and sleepy that they had to put a hand on the shoulder of the man in front as they marched along. I learned that he was a company runner. He told about being behind enemy lines hiding in the woods.

He had also told family members that he was a jeep driver with 1st Sergeant William Hollis of D Company in a re-supply convoy to Steige on November 26, 1944. The

Germans attacked the convoy from both ends, but the Americans were able to fight their way through and routed the Germans. Hollis received a Silver Star for his actions that day. Another time Charles told of evacuating a group of nuns.

An event he experienced which I believe played a big part in his later paranoia was related to the battle of Sélestat. As I remember him telling me, he had delivered a message to Company B. Approximately fifteen minutes after returning across the bridge from town, the Germans blew up the bridge. The bridge was the only escape route for the Company B and D men in the Sélestat houses. So the destruction of the bridge at the beginning of the firefight left the Company B and D men trapped on the wrong side of the bridge. From my recent readings, I learned that German tanks shelled the houses that the men were in and that most of the men in Company B were captured in the German tank-led attack.

On December 14, 1944, he was shot by a sniper near Cleebourg, France and was sent to England for recovery. He returned to his unit on March 6, 1945, just before the 1st Battalion went back on line for the new offensive on March 17th into Germany. He was wounded a second time when he stepped on a land mine on March 19th near Climbach, France. This resulted in his medical discharge. His discharge shows he received a Purple Heart with Oak Leaf Cluster, Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge, Rhineland Campaign, Central Europe Campaign, Ardennes-Alsace Campaign, European Theater Ribbon with two Battle Stars, and a Good Conduct Medal.

Charles seemed to be repressing his horrible memories very well for most of our married life. He was usually very happy for he loved his family and we all adored him. He greatly enjoyed having our grandchildren visit us. He was also passionate about his work and enjoyed the other engineers in his group, especially his wonderful boss. Eight years into our marriage, we bought thirty acres of land outside of Valparaiso, Indiana and he commuted to Chicago by train. We enjoyed "playing farmers" during weekends. We were close enough to Chicago that we took our children there often to museums and such. I believe it was this very busy life that enabled him to suppress the terrible memories until after retirement and when he could no longer do everything that he had been capable of previously. It was then that he started talking a little more about the war and we could sense his feelings.

One time he was talking to one of our sons and a friend and showed them a place in the book *The 409th Infantry in World War II* that described events he had been involved in. They hoped he would begin talking more about the war. At a later date, that son was traveling with us when something happened to which Charles overreacted. He pulled into a gas station, but just couldn't drop the issue. Our son said, "Dad, you need to talk to a professional because you may have issues with the war." He vehemently snapped back, "Of course, I have issues with the war. They barely gave us training and then sent us off to combat." (I have seen this sentiment expressed in other 103d veterans' stories or that the training they received did not prepare them for the type of action they experienced.) We realized there was a great deal more conflict within him that he did not talk about. He also began telling our son-in-law about his experiences. Charles' strongest wish to him was that no young person should ever have to go through the things he went through. He said he clearly understood there were times it was necessary, but that didn't mean he had to like it. He was a religious man and he deeply regretted having taken human life. He had come to grips with the understanding of the necessity of his being there and doing the things he did by trying not to think of them.

During his last two years, I could usually trace his fears back to the experiences described above. For example, he was often insistent that we get into the woods around our house or that our house was going to be blown up. He would be frantic that our little dog be released so that she could escape into the woods with us. He was frequently looking out a window, checking for something, but could not tell us what he feared. Near the very end, he was worried that he was not a good man—probably from having to kill another human being. I hope I was able to convince him otherwise. He had never wanted to go back to France, but he was proud of his service with the 103d. He died on May 25, 2010—one month before our 56th wedding anniversary. We all miss him very much.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Robert French for all the materials he has sent me and the encouragement he has given me in my quest to learn of Charles' experiences during WW II.

I also owe Larry Wayne thanks for providing me with the interpretations of the morning reports concerning Charles.

