

1945

The 106th: The Story of the 106th Infantry Division

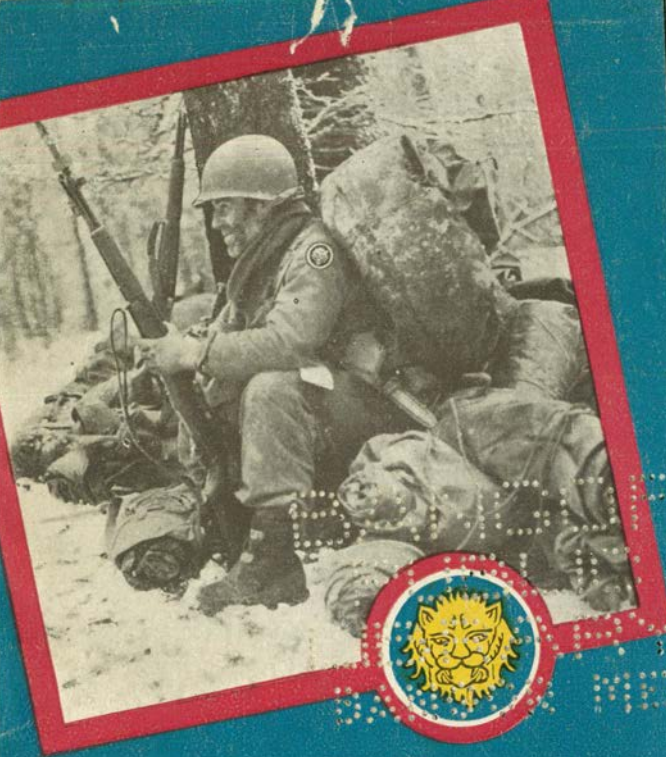
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the 106th

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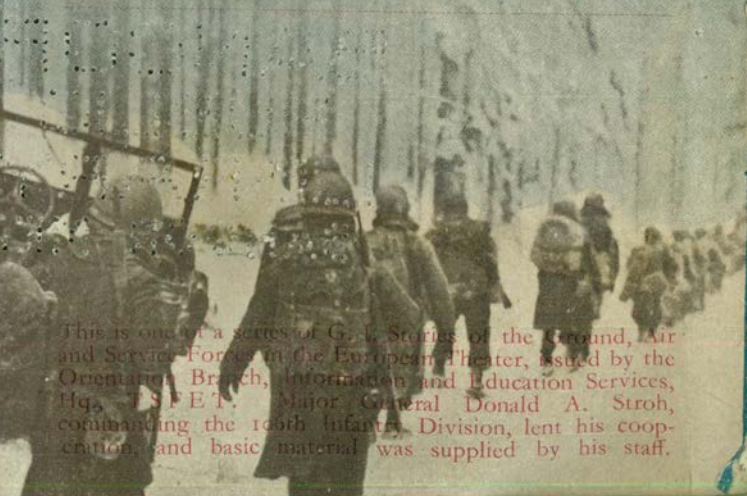
Date Enlisted _____

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Citations _____



This is one of a series of G. I. Stories of the Ground, Air and Service Forces in the European Theater, issued by the Orientation Branch, Information and Education Services, Hq., TSFET. Major General Donald A. Stroh, commanding the 106th Infantry Division, lent his cooperation, and basic material was supplied by his staff.

When the history of the Ardennes fighting has been written, it will be recorded as one of the great strategic Allied successes of the war in Europe. Tactically, for the 106th and the other American divisions involved, it was a bitter and costly fight. But it becomes increasingly clear that the Germans expended in that last futile effort those last reserves of men and materiel which they needed so badly a few months later. The losses and sacrifices of the 106th Infantry Division paid great dividends in eventual victory.



These pages are dedicated to those gallant men who refused to quit in the darkest hour of the Allied invasion, and whose fortitude and heroism turned the tide toward overwhelming victory.

Donald A. Stroh

Major General, Commanding

THE STORY OF THE **106th** INFANTRY DIVISION

DEC. 16, 1944: Springing from the bleak vastness of the Schnee Eifel with the speed of a coiled snake, Field Marshal von Rundstedt's desperate but mighty counter-offensive struck toward Belgium and the Ardennes. Carefully hoarded Panther and Tiger tanks, followed by crack, battle-tested infantry, launched the last-chance gamble aimed at shattering the taut lines of the US First Army, seizing the



cities of Liege and Antwerp and slashing through the Allied forces to the sea.

The full force of this massive attack was thrown against the new, untried 106th Infantry Division which had gone into the front lines for the first time only five days previous. Two regiments, the 422nd and 423rd, with the 589th and 590th FA Bns., were cut off and surrounded by the sheer weight and power of the concentrated German hammer blows. The 424th Regt. was driven back. The 106th Recon Troop, 331st Medical Bn., and 81st Engr. Combat Bn. suffered heavy casualties.

But, despite the vulnerable 27-mile front which the division had to defend, despite inadequate reserves, supplies and lack of air support, the valiant men of the Lion Division took a tremendous toll of enemy shock troops, wrote a story in blood and courage to rank with the Alamo, Château-Thierry, Pearl Harbor and Bataan. They never quit. Said Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery:

The American soldiers of the... 106th Infantry Division stuck it out and put up a fine performance. By jove, they stuck it out, those chaps.

At St. Vith, first objective of the German thrust, the 106th held on grimly at a time when every hour of resistance was vital to the Allied cause. The 106th doughs fought against superior forces, with pulverizing artillery battering them from all sides; it was men against tanks, guts against steel. Their heroism gained precious time for other units to regroup and strike back. In one of the bloodiest battles of the war, the 106th showed the Germans and the world how American soldiers could fight—and die.

When the terrific German onslaught was launched the 106th had only been on the Continent 10 days. The men had made a three-day road march from Limésy, France, to St. Vith, Belgium, in rain, cold and snow. In the five days they had been in the line there had been little rest.

They landed at Le Havre from England, Dec. 6. Next day, in the dim half-light of dawn, troops piled into open trucks while a cold, drizzling rain fell. Some of the men laughed and made cracks about "Sunny France." Others cursed the rain, the cold, the fate that had sent them to battle-scarred Europe. Still others said nothing.

In the clump of trees off to one side of the road stood what once had been a pretentious country chateau. It was decayed and rotten now. Bomb-cratered ground and the shell of a fire-gutted house gave evidence of what had passed. In a field across the road lay broken remains of an Allied bomber. It

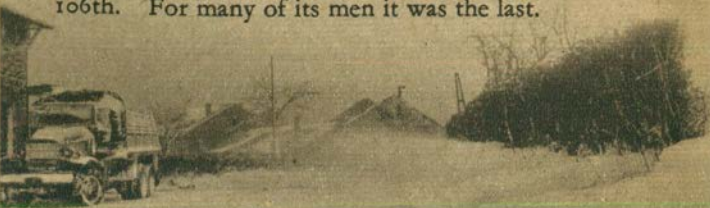
looked alone and dead; there was the feeling that someone ought to bury it. The scene was one of dreary foreboding.

Trucks roared over pitted, rough roads toward St. Vith, through towns and battered remnants of villages; past burned skeletons of tanks and trucks in roadside ditches, around battlefields of World War I. People came out to smile, wave and make the V sign with their fingers. The men smiled back and made the V sign, too.

As the long convoy wound through the mountains of eastern Belgium and Luxembourg, men saw the snow-covered evergreens and thought of Christmas, only a short time off. Then they stopped thinking about that because they remembered where they were and why they had come.

Arriving at St. Vith the night of Dec. 10, the division went into the line the next day. It relieved the veteran 2nd Inf. Div. in the Schnee Eifel, a wooded, snow-covered ridge just northeast of Luxembourg.

This was a quiet sector along the Belgium-Germany frontier. For 10 weeks there had been only light patrol activity and the sector was assigned to the 106th so it could gain experience. The baptism of fire that was to come was the first action for the 106th. For many of its men it was the last.



PANZERS *Strike* —

106TH STICKS IT OUT !

ASSIGNED to VIII Corps, the 106th took up positions in a slightly bulging arc along a forest-crowned ridge of the Schnee Eifel approximately 12 miles east of St. Vith.

The northern flank was held by the 14th Cav. Gp., attached to the 106th. Next, in the easternmost part of the curve, the 422nd held the line. To the 422nd's right, swinging slightly to the southwest, was the 423rd and almost directly south was the 424th. Beyond the 424th, on the division's southern flank was the 28th Inf. Div. St. Vith was 106th HQ and the rear echelon was in Vielsalm, about 12 miles due west.

The little road center of St. Vith had seen war before. It was through St. Vith that the Nazi panzers rolled to Sedan in 1940; German infantry marched through it in 1914. But it never had figured as a battleground such as it was to become in this fateful December of 1944.

During the night of Dec. 15, front line units of the 106th noticed increased activity in the German positions. At 0540 the enemy began to lay down a thunderous artillery barrage.

At first, fire was directed mainly against the northern flank sector of the 14th. Slowly the barrage crept

southward, smashing strongpoints along the whole division front. Treetops snapped like toothpicks under murderous shell bursts. Doughs burrowed into their foxholes and fortifications, waited tensely for the attack which would follow.

The darkness was filled with bursts from medium and heavy field pieces plus railway artillery which had been shoved secretly into position. The explosions were deafening and grew into a terrifying hell of noise when Nazis started using their nebelwerfer "Screaming Meemies."

Full weight of the barrage was brought to bear on the 589th FA Bn., supporting the 422nd. Hundreds of rounds blasted their positions in 35 minutes.

At 0700 the barrage lifted in the forward areas, although St. Vith remained under fire. Now came the attack. Waves of Volksgrenadiers, spearheaded by panzer units, smashed against the division's lines in a desperate try for a decisive, early breakthrough. They were stopped. A second attack was thrown against the division. Again, 106th doughs held. Nazis threw in wave after wave of fresh troops, replacing their losses. There were no replacements for the 106th.

Lionmen settled to their grim business, dug deeper, fought with everything they had. German bodies piled up, often at the very rim of the defenders' foxholes. Still the Nazis came.

All during the day the attacks mounted in fury. Hundreds of fanatical Germans rushed straight toward



the American lines, only to be mowed down or driven back by a hail of steel. Others came on, met the same fate. The deadly, careful fire of the stubborn defenders exacted a dreadful toll on the Wehrmacht.

Finally, under pressure of overwhelming numbers, the 14th Cav. Gp. was forced to withdraw on the north flank, giving the Germans their first wedge in the division front. Enemy tanks and infantry in increasing numbers then hacked at the slowly widening gap in an effort to surround the 422nd.

In the meantime, a second tank-led assault, supported by infantry and other panzers, hammered relentlessly at the 423rd and 424th. Early next morning a wedge was driven between the two regiments. This southern German column then swung north to join the one that had broken through in the 14th's sector. The 422nd and 423rd were surrounded. The 424th pulled back to St. Vith.

The Nazis were headed for St. Vith. There, cooks and clerks, truck drivers and mechanics shouldered

weapons and took to the foxholes. Hopelessly outnumbered and facing heavier firepower, they dug in for a last ditch defense of the key road center. They were joined Dec. 17 by Combat Command B, 9th Armd. Div., and elements of the 7th Armd. Div.

Surrounded, the 422nd and 423rd fought on. Ammunition and food ran low. Appeals were radioed to HQ to have supplies flown in, but the soupy fog which covered the frozen countryside made air transport impossible.

The two encircled regiments regrouped early Dec. 18 for a counter-attack aimed at breaking out of the steel trap. This bold thrust was blocked by sheer weight of German numbers.

The valiant stand of the two fighting regiments inside the German lines was proving to be a serious obstacle to Nazi plans. It forced von Rundstedt to throw additional reserves into the drive to eliminate the surrounded Americans, enabled the remaining



units and their reinforcements to prepare the heroic defense of St. Vith, delayed the attack schedule and prevented the early stages of the Battle of the Bulge from exploding into a complete German victory.

Low on ammunition, food gone, ranks depleted by three days and nights of ceaseless in-fighting, the 422nd and 423rd battled on from their foxholes and old Siegfried Line bunkers. They fought the ever-growing horde of panzers with bazookas, rifles and machine guns. One of their last radio messages was, "Can you get some ammunition through?"

Then, no more was heard from the two encircled regiments except what news was brought back by small groups and individuals who escaped the trap. Many were known to have been killed. Many were missing. Many turned up later in German prison camps.

Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, First Army commander, said of the 106th's stand:

No troops in the world, disposed as your division had to be, could have withstood the impact of the German attack which had its greatest weight in your sector. Please tell these men for me what a grand job they did. By the delay they effected, they definitely upset von Rundstedt's timetable.

Germans kept probing toward St. Vith all during the night of Dec. 17-18. Then, as daylight came, they renewed their furious and relentless attack. North of the town, 7th Armd. Div. elements were in position.

To the south were the 424th and CC B, 9th Armd. Div. Dug in along the highway to the east were Div. HQ Defense Platoon, 81st Engr. Combat Bn., and the attached 168th Engr. Combat Bn.

A mighty see-saw battle churned over the entire area during the next three days. Raging at the unexpected snag in their plans and aware that precious hours were being lost with every delay, the Nazis unleashed repeated fanatic attacks along the whole, thin perimeter of the defenders. Time and time again they were thrown back.

WOUNDED LIONS

Claw NAZI JUGGERNAUT

FEATS of individual gallantry and courage against long odds were legion. Men alone and in little groups fought their way out of the surrounded units. For days, soldiers made their way back through enemy lines. Some fought with whatever outfits they found.

During the early hours of the Nazi assault, the 423rd I & R Platoon, under 1st Lt. Ivan H. Long, Pontiac, Mich., effectively held a road block. The Germans, learning at great cost that they could not smash through the block, went around. The platoon was faced with the alternative of surrendering or making a dash through enemy territory. The men were without overcoats or blankets. Among the 21 doughs were only four D-ration chocolate bars. They had little ammuni-

tion. But they fought their way through the snow and gnawing cold to rejoin the division with every man safe.

Cpl. Willard Roper, Havre, Mont., led the group back as first scout. After 72 hours of clawing through enemy patrols, tank and machine gun positions, the exhausted and footsore men, some of whom had lost their helmets, could still grin and fight.

One of the most noteworthy efforts at St. Vith was the leadership of Lt. Col. Thomas J. Riggs, Jr., Huntington, W. Va., commanding the 81st Engr. Combat Bn. Once a midshipman at the US Naval Academy, Col. Riggs first won fame as an All-America full-back at the University of Illinois.

On the morning of Dec. 17, Col. Riggs took over the defense of the town. He disposed his limited forces, consisting of part of his own battalion; the Defense Platoon, 106th Hq Co., and elements of the 168th Engr., and waited for the coming blow. The wait was short. Soon a battalion of German infantry attacked behind Tiger tanks. Time after time more



tanks and infantry tackled the engineer line, probing for a weak spot. During these attacks, Col. Riggs was in the center of the defense, rallying his men and personally heading counter-thrusts to keep the enemy off balance.

Col. Riggs was captured while leading a patrol in the defense of St. Vith. Marched across Germany, he escaped near the Polish border and made his way to the frontier. He was sheltered three days by civilians and then joined an advancing Red Army tank outfit. After fighting with it for several days, he was evacuated to Odessa and from there was taken to Marseilles. He rejoined the 81st in the spring when it was stationed near Rennes, France.

Ruthless concentrations of German artillery, armor and infantry were thrown against the 81st on the eastern approaches to St. Vith. In the meantime, the Headquarters Defense Platoon was making a heroic stand in an attempt to protect the CP.

Cpl. Lawrence B. Rogers, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Pfc Floyd L. Black, Mt. Crab, Ohio, both members of the platoon, along with two men whose identity never was learned, successfully held a vital road junction against three Tiger tanks supported by infantry. With a machine gun, rocket launcher, two rifles and a carbine, the four-man volunteer rear-guard stopped the advancing force. They held the enemy at bay for two and a half hours, retreating only when their machine gun failed to function.



T/5 Edward S. Withee, Torrington, Conn., 81st Engr., volunteered for what seemed to be a suicidal mission. His platoon was pinned down in a house near Schonberg by four enemy tanks. All were doomed unless escape could be made while the enemy's attention was diverted.

Withee attacked the four tanks and the supporting infantry, armed only with a sub-machine gun. His platoon withdrew safely. When last seen, Withee was pouring fire into German infantry. He was listed as missing in action until April when he turned up in a PW camp. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

There was the magnificent bluff of 220-pound

Capt. Lee Berwick, Johnson's Bayou, La., 424th. He talked 102 Germans and two officers into surrendering an almost impregnable position to a handful of men. He boldly strode to the very muzzle of enemy machine guns to warn of the "huge force" supporting him and ordered the senior officer to surrender. It worked!

As the relentless drive of the Nazi juggernaut ground in on the surrounded units, many men and small groups made desperate attempts to cut their way out. A number were killed or captured, but a few made it. Two who succeeded were 1st/Sgt. Wallace G. Rifleman, Green Bay, Wis., and Capt. Edward H. Murray, Cabin Creek, W. Va., both of Co. G, 423rd.

With several others, the pair started for the American lines under cover of night. There was a bridge over the Our River guarded by three Germans—by-passed; guards in an enemy motor pool and radar station—killed in a gun fight; German guards on a building—silenced in hand to hand combat; two Germans who rose from foxholes to try to bar their way—liquidated. Encounters with an enemy tank, a German artillery crew, and a close escape from a heavily armed combat patrol sent out to track them down rounded out the adventure.

Sgt. Rifleman won the Silver Star for gallantry in action in a subsequent battle.

Enemy artillery fire on the second day of the attack damaged a mortar base manned by Pfc Harry V. Arvanis, Moline, Ill., 424th. He resumed fire, holding the

tube between his legs and aiming by hand. After firing about 50 rounds, he saw a squad of Nazi infantrymen creeping toward his position.

Training the mortar on them, he shot his last 30 rounds of ammunition, killing or disabling eight of his attackers. The other four rose to their feet and lunged at him in a bayonet charge. Arvannis and his assistant gunner emptied their service pistols, stopping three of the four. The fourth was upon them, bayonet gleaming.

Pfc Arvannis threw his four pound revolver at the German, hitting him squarely in the forehead and killing him instantly.

Heroes UPSET

VON RUNDSTEDT TIMETABLE

THERE are stories, too, of units that fought and served in the face of overwhelming odds: the 106th QM Co., 106th MP Platoon, 106th Signal Co., Division Band and 331st Medical Bn. Each received the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque.

Despite intense enemy artillery and small arms fire, the MP Platoon kept traffic flowing and performed other duties all during the German counter-offensive.

At St. Vith, when shelling by the enemy was at its heaviest, the men at the traffic posts were forced to

take a prone position, but they stuck to their posts and directed traffic. During this critical period, over 700 PWs were handled by the platoon. When St. Vith finally fell to the enemy, all remaining PWs were marched to Vielsalm under cover of darkness. This operation was accomplished without the loss of a prisoner.

Members of the platoon conducted ammunition trains over routes which were under constant artillery fire. They helped "stragglers" to get back to their own units and into the fight. They reconnoitered roads, planned road blocks, crippled an enemy tank, destroyed an enemy staff car with its officer occupants.

The 106th QM Co., composed almost entirely of New England personnel, found itself partially surrounded at times, and had to depend on the ingenuity of its men to get the supplies through.

The ration shortage was becoming critical in Vielsalm Dec. 19 due to the enemy advance and destruction of supply depots. Twelve QM trucks set out to find a depot still open. Rations and gasoline were located at Dinant, Belgium. For security, the trucks made the 35-mile return trip in two serials. The first arrived in Vielsalm on the 20th. The second ran into a furious tank battle near St. Hubert, detoured, avoided destruction and got through to Vielsalm with all supplies intact.

As the fury of the battle mounted, maintenance of communications became literally a matter of life or death. Skill and courage of signalmen of the 106th

marching

in



Brig. Gen. Herbert T. Perrin
Former CG



out

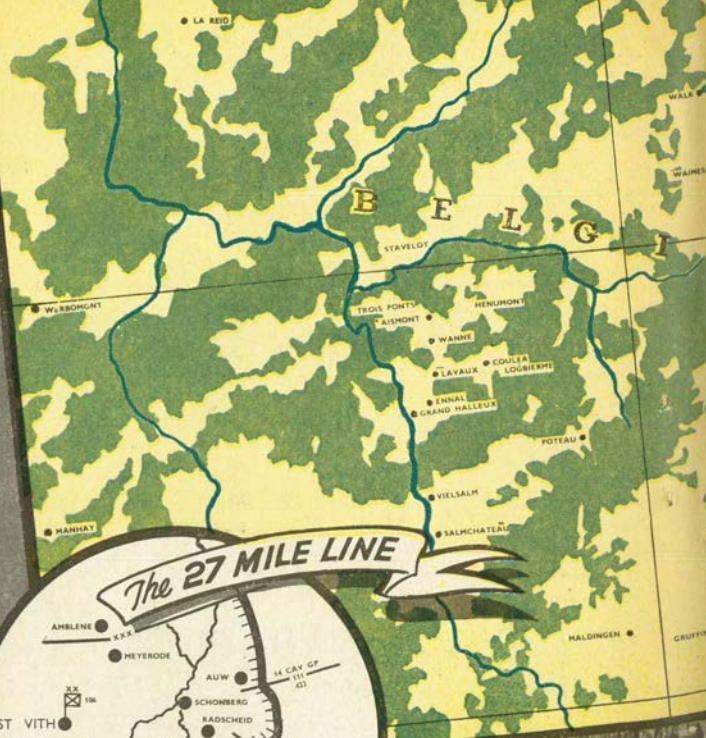


Major Gen. Alan W. Jones
Former CG



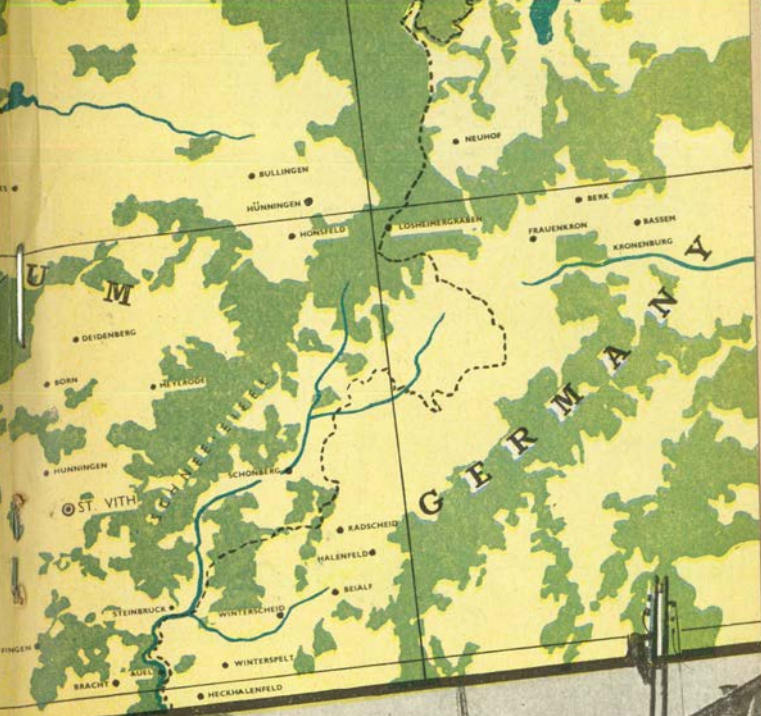
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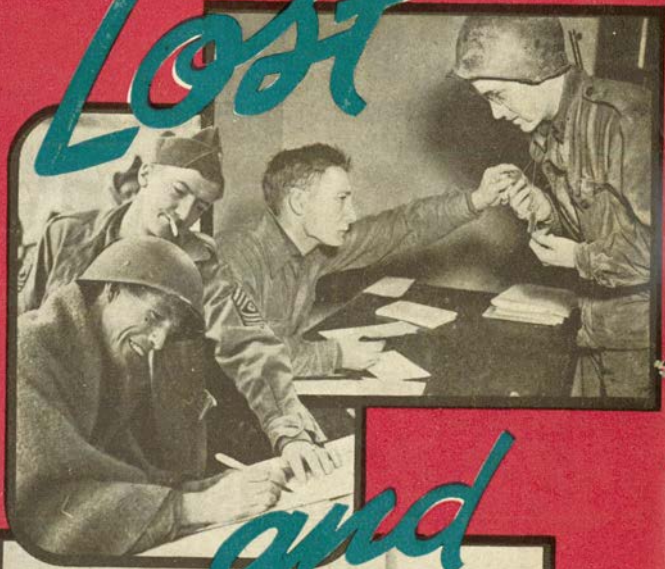


The 27 MILE LINE





Lost



and



Found

Signal Co. and in the regiments kept the vital communication lines open whenever it was humanly possible.

Again and again through the whole division sector, trouble shooters made emergency repairs on lines severed by artillery fire. For signalmen, field splices under enemy small arms fire became almost commonplace. New lines frequently were laid through territory teeming with enemy patrols.

While the town of Schonberg was under heavy bombardment by the Germans, four men of the Signal unit stayed at their switchboard while the building in which they were located was blown down around them. A shell ripped off the rear of the structure. Another reduced the right side to rubble, and the roof collapsed as a third shell tore into the structure. Still the men stayed at their post.

A fourth shell landed behind the switchboard, wounding two of the operators. They destroyed the board and withdrew only when ordered to leave by a superior officer, after German infantry had entered the town in strength as the barrage lifted. These men were T/5 Seymour H. Zorn, New York City; T/5 James R. Leonard and Pfc Donald A. Allen, both of Pittsburgh, and Pvt. Archie L. King, Muscatine, Ia.

Medics of the 106th also distinguished themselves in the bloody Ardennes. One was T/5 Marshall W. Walker, Tryon, N. C., who made repeated trips by jeep through German-held territory near Winterspelt to evacuate 424th wounded.

Capt. Philip J. Antrim, Wichita Falls, Kan., 424th battalion surgeon, found that deep snow, rough terrain, roving enemy patrols and the number of casualties prevented litter bearers from bringing wounded to his aid station fast enough. He packed equipment on his back, went forward to treat men where they had fallen. Capt. Antrim received the Bronze Star and was decorated for two other heroic deeds in the next five weeks.

Men of the 331st Medical Bn. also followed the "Service Above Self" motto. Collecting Cos. A, B and C, supporting the 422nd, 423rd and 424th, respectively, treated and evacuated the wounded so efficiently that Clearing Co. D had only six deaths among all wounded treated in the Ardennes campaign. Co. D functioned for three days and nights as a field hospital in the Vielsalm area, although completely surrounded.

Two other units of the division won praise for a difficult job well done: the 806th Ord. Co., which worked under trying conditions, and the 106th Div. Band, which fought as infantry in the defense of St. Vith. Dec. 19-21, the 112th CT, 28th Inf. Div., on the 106th's right flank, was cut off from its own division. CT 112 was attached to the 106th Div., and with the 424th, held against German attacks south of St. Vith.



424TH

Lashes Back

AT MANHAY

THE fall of St. Vith became inevitable late Dec. 21. All units of the 106th and 7th Armd. withdrew to form a perimeter defense west of the town and east of the Salm River. These positions were held against renewed attacks next day.

Orders were received on the 22nd from XVIII Corps (Airborne) to withdraw farther to the west. The 82nd A/B Div. was moving into positions along the Salm River and a line running west from Salm Chateau. Elements of the 106th, the 7th and 9th Armd. Divs. were to move back to the northwest through new lines formed by the paratroopers.

Careful planning and leadership enabled the units to pull back under constant enemy infantry and tank attacks. The successful withdrawal across the two remaining routes over the Salm River was completed by night of the 23rd.

It was at the start of the withdrawal across the Salm that Maj. Gen. Alan W. Jones became a casualty and was evacuated to a hospital in Liege. Brig. Gen. Herbert T. Perrin, Asst. CG, assumed command.

That night and next day the weary, battle-bruised survivors of the first week of the Ardennes breakthrough took their first respite from battle. Without blankets, with barely enough rations, and unable to light fires

for warmth, they dug in on a windswept hill in the vicinity of Werbomont, Belgium.

Sixteen hours later, on the coldest Christmas Eve in the memory of Belgians, the 424th launched the first counter-attack of the Bulge at Manhay. This heavily fortified junction on the St. Vith-Houffalize Highway was the northern pivot point of the German penetration into Belgium. It was to be another bloody battleground for the 106th.

Gen. Eisenhower wrote Gen. Perrin:

The magnificent job you are doing is having a great beneficial effect on the situation. I am personally grateful to you and wish you would let all your personnel know that if they continue to carry out their mission with the splendid spirit they have so far shown, they will have deserved well of their country.

Securing the main road to Manhay, 2nd Bn., 424th, crossed open ground to the edge of town under intense shelling. It pushed into town, then was forced to withdraw. Christmas Day, the battalion punched its way into town again and held on against furious resistance by the First SS Panzer Div. and Volksgrenadiers. Manhay was one of the significant turning points of the Ardennes battle. It, too, was a story of valor.

When Co. E's advance was halted by intense machine gun fire, S/Sgt. John F. Goidesik, Chicago, advanced alone with a 60mm mortar and destroyed the enemy position with three rounds, permitting his company to advance.



Sgt. Richard J. Maslankowski, Chicago, cradled a .30 caliber light machine gun in his arms and advanced to wipe out an enemy machine gun nest. The gun jammed; he repaired it under fire, pressed on to kill the enemy gunners with his last burst of ammunition.

Capt. Glynn Salyers, Somerset, Ky., commanding Co. H, 424th, was wounded while leading his men across an open field. He refused medical attention until the objective was won and all his wounded men were cared for.

After Manhay, the 106th continued to hack away at the Bulge. The 517th Parachute Inf. Regt. was attached Jan. 11, and with the 424th, formed a tough battle-ried fighting team. The two regiments attacked on the northern side of the Bulge, jumping off along the Ambleve River between Stavelot and Trois Point and along the Salm River to the south. Terrain was rugged—barren ridges, heavily wooded slopes, deep gullies. The enemy was well dug in and had been ordered to hold at all costs.

But the men of the Lion Division had a score to settle. Determined, they smashed ahead. The attack on Jan. 13 drove the enemy from positions east of





Henumont, and the infantry advance carried to Mohipre by late afternoon. In Henumont itself, resistance was rugged. The enemy made effective use of self-propelled guns.

During an assault on the strongly defended town, sudden crossfire from well-concealed machine guns halted Co. I, 424th, scattered men and mortally wounded Lt. Raymond S. Kautz, Raleigh, N. C., company commander, and mortar platoon leader, Lt. Robert A. Engstrom, Bayport, Minn. Although wounded himself, T/Sgt. Harold R. Johnson, Flint, Mich., assumed command of the company. He was hit twice more while rallying the men, preparing to renew the attack. He personally directed intense, accurate mortar and machine gun fire on enemy automatic weapons, eventually led the men to their objective.



When his platoon of Co. K, 424th, was pinned down by fire from an emplaced machine gun, S/Sgt. (then Pfc) George S. Vasquez, St. Paul, Minn., located the gun, went forward with his M-1 and wiped out the Nazi position single-handed.

Co. C, 424th, was held up by three enemy tanks. Robert Honaker, Scarbro, W. Va., led a bazooka team which destroyed one tank and repulsed the others. Honaker later earned a battlefield commission and a Silver Star.

The 106th pressed south and east. The 1st Bn., 424th, met serious opposition in front of Coulee where the enemy was dug in on a strong and deep defensive line. Fighting was fierce, losses were heavy. While the 424th attacked to the front, engaging the main strength of the defenders, the 517th swept around and cleared the town in a slam-bang action before the enemy could recover and regroup.

After seizing all assigned objectives, the 106th was given the additional mission Jan. 15 of taking the

town of Ennal and high ground to the east. Ennal was held by a strong force of Germans entrenched in houses bristling with automatic weapons.

Two platoons of Co. K, 424th, punched their way into Ennal but were pinned down by devastating enemy fire. Ennal had to be secured by night. Available forces were organized and, as darkness approached, the town was taken by assault and cleared. Gen. Perrin personally led the attack, for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

The 517th cut the road from Petit-Thier to Poteau on the 16th and by nightfall was on the outskirts of Poteau. But the advance of the 30th and 75th Inf. Divs. pinched off the 106th. The division was then ordered to mop up by-passed enemy troops in the area. On Jan. 22, Gen. Perrin issued the following:

With the withdrawal of the 424th Inf. from the line on Jan. 18, the major portion of the elements of this division completed a period of 34 days of practically continuous close combat with the enemy. Our artillery is still engaged. The events of that period are still fresh in your minds and in those of your men. The physical hardships endured, the constant exposure to rain, sleet and snow in freezing temperatures, and on terrain over which it was once considered impossible to wage effective warfare, have, so far as I know, rarely, if ever, been demanded of soldiers of any nation. Those twin enemies—weather and terrain—have been our greatest problems, for certainly, wherever we have met the German, we have found that he is in no sense

our equal. You and your men have met those demands and overcome them by a stubbornness of will, a fixed tenacity of purpose, and a grim and determined aggressiveness of body and spirit. You have accomplished your missions, and no higher praise can ever be spoken of any military organization.

106th HAS RECORD OF VALOR AND HONOR

AFTER a rest, the 424th CT joined the 7th Armd. Div. in the mission all Lionmen had been waiting for: to retake St. Vith.

The 424th struck southeast on Jan. 25 from a point just north of St. Vith with the objective of securing the main highway running through Amel to the northeast. A coordinated infantry-tank attack dislodged a main enemy outpost at a road junction. By late afternoon, in the face of automatic weapons, 88mm guns and small arms fire, doughs cleared the town of Medell. The following morning Meyerode fell to the furiously attacking 106th. The 7th Armd. then seized St. Vith while the 106th took Deidenberg and Born.

The 106th now was back at the line where it had first met the enemy. It had taken fierce punishment but had come back in some of the bloodiest fighting of the war—a proud achievement for a division that had a history of less than two years.



sown mine fields to find a weak spot in the pillboxes, concrete gun emplacements, dragon's teeth and anti-tank obstacles of the Siegfried Line.

Facing the 106th was a division identified as one which had been in the attack on St. Vith. With the memory of the breakthrough still vivid, Lionmen sought vengeance. They got it.

Co. C, 424th, with combat engineers from Co. A, 81st Engr. Bn., knocked out a large, particularly troublesome Nazi pillbox. The team clawed its way under machine gun and rifle fire, over four rows of anti-personnel mines and up to the very walls of the fort. Germans in foxholes outside the pillbox were killed or driven off. Fire from the embrasures was silenced by flame throwers, rifle grenades and bazookas.

Pvt. Dennis A. Wartigun, Kearny, N. J., Co. A, 81st, approached the eight-foot thick walls and with a long pole, pushed a charge of TNT through an opening. The blast cracked the walls, blew open the door, killed three of the defenders. Doughs rushed in

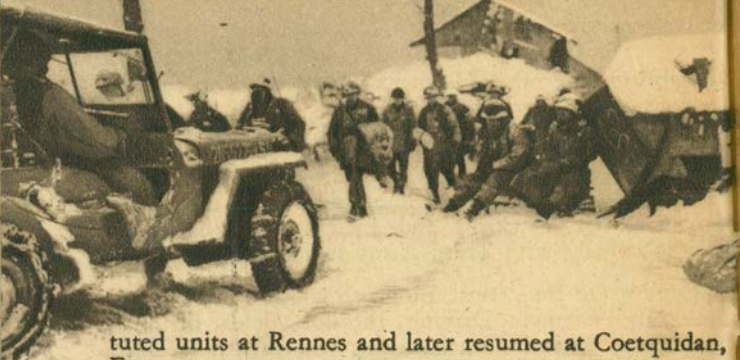
to capture nine other Germans who needed no further persuasion to surrender.

Slowly, methodically, pillboxes fell. A week later, the 106th was well on its way through the Siegfried Line heading toward the Rhine. Fighting on the southern flank of V Corps and First Army, the 106th was in contact with Third Army to the south.

Led by 3rd Bn., 424th, Lionmen wrested Frauenkron from the enemy. Driving through fields of anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, the 424th crossed Lemert Creek, seized the towns of Berk, Kronenburg and Baasem, as it advanced toward its objective along the Simmer River.

Other divisions of V Corps started to swing to the southeast as the Siegfried Line was breached, pivoting on the 106th. Third Army continued to drive to the east, and the division was pinched out. After mopping-up operations, the 106th was pulled back to Corps reserve and the 517th was relieved from 106th control.

Assigned to Fifteenth Army, the division moved to St. Quentin, France, late in March. After a brief stay, it moved to Rennes, France, where reinforcements were brought in and the 422nd and 423rd Regts., along with the 589th and 590th FA Bns., were reconstituted. For the first time since the division had gone into the line, it was up to full strength. A strenuous, tough training program was started for the reconsti-



tuted units at Rennes and later resumed at Coetquidan, France.

While at Rennes, 3rd Inf. Regt., 159th Inf. Regt., Aleutian veterans; and 401st and 627th FA Bns. were attached to the division. The 106th now was not only at full strength, it had a surplus—a far cry from the dark final days of December when the 424th and a few attached units were the division's only force.

An impressive ceremony was held April 14 at the St. Jacques airfield near Rennes. Survivors of the original 106th regiments lost in the breakthrough presented their colors to the new members of the 422nd and 423rd.

While the division stood at “present arms” on the parade ground, commanders, with the old and new color guards armed with German rifles captured in the Battle of the Bulge, advanced to the center of the field where they exchanged salutes. Colors and guidons were then presented to the new color guard. When the units reformed, the augmented division of five

regiments and six artillery battalions passed in review before Gen. Stroh.

A similar ceremony on a smaller scale was held later in Germany by the 424th. During the hectic see-saw battle in the early days of the Ardennes breakthrough, the regiment lost its colors. After V-E Day, a medic of the 2nd Inf. Div., then moving into Czechoslovakia, recovered the colors from a German prisoner and sent them back to the 106th. The colors were presented again to the 424th in an impressive ceremony.

While in the Rennes area, the 106th constituted the reserve for the 66th Inf. Div. and French units containing the strong German garrisons on the coastal area of St. Nazaire and Lorient.

Plans were being made to relieve the 66th but orders came through for the division to return to Germany. Leaving the reconstituted units to complete their reorganization and training, the 424th, 3rd and 159th Regts., with other units, raced across France to corral the thousands of prisoners being taken in the final drive through Germany.

Spread out along both flanks of the Rhine from Holland to Switzerland, the 106th was reinforced to a strength of 40,000. Approximately, 1,500,000 PWs passed through 106th cages.

It was a big job: receiving, screening, processing and discharging the hordes of former German soldiers. But it was a job the 106th relished; many of the Germans

were the same ones whom they had battled in the Ardennes.

Meanwhile, the reconstituted units of the division moved from Coetquidan, to a training area near Mayen, Germany, named Camp Alan W. Jones for the former CG. They completed their training and were ready for action when Germany surrendered May 8, 1945.

Following the surrender of Japan, the 106th, now under the command of Brig. Gen. Francis A. Woolfley, was alerted to return to the States. The division had been through some of the hardest fighting in the European Theater. It had suffered huge losses. It had no record of blitzkrieg offensives or mile-devouring advances. But it had more than that. The 106th had a story of valor and honor; of men who had "stuck it out" against the most powerful force the Germans could muster and had lashed back with the courage of lions. The men of the 106th could wear their insignia with pride.



Photos : U. S. Signal Corps, 106th Inf. Div.

Paris, P. Dupont

The Road Back:



St. Vith



