

February 3, 1992

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CUB 92-05

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Dear John,

Last September, a couple of my army buddies from WWII days made contact with me, more than 45 years after we were separated during the Battle of the Bulge. They informed me of the existence of the 106th Division Association, and I sent in my membership dues right away. Since that time, I have received one issue of the CUB and a couple of letters from your office. I also ordered and received a copy of your book, "The CUB Passes in Review", and am enjoying all of them. From one of the articles in the book I have even been able to make contact with a couple of the fellows who were in the same POW camp with me. I want to thank you for your part in all of this.

John, you probably don't remember me, but I believe that our military careers closely paralleled each other. If you are the same John Kline I remember, we took basic training together at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, during the summer of 1943. I still have the group picture of Co. B, 7th Bn., dated August, 1943. If you still have your copy of that picture, I am in the center of the first row standing, just behind the officers, and directly below the staff of the flag. If I remember you correctly, John, you are standing in the same row, the eighth man to my right. I do not mean to imply that we were close friends or bunkmates, but we may have been in the same barracks. After basic, we were both sent to the University of Alabama for six months. I was in House "J", and I do not believe you were in the same section.

When the ASTP program ended, we both joined the 423rd Regiment of the 106th Division at Camp Atterbury, Indiana. From some of your writings, I know that you were in "M" Company. I was initially in "L" Company, but after two or three weeks I was transferred to the I&R Platoon of Regimental Headquarters Company. I can remember seeing you at a distance from time to time, and I remember being a little jealous when you made Sergeant and I was still a Pvt.

John, I hope I'm not boring you, but you asked for stories, and if you can use any part of this one, you are welcome to it.

I know that you have the story of the 423rd I&R Platoon in your archives, and are aware that they were among the few members of the 423rd who were able to make their way back through the enemy lines and rejoin what remained of the 106th after most of the Regiment was taken prisoner. Unfortunately, I was not with the platoon when the action all began early on the morning of the 16th of December, 1944. It's been a long time, and I have forgotten a lot of the details, but this is the way I remember what happened to me.

I was a Jeep driver in the I&R platoon, and on or about the 14th, I was temporarily assigned as a driver for a Lieutenant Weeks, who

was liason officer between Regimental and Division headquarters. We may have made one or two trips between headquarters, but on our last attempt, probably on the morning of the 16th or 17th, we were cut off from the Regiment. I remember standing by our jeep at a high place and watching some town between St. Vith and the regiment while it was being shelled. We returned to St. Vith and spent a day or two there, sort of in limbo, waiting for a chance to get back to the outfit. I was just a jeep driver, and was not kept very well informed, but apparently it was decided after a while that we were not going to be able to get back, and on the morning of the 18th, Lt. Weeks was given the assignment of taking a bunch of fellows who, like ourselves, had been separated from their regular outfits, and setting up some bazooka teams at various locations. I was driving the jeep with Lt. Weeks giving directions and a couple of other guys were in the back. We were closely followed by a 2½ ton with a bunch of guys in it. I think we may have set up one or two teams, but before long, with the fog and the unfamiliar roads, and the constantly changing enemy positions, I think we were pretty well lost. I know we changed roads a lot, and stopped for directions several times. I remember passing an American tank beside the road with its crew standing beside it. They just watched as we drove by, and a few hundred yards down the road we rounded a curve and met a big German tank sitting in the middle of the road and what seemed to be dozens of German soldiers on the ground around it. We had no time to react before we were completely covered. I later realized that they were not sure whether we were Americans or some of their own in American uniforms, or they would probably have wiped us out before we ever saw them. I know there were a lot of Germans running around in American uniforms and with American equipment.

I can't remember the details, but we were herded in with a number of other GI's who had already been captured, and more were added as the hours went on, some of them wounded. I particularly remember one tank crew that came in. One had been hit in the belly by one of those burp guns. His buddies begged for medical attention, but he didn't get any, and he died later that evening.

I was wearing overshoes when I was captured but they took them from me right away. I was also wearing some thin leather driving gloves that fit over some knitted woolen gloves. They took my gloves too, but when they discovered that the leather parts were separate, they kept them and returned the wool part to me. I was wearing my overcoat and long underwear, so was more fortunate in that respect than many other captives. Oddly enough I was also carrying my mess kit inside my overcoat (we had been getting fed at odd times and in odd places the past few days) and they let me keep that. As a matter of fact, I still have that same mess kit as a souvenir of my POW days.

Some time after my capture, I'm not sure how soon, they started marching us to their rear. We continued walking for five days, staying at night in barns, schoolhouses, and other places. There were hundreds of us in the column now. There was very little food. I remember getting some boiled potatoes one time, and another time we were fed in some sort of factory dining hall. One night we were broken into smaller groups, and I stayed in a farmer's hay loft with several other guys. The next morning we

got a chance to mingle with the farmers' families enough to do a little trading of whatever jewelry or valuables we had for whatever food they had. I had sent my class ring and my better watch home before we went overseas, but I traded my cheap "dollar" pocket watch for a chunk of bread and a small amount of jam.

One night we were in a large metal building, probably an empty warehouse, when American bombers came over. Several bombs came through the roof, but they were small incendiaries, and no one was hurt. We could hear the explosive stuff hitting nearby, and that was one of the times I felt fear.

After five days and nights of this foot travel, we were loaded into boxcars and spent another five days and nights there. I don't remember getting any food during this time, although they would occasionally pass in a bucket of water at a stop. There were no latrine facilities. Whatever helmets and helmet liners we still had were used up here. We started out trying to limit the waste to one end of the car, but with forty or more men, some of them with dysentery, it got pretty bad. Fortunately, since we weren't eating, most of us didn't have to go very often.

After five days in the boxcars, moving back and forth or just sitting at a siding somewhere, we ended up at Stalag IV-B, back in Germany somewhere. If I ever knew just where, I have forgotten now. It was a large camp, mostly occupied and run by British POWs. I was there about two weeks, then was sent to a smaller work camp for American POWs, near Zittau, on the Polish and Czechoslovakian borders.

There were about 300 of us when we arrived at this POW camp, some time in January. There were just over 100 left when the Germans surrendered a few months later. Twelve died in camp of flu, pneumonia, or other cold or malnourishment illnesses. Three were shot and killed while trying to escape. The rest got sick enough to be taken out to hospitals or other camps and we lost track of them. Only one that I know of might have escaped. He went to work one morning and was missing that night. We never learned what happened to him. The bodies of the three that were shot were brought back and dumped by the gate and left there in the rain for about 24 hours. There was a similar scene in the movie Stalag 17. I have always wondered if that scene was based on what happened in our camp or if there were similar incidents in other camps.

The work we were forced to do was mostly of the pick and shovel type. Most of it was at a railroad yard at a nearby town. We were lowering and leveling the ground, apparently for an additional railroad siding. We would dig down a few inches, loading the soil on a push cart on a small gauge track, push the cart to the end of the track, dump it, level the soil, and then repeat the process. The work was very slow. We were all weak from lack of nourishment and the cold, and nobody could work very hard. The guards realized our condition, and most of them did not try to push us too hard, although they did try to keep us moving most of the time. One night a large bomb was dropped in the rail yard, leaving a large crater. Our guards did make us work pretty hard that time, filling up that crater.

Our camp was located much closer to the Russian front than to the American. We constantly heard rumors that the Russians were only a few kilometers away, and in fact could occasionally hear distant explosions. Our hope was that the Russians would come on through and liberate us, but it never happened. With no real contact with the outside world, we readily believed all kinds of rumors.

When VE day finally came, our guards assembled us and told us that the world situation had changed, that the Germans and Americans were now going to be allied against the Russians, and that they were going to take us to join the Americans before the Russians could get us. We took the alliance business with a grain of salt, but we ourselves were not too sure about the Russians, so we cooperated pretty well when we were lined up and marched out of the camp for the last time.

We hiked most of that day and spent the night on the road. The next day we joined a convoy of German vehicles that were also moving toward the American lines. We later realized that the Germans wanted to be able to surrender to the Americans rather than the Russians, and justifiably so, for the Russians were still fighting, as it turned out.

After a few hours of riding in the back of a truck, we were stalled in traffic in some small town. While we were stalled, Russian bombs or shells began falling in the town. Our guards indicated that we were now on our own, and everybody took off. I never saw any of our guards again, and there was a complete lack of organization everywhere. Several of us ended up at an abandoned house on a hill overlooking the town. We decided that would be a good place to wait for the Americans to come and pick us up. We would occasionally go down into the town where stores had been abandoned and were being looted for food and souvenirs.

I can't remember just how long we stayed on that hill. It was at least two or three days, and maybe four or five, but we finally realized that the Americans were not very near, and the Russians were. Somebody went down into the town, found and took a flat-bed truck, and brought it back up the hill. We loaded up and took off. There were about a half dozen Americans and a couple of English guys when we started, but we picked up several more as we traveled. We had to go through the town as we left, and the Russians were now in the town. They were giving the German civilians quite a bit of trouble, those who were left, but when they learned who we were, they waved us on through.

I wasn't driving, and if I knew where we were then, I have forgotten now. We traveled on into the night, occasionally picking up other stragglers, both American and British. There were lots of refugees on the road, and Russians were there, too. Sometime after dark, we were stopped by a bunch of Russian soldiers who were traveling in a German bus that they had taken the same way we got our truck. The lights had gone out on the bus, so they took our truck and left us the bus.

We spent the rest of the night on the bus and resumed our trip when it became light enough. We continued picking up a few more stragglers, and even a few civilians, and when we finally reached

the American forces that afternoon, the bus was full.

Events of the next few days are rather hazy in my memory. I know we were deloused, which we needed, and given fresh clothing, which we needed. I remember taking a long bus ride, and also taking my first plane ride ever, in a C-47, but I don't remember which came first. I ended up at Camp Lucky Strike on the coast of France, where I ate, rested, ate, rested, ate and waited for a couple of weeks. I then loaded on a Liberty ship with a lot of other ex-pows and had a liesurely two week cruise back to the states.

When I got back to the states, I was given a sixty day furlough. The war in the Pacific ended while I was still on this leave. When my 60 days were up I was assigned to a motor pool at Camp Hood, Texas. They learned I had taken typing in high school and made me a clerk-typist. They didn't know that I barely passed typing and how poor a typist I really was, but that wasn't too important on the kinds of reports I was doing. They made me a T-5 and that was my rank when I was discharged on December 3, 1945.

If you might be interested in my civilian life since 1945, I will save that for another time. Again, thanks for the information you have sent me, and for your work with the CUB. I plan to attend the reunion in Pittsburgh this year, and maybe I'll see you there.

Sincerely yours,

Alfred "Al" Shoffit

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