

THE PUSH TO CZECHESLOVAKIA

On March 23rd, 1945 we attacked Mundeheim, south of Ludwigshafen. It was a typical infantry job, approaching the city through slime-filled sewers, hitting the dirt as German 88's fell everywhere, snipers shooting from many factories, and fighting street to street but by nightfall we were within the city proper.

For the first time in our combat careers, in Ludwigshafen we found ourselves performing for an audience for the inquisitive citizens of the city gathered in doorways and even in the streets to watch the fighting, ignorant of the fact that artillery shells don't discriminate between combatant and spectators. They couldn't realize that the shells coming from the guns in Mannheim were German shells falling on a German city, killing German civilians.

No matter what part of the city we entered we all met the same fanatical resistance, for the defenders of Ludwigshafen, realizing they had no chance of escaping across the Rhine, were determined to fight to death rather than surrender. We were forced to "mousehole" from one house to the next, blasting holes with TNT or with bazooka rockets.

With no tanks available we had to flush the Germans out with rifles, grenades and bazookas. But even after Ludwigshafen was taken, snipers kept popping up in disconcerting places -- even church towers.

We were relieved by the 399th Infantry of the 100th Infantry Division, again forming a bridgehead over the Saar River on to the Rhine. The German forces on our Front began to collapse. We launched a pursuit resulting in the capture of many towns, many prisoners of war, and large amounts of enemy material and supplies. The city of Ludwigshafen was taken.

After 5 months of combat the 376th Regiment went into the Third Army Reserve. While in Reserve General Omar Bradley called on the 94th Infantry Div. and our Regiment headed north to join the Fifteenth Army at Willich, Germany. We were put on "40 & 8's" (WWI boxcars which carried 40 men and 8 horses). After three days of bumps and shakes, eating "K" rations, drinking hot coffee previously prepared by our kitchens, our "horse Pullmans" reached Willich on April 3rd. We were shuttled to Willich, Germany, preparing to cross the Rhine.

Shortly thereafter, the "Ruhr Pocket" was completely eliminated. We moved to a new area east of the Rhine and peace was declared but not until 198 camps were liberated containing over 30,000 Russians, Poles, Italians, Yugoslavians, French, Czechs, Belgians and Dutch. What a mess for the living conditions in these camps were unbelievably bad - filth and unventilated, unlighted rooms creeping with lice.

I was assigned to take a convoy of 26 Army 2-1/2 ton trucks to Pulch, Germany (potato country) to pick up potatoes for these starving people, because I spoke German. This area was occupied by the British and when we returned three days later with all those potatoes, some of the displaced prisoners kissed my hands.

On June 13th we crossed over into Strakonice, Czechoslovakia. This was where we noticed that the German forces now were made up of mostly young boys, as young as 14 years old, and old men, wearing only parts of a uniform and looking hungry. One day my runner came to me with the message that there were Germans on the radio from Prague, begging for any "Amerikaner" to answer their call. They wanted to surrender to the Americans, not the Russians, and would guarantee safe passage from the Cezch border through Pilsen to Prague. I immediately told Col. Thurston of this who then relayed the request to Regimental and Division Headquarters but nothing more was heard from the "upper echelon". Did they suspect a trap or.....?

The war here was now over for all of us except we also had orders to be shipped to Japan for the invasion there. However, V-J Day came with overwhelming suddenness and now we all started to "sweat out" the trip back home to the States.

Unfortunately, I did not have enough points to go home yet because of my Battlefield Commission, for Officers needed more points than the troops so I spent one more year in Europe: three months in Czecheslovakia when the Russians told us to leave as "Roosevelt and Churchill gave us this land", and seven months in Oberammergau, Germany where I moved 29 Officers into the Schilcherhof Inn. Here is where I stayed after I was promoted to Regimental Staff.

I had received the Battlefield Commision to 2nd Lt. five weeks after we landed on Omaha Beach, being promoted from Staff Sgt. to 2nd Lt. Finally returned to the States on Jan. 12th, 1946.

Correction and further information for Page 12, paragraph 2 re ASTP (Army Special Training Personnel):

Back in 1943 and 1944 any male who graduated from highschool with a very high I-Q was sent to Fort Benning, Georgia with the intention of forming a special group for intelligence activities, but after D-Day and the high rate of casualties on the front lines in Europe and Asia, these boys were sent to both fronts as replacements. Of course we were very happy to build up our strength for we were always 40% to 60% below strength. But when I found where these boys came from (I was only 20 years old myself), I couldn't believe the Armed Forces would use them as "gun fodder".

When I was drafted into the Army, many of the recruits came from the South (I will not name the States). Many could not read or write -- and yet the highly intelligent ASTP

boys were thrown into this mix. They too, though were very good fighting men and we were surprised when we learned of their high IQ's. Only a few gave us "Old" combat leaders a rough time. Of course, we did need "fresh men" and the Armed Forces sent anyone they could get their hands on to fight alongside the "veterans" (one hour or one day of being shot at, facing mortar and artillery fire, made you a veteran.)