

**Thanks Dad and all other veterans for your's and their service in WWII and to our country!!
At 92 Dad was recently honored in a feature story written in a local paper - Fluvanna Review in Virginia. Here is that story along with some slight corrections and providing additional details. Love you always Dad!**



“I’m proud to have served”

BY VALERIE DAVIS

CORRESPONDENT

(Note: slightly corrected with some added details)

Thomas Bugg, Jr. was a newlywed and had just completed his junior year at Virginia Polytechnic Institute when the war in Europe turned his world upside down. Bugg was 22. His bride, Dorothy Graham, was 20. Even as they celebrated their wedding day on Feb. 26, 1943, thoughts of inevitable separation loomed in their minds. “We knew I was going to get called to serve, we just didn’t know when,” said Bugg, who enlisted in the Army Reserves and was a member of the Corps of Cadets at VPI (now Virginia Tech).

“When the time came, they called up the entire junior and senior classes.” That was April 7. Thomas left for basic training at Fort McClellan, Alabama, followed by infantry officer candidate school in Fort Benning, Georgia. A year later, he received his commission as a second lieutenant in the Army Officer Reserve Corps. From Georgia, Bugg was transferred to Camp Robertson in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he commanded a platoon and trained soldiers in combat tactics and maneuvers. In June 1944, he and his platoon deployed to the European Theater of Operations aboard the *USS Argentina*. After debarking in England, they crossed the English Channel into Normandy and landed on Omaha Beach July 10, just five weeks after the initial D-Day invasion. His platoon was assigned to the 30th Division of the 119th Regiment.

Their mission – to join with other American troops in pushing the Nazis back into Germany. Three months of marching took the platoon through northern France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Germany. Some of the countryside reminded Bugg of his childhood home in Shores, a tiny community along the James River in southern Fluvanna County Virginia.

His unit sustained heavy casualties along the way. By the time they crossed the Siegfried Line (the famous defensive line of bunkers and tank traps built by Germany along its western border), 23 of the 37 men in his original platoon had been killed in action.

While extensive training taught Bugg basic combat techniques, nothing could completely prepare him for the events of October 6, 1944:

“We got to the Siegfried Line, and I guess we made a mistake. We had gotten into a Pillbox (concrete bunker) thinking we would be safe there. It was the worst place in the world to be. We got in there and couldn’t get out. The Germans knew we were hiding in there and came up on our blind side,” recalled Bugg. “We had been in the Pillbox maybe an hour or so and they surrounded us. We had to come out. My company commander was killed just before we were captured. Practically my whole company was destroyed.” “I guess it was the worst day of my life,” Bugg said.

After several weeks as a prisoner of the elite SS German group, Bugg and other captured American officers made a difficult journey in overcrowded railroad cars to the camp Oflag 64 in Schubin, Poland (www.oflag64.us/). Bugg said the German guards treated their American captors well. Some of the guards had lived in the United States and returned to Germany to fight for their homeland when war broke out in Europe.

The imprisoned soldiers were permitted to write letters to loved ones back home in the United States and receive care packages from the American Red Cross. The packages included candy bars, cigarettes, powdered milk, and other items. Bugg mailed several letters from Oflag 64 to his wife, Dorothy, who was staying with his parents in Richmond. In an excerpt from a letter dated Dec. 25, 1944, he wrote:

“I sure would like to be with you today. It would be a Merry Christmas for me if I didn’t have anything else in the world. Still, we have a lot of things to be thankful for as it is. We received Christmas Red Cross parcels and they are surely nice. ... I hope Sis got home for Christmas. Also Wave. Next Christmas I hope we are all at home. That will be a happy event for me. ... Honey, you are living a life of great suspense. I hope you heard where I was before too long. I know you and the family were awful worried. Well, don’t worry about me now. I am ok. Take care of yourself. Keep up the chin. With all my love, Tommy.”

Living conditions were primitive. There was no heat and no hot water in the barracks. Their only clothes were the uniforms they wore on the day of their capture. The men were marched outside once a month for showers and de-licing.

Bugg recalled taking off his shirt one night before going to bed and painstakingly pulling off the tiny brown nits. “It’s amazing what you can take when you have to,” he said.

Hunger was the worst part of Bugg’s experience at the Oflag POW camp. At one point, his weight dropped to 128 pounds.

"They didn't treat us bad physically, but we didn't have much to eat. The German soldiers didn't have much either," he said. The harshest period of Bugg's captivity was still to come, however. Russian forces were pushing the Germans out of Poland, and the camp at Oflag would have to be abandoned as the Nazis retreated back to Germany. In the dead of winter with sub-zero temperatures, some 1,500 POWs left Oflag 64, Poland, on January 21, 1945, to begin what would become a 350-mile march to a camp in Moosburg, Germany. Only about 400 men would reach this destination, and Thomas Bugg was one of them.

Both the American prisoners and their German guards lived on what they could – usually potatoes and turnips they found in the fields. Villages in the Polish countryside had turned into ghost towns, and Bugg said the men slept in barns to seek refuge from the subzero temperatures three abreast rotating the outside man in every hour to avoid freezing.

"I slept in the hay beside an old cow one night. She was nice and warm," he said.

It would be seven long months before Bugg would taste freedom – and a good meal – again. The guards overseeing the Moosburg camp had already fled when American troops liberated Bugg and the other POWs on April 28, 1945. Nine days later, the Western Axis countries surrendered to the Allies.

"I made a promise to myself one day in the POW camp that if I got out, I was going to eat anything and never complain anymore," said Bugg. "The first morning after I was liberated, I was in an American camp, and wouldn't you know, they served sunny-side-up eggs and sweet milk. I have never liked either!" "I reasoned with myself and thought, 'Well, I'm liberated now, and I don't have to eat those eggs.' So I didn't," he said.

Bugg left Europe on the same ship that brought him there, the *USS Argentina*. During a two-week respite in a North Carolina hospital, he heard the news of Japan's surrender. In late August 1945, Bugg went to Texas to oversee the deactivation of his company. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army on January 15, 1946. His brother, Waverly, who fought in the Pacific Theater, and his sister, Virginia, an Army nurse who served with the 68th General Hospital in England, also made it home safe and sound.

Bugg was reunited at last with his beloved Dorothy and returned to VPI to complete his degree in animal husbandry.

They moved to Fluvanna, where Bugg accepted a job as a county extension agent for a year before becoming a fulltime dairy farmer. The couple had three children. Dorothy passed away in 2007.

At 92, the Scottsville resident is the oldest living member of the local Veterans of Foreign Wars post. Bugg served on the county board of supervisors from 1987 to 2002, and on the Central Virginia Regional Jail Board for several years, but his greatest source of pride comes from being a World War II veteran.

"I don't like war, but I'm proud to have served," he said. "I have had a good life."

Addition - Another interesting point during the infamous march was Hammelburg raid an event called the where they were actually liberated for a brief 2 day period – here is a link to that story as well: <http://www.taskforcebaum.de/main1.html>