

Subj: Re: Lt. James V. Cook
Date: 6/3/01 2:23:57 AM Central Daylight Time
From: kevinandsylvveen@yahoo.com (Kevin Cook)
Reply-to: HAMMELBURGPOW@topica.com
To: HAMMELBURGPOW@topica.com

Bill -

In response to your questions, I spent about 2 1/2 hours on the phone with Dad this evening. I apologize in advance for the length of this e-mail, but Dad gave me about 9 pages of notes, which I will try to summarize here. Please excuse the misspellings, but I've misplaced my dictionary.

At the time of his imprisonment dad was a second Lt. He eventually was retired as a first Lt. in 1946 or 1947. He was a rifle platoon leader (small unit commander) in the 3rd platoon, Company C (Charley), 137th regiment (Harry Truman's old regiment), 35th Infantry Division of the 1st Battalion. His original commission was as 2nd Lt. Coast Artillery Corp (CAC) Anti-Aircraft(AA) and Automatic Weapons (AW) from Camp

Davis, NC in November 1943. He then spent three months at Camp Haan in California in the Casual Officer Pool (COP). He proceeded to infantry school, Officer Special Basic (OSB) for 8 weeks in Ft. Benning, GA, where he graduated in Spring/Summer 1944. He was sent to Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas at the Infantry Replacement Training Center (IRTC). In November 1944 he was sent overseas.

He was captured on December 31, 1944 in La Ville Bon Eau (sp?) translated as Village of Goodwater located about 10 miles Southeast of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. According to dad, his unit occupied a small building in the village. They soon realized that there was a German unit in the basement of the same building. He spoke a little German and the commander of the German unit spoke some English, so they negotiated with each other. Dad indicated that the battle in the streets was fairly indecisive at the time and it wasn't apparent who was going to win. At that time it was also common for neither side to take prisoners. Many were taken into the woods and shot by their captors. So he and the German officer agreed to speak on each other's behalf depending on which side was victorious. The Germans finally prevailed. Dad and his unit were taken into the street and for awhile they were convinced that they were going to be executed. A catholic fellow in his unit was so sure that he pulled out his rosary. However, the German commander that he had encountered in the building came forward, as agreed and his unit was spared.

From there he was taken on what he describes as his "Tour of Germany". An old German Master SGT., who dad describes as very courteous and very formal, was put in command of him and other POWs. My notes from this evenings conversation are somewhat cryptic, so I may not have this sequence written correctly. My spelling is also suspect here. They marched by foot to

Wittlich, Germany where they stayed in an old prison for several nights. They crossed the Rhine River in Koblenz, Germany. Stayed at a farm in Nach Monderscheid. Also spent a little time in Monchhausen, which dad found amusing because of Baron Von Monchhausen on the Fred Allen show ("Vas you der Charlie?"). While in Monchhausen he believes that it must have been the headquarters for the 28th infantry division before being overrun by the Germans. He remembers seeing file cabinets, papers and office furniture with a lot of references to the 28th. They slept in an old schoolhouse there, which had a door on either end of the building, so two guards were posted. One night Monchhausen was hit by artillery fire from 155s. He and his comrades who were on the second story of this school building were sleeping spoon fashion to stay warm. Every 15 to 20 minutes they would hear the fluttering from the incoming artillery. Everybody would stiffen up. Then with the sound of the explosion they would relax. This went on all night. Eventually he ended up in Limburgh at Stalag XIIA. A little later he was transferred by train to Hammelburg. He was somewhat nervous about the train ride, because apparently one of the trains that left a few days earlier had been strafed by the Army Air Corp, resulting in allied casualties.

As I indicated in an earlier posting, dad was one of the POWs that kept a "recipe book". He made this out of the black wax parchment paper (similar to packing or butcher paper) from the red cross packages. The front of the paper was brown parchment and the backside was a heavy black wax. He still has this book. The very last entry has "27th March 14:30 Major General Von Goekkel (sp?) surrenders Oflag XIIIIB to Col. Goode."

Dad remembers the Green Hornet soup, but not the buzzing sounds made by the POWs. He said that the original Sr. American Officer (SAO) before Col. Goode arrived from Oflag 64 was a Col. Cavender (sp?). Dad's barracks was near the main road next to the main gate. Dad has a list of the 40 men in his barracks which he wrote on a Kriegeres Gefandner Post. He will send it to me. His work group consisted of 6 POWs: Dad, Leo Champagne from New Orleans, LA, Frank Smysor, First Name? Kornegay, First Name? Brown (a Quartermaster) and First Name? Saylor from Cincinnati, Ohio. Dad indicates that morale was very low before Col. Goode showed up. Goode provided good leadership and improved the morale quite a bit. He also indicated that the 106th was referred to as the "Hungry and Sick" as a play on words.

After the liberation by Baum's forces dad believes he was wounded in Hollrich. He was riding in the third tank in the column. The tank was a Sherman M4A3. Bill you stated you were on a light Stuart tank at the column's head. He wants to know if that was LT. Nutto's. He was sitting with his butt in the commander's access with his legs dangling out. He thinks his was the first tank hit. He thinks this was the case, because there was a roadblock to the front

of the column and tank ditches either side. By crippling a tank back in the column, the Germans could potentially prevent the forward tanks from backing out and escaping. He indicated that the tank he was on did not get hit directly by the panzerfaust, otherwise he speculates that he might have been incinerated. He believes that it hit somebody's leg, exploded and sent shrapnel out everywhere. He was hit in the right foot and right leg by two pieces of shrapnel. At the time, he thought his legs were possibly blown off as he felt the impact beneath his knees. He slid down the tank to the tank tread guard and fell head first into the ditch. He did this in a diving fashion with his arms outstretched because he was not sure he had his legs and did not want to land on what stumps he might have had. As it turns out this was not a good thing, because he ended up breaking his wrists and jamming his arms (it was quite a drop).

Two other POWs he knew were in the ditch. They asked if he was hurt. They took off what remained of his right boot (only the top buckle was secured in tact, with the right side of the boot completely blown off). He remembers that the flesh on his right foot was "flowering". His comrades took 12 inch square felt cloth used by POWs as makeshift socks and tried to use them as bandages to dress the wound. At the same time, they kept hearing the tanks and halftracks above (he was still in the tank ditch - it was wet) trying to manoeuvre. He recalls the treads being steel, not rubber like many today, so they kept making this click, click, click sound as they tried to move slowly over the pavement. Eventually the task force backed away.

He and his fellow POWs could hear some groaning above. He remembers hearing a German saying (in German) "How many soldiers?" "How many tanks?" They also heard a pistol shot and a nearby groan stopped. He and his comrades started to make their way down the ditch, with his friends supporting him on either side. The ditch eventually shallowed out. They proceeded along, but then were shot at. His friends dropped him and started to run. Fear took over inside him and he got up and also ran on his wounded foot and leg. He says it's amazing what you can do when your really terrified. Eventually he and his comrades made it back to the task force. His friends loaded him onto a halftrack. He never saw them again, but heard from one of them about ten years ago. The other friend had already passed away.

He ended up at Hill 427 with the rest of the task force. Initially he was taken into the barn with the rest of the wounded and laid in the center aisle. He indicated that the barn had two truck doors, one on each end, and a walk in door that had been nailed shut. He doesn't remember the makeshift red cross on the roof. He doesn't remember other buildings in the area.

He felt okay about being in the barn until he learned that the wounded were going to be left behind. He

negotiated with somebody and convinced them that he had been in the infantry and could still fight. That got him out of the barn (later described as a sheep fold).

He was put into a halftrack, given an M1 rifle and an army blanket which he wrapped around his legs. He was in the halftrack for up to one hour. During this time he remembers others preparing to leave. They took gasoline out of halftracks slated for abandonment, set incendiary grenades on the engine blocks of approximately 8 halftracks. Baum was riding up and down the column in his jeep as preparations were made. He remembers a couple of the incendiary grenades popping and starting to burn. Then the Germans let loose.

Dad says everything was chaos. He tried to get out of the halftrack, but his legs got tangled in the army blanket. He ended up dangling upside down, half in and half out of the halftrack. He remembers calling for help to some folks running nearby, but they were busy trying to save their own skin. Eventually he worked his way out of the blanket and made it behind the far wall of the barn. It provided good cover and he huddled there. Dad says that he remembers that the firing stopped at least on one occasion, but that the American forces on the far side kept up small arms fire. So the Germans started firing again. Dad remembers people scrambling trying to find something white so they could surrender.

One thing, dad disagrees that everybody in the barn was killed immediately after it was hit. People were inside screaming and several attempts were made by him and others to get to them, but to no avail.

After the surrender, dad was laid with others in a row. He remembers looking over at one of Baum's tanks. There had been a box of cigarettes on it. During the battle the tank was hit and the cigarettes were scattered like snow around tank. While he was lying there German soldiers and cadets would walk by, quickly grab a couple cigarettes off the ground and put them in their pockets. At the same time two German officers were pacing along looking at him and the others in the row. He said he didn't like the way they were looking at him and thought they might be considering executing some of the prisoners. He noticed an American Lt. who seemed to be helping organize things. Dad said to the LT. "Don't leave, I don't like the way the German Colonel is looking at me." The LT. said, "You don't have anything to worry about." This fellow eventually helped Dad to a jeep being used to transport the wounded back to Oflag XIII B. Dad sat up in the front seat. The driver was a Corporal, who told dad that there were K-rations under the seat. Dad grabbed cigarettes for trading, chocolate bars and toilet tissue, but discarded the rest for fear of retribution from the Germans. He says that he feels what he did at the time was pretty greedy and feels guilty about it.

Dad was placed in a hospital bed in a long narrow room (like a barracks) next to a doorway that he thinks led to a smaller private room. He thinks it may have been John Waters room and he could hear groaning coming from that room. During this time his leg became badly infected and swelled up like a watermelon. As a result, he was one of the first four selected to be sent to Bad Kissingen so the Germans could declare it as an open city. Eventually 18 POWs were sent there. At the time, he didn't realize what was happening and thought that he and the other three were being singled out as examples to be executed by the Germans over repatriation issues. An American doctor, Major Brendt helped make the selection. Dad thought he was arguing for his life, and at one time threatened to kill the major if he ever made it out alive. He said Major Brendt kept telling him, "This may be your life." Obviously, Major Brendt was very concerned about dad's condition. He was very sick from the infection.

Dad was sent to Bad Kissingen with three others (a captain from the 45th division with one arm amputated at the elbow [an old wound] and two LT's, one being a paratrooper Lt Ellie or Ely?). Dad remembers Lt. Ellie or Ely always having a severe case of trench foot during his stay at Oflag XIII B.

In Bad Kissingen, a German doctor operated on dad's leg and saved it. The doctor told dad that had he been a German soldier, he probably would have lost his leg. Dad remembers the nurse there Sophie Planck. After the war Sophie wrote to dad because she along with many other Germans had fallen on hard times after the war.

Eventually dad was sent back to the U.S. He spent 10 months in Crile General Hospital in Parma, Ohio near Cleveland. While there he bumped into Major Brendt. I think dad indicated that Brendt was now a Lt. Colonel. Dad looked at him and said, "Last time I saw you I told you I would kill you." Brendt was stunned. He didn't recognize dad because dad had put quite a bit of weight back on. Dad said, "You probably saved my life when you sent me to Bad Kissingen." Brendt made the connection and they had a long conversation about their experiences. Dad never saw him again.

After Crile, dad spent 18 months in Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan. He was retired from the army at Percy Jones as a 1st Lt. He is listed as 1st LT. AUS RET. He still has his Certificate of Service papers, which he says were referred phonetically as "Bonafidees" by you servicemen.

Today, dad is a retired mechanical engineer in Youngstown, Ohio. He volunteers a lot of his time at a WWII museum in Hubbard, Ohio (I incorrectly listed it as Girard, Ohio in an earlier posting). The museum is put together by a fellow named Henry Venedda and according to dad is getting tremendous recognition as one of the finest WWII vehicle museum's in the country. The museum is staffed by former veterans who

volunteer their time and tell their story. Henry is currently over in Bastogne on a purchase mission.

Dad says that more and more WWII buffs are familiar with Baum's raid. He has befriended officers in the military who perk up when he mentions Hammelburg. So you all are a well recognized bunch.

Now, a question from dad. Does anybody know if it is true that the Hammelburg Raid is used as a school problem at Fort Knox? He has heard rumors to this effect.

One final thing from me. Dad never talked too much about his war experiences when I was growing up. As a kid, I remember him as a great baseball coach, scoutmaster, brilliant engineer who was always involved with his kids' lives. I knew he had been wounded and a POW, but that was about it. Everyday, he opens up a little more and tells me about his war experiences. I am in awe of what you all went through, and hope that we can all keep in touch and share this phenomenal part of American history.

Regards
Kevin Cook

--- Phyllis Rowe <pnrowe@earthlink.net> wrote:
> Dear Kevin Cook:
> > You ask whether anyone remembers your father, Lt.
> James V. Cook (First or Second at the time?),
> captured in Belgium (town?) in Dec. 1944 (date?) and
> wounded (how?) at Hollich while riding on the top
> of a tank (what kind?) Riding on top of a light
> (Stuart) tank near the columns head, I was there.
> Although I don't recall the name, we could
> conceivably have been on the same tank and come from
> the same barracks. To have any reasonable hope of
> finding what you seek, more information is needed.
> To what unit did you dad belong when captured? What
> was his arm or service? What was the source of his
> commission? What was his job assignment? (I, for
> instance, was a staff captain of armored infantry,
> assigned as S-2, S-3 in the 17th A.I.B., 12th A.D.,
> originally NGUS, DCNG).
>> Since the first kriegies at Oflag XIII-B were from
> the 106th Divison, perhaps your father was, too.
> However, many were from Oflag 64, in Poland.
>> I was touched that he remembers the Gourmet/Gourmand
> rivalry. (I was a mere Gourmand myself, and as such
> produced some phony but pretentious recipes myself.)
> Note that identifying your own military service (if
> any), could be helpful in your search.
>> Note also that Mr. Erick Eastes has recently (May 3)
> circulated, via an "Attachment,"
> an article by me about the Baum raid, in answer to
> one by our member Richard
> Whitaker, published in "Armor Magazine."
> So long for now,
> Willis case (Bill) Rowe