

1329 Kasold Drive, M-1
Lawrence, KS 66049-3426

December 19, 2000

Mr. Bob Thompson
7448 E. 68th Place
Tulsa, Oklahoma 39206

Dear Bob,

Recently I sent Bill Warthen an e-mail letter about some of my experiences as a POW in Germany in W.W. II, with emphasis on being at Oflag XIII-B, Hammelburg, when Task Force Baum entered on March 27, 1945, and my subsequent walk through southern Germany until my liberation on May 2. In his response, Bill said he and you are interested in my story. In fact, he wrote, "We have been seeking members of your group for two years."

I wrote a synopsis to Bill in my October 13 e-mail letter. I will expand in this letter to you, and I can expand further, if you want more information.

I graduated from Infantry Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, on June 20, 1944, and joined the 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division as a Second Lieutenant platoon leader in July, after the division had completed Tennessee maneuvers. In August most men who had been on maneuvers were sent overseas as replacements, and the division received new men, most of whom had no training in the infantry. We went overseas to England on the Queen Elizabeth in October and to the front line in the Ardennes section of Belgium, along Belgium - German border in December, 1944.

Convinced that Germany could not mount a significant offensive, top Allied commanders made a number major blunders.

1. Eisenhower and his staff were certain that Germany would never attack in the Ardennes, though this is precisely where Germany attacked in 1914 and in May of 1940.
2. They spread the 106th and 28th Infantry Divisions far too thin, over too much of the front, about 23 miles for each division.
3. They took all reserves out from behind these two divisions.
4. Allied intelligence lost track of the 1st German Panzer Division, thinking it had gone east to Berlin, when, in fact, it was poised to attack in the Ardennes.

5. For days frontline American troops reported that Germany was amassing hundreds of tanks opposite their positions in the Ardennes, but these accurate reports were ignored. On the second day of the Battle of the Bulge, December 17, speaking about the large numbers of German tanks, Omar Bradley asked, "Where in hell did they get all those tanks?"

6. On the first day of the Battle of the Bulge, Allied commanders took no action, because they thought it was a mere skirmish. The 422nd and 423rd Regiments of the 106th Division were surrounded and trapped on the morning of the second day. Not until the second day did top Allied commanders take action, and this was too late for the two regiments surrounded on the Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountains).

7. Top commanders issued orders to hold at all costs. We were promised resupply of ammunition, food, water, and medical supplies by air, but, because of horrible flying weather, we received no air drops of supplies.

After we ran out of ammunition on the third day, we received orders to attack in the direction of Schoenberg (to the northwest), causing as much destruction as possible. We were to meet the Seventh Armored Division in Schoenberg, but neither we nor the Seventh Armored Division reached Schoenberg.

With about 7,000 men from the two trapped regiments, I was captured on December 19, 1944, when Col. Cavender of the 423rd regiment gave orders to surrender. After the war Colonel Cavender was called before a review board to explain his order to surrender, but he was neither reprimanded nor punished.

American POWs walked in bitter cold weather and snow for two days, arriving at Gerolstein near midnight on December 20. The next morning, after we were each given a small piece of cheese and several crackers, we were packed into railroad boxcars for the trip to POW camps. In late afternoon of December 23 the train stopped in railroad yards at Diez, west of Limburg on der Lawn, where the British Royal Air Force dropped 2 1/2 ton bombs on the railroad yards. Many men locked in boxcars and many men in a nearby American POW camp were killed.

We arrived at Stalag IX-B, Bad Orb, on December 28. Many others and I had frostbitten feet, and many POWs were sick or injured. Sanitary conditions were horrible; and there were no medical supplies, no heat, and only "green hornet" soup to eat. On the night of January 10-11, I was moved with other officers to Oflag XIII-B, southeast of Hammelburg, where some American POWs died and several were killed by guards. In March several hundred American POWs arrived at Hammelburg from other camps.

Task Force Baum from Patton's Army drove sixty miles beyond the front lines, and in early evening of March 27 six or seven vehicles drove off our guards and entered the camp.

Almost 1,500 American POWs and about 4,500 Serb and Yugoslav POWs were liberated for several hours, but in a day or two all except a handful of men were recaptured, and the tankers were captured. I was one of about 170 men who were recaptured during the night of March 27-28 and forced to march to the southeast, away from approaching Allied troops.

The group of 170 men of which I was a part walked short distances at first because we were emaciated. Later, as our physical and mental conditions improved as we walked each day and found potatoes and bread to eat almost every day, we walked longer distances. We walked through Herlheim on March 30. On Easter Sunday, April 1, we held church service as P-47s flew low overhead and strafed nearby villages. Apparently the pilots saw the white, cloth "POW" signs we placed on the ground, because the planes did not strafe the village near which we rested.

We walked through Oberlenbach and Vach, arriving at Furth, a western suburb of Nuremburg, on April 4. On the morning of April 5 we walked into the outskirts of Nuremburg. A little before noon American B-47 aircraft bombed the city heavily and some of the bombs fell on our group as we hugged the ground. Many men, perhaps 30 or 35, were killed, and many others were injured. I was uninjured, but two or three men next to me were killed, and several next to me, including my buddy, Manning L. Kessinger, were injured. I cleaned up Kessinger's head wound as best I could, and we continued our trek to the southeast with approximately 110 in our group. I have read that this April 5 raid on Nuremburg was the last 1,000-plane raid of the war.

On April 6 in Feucht, a southern suburb of Nuremburg, we received 1/2 a Red Cross parcel for each man. We walked through Seligenporten on April 9, Evasbach on April 10, Kevenhull on April 12, Zell on April 13, and Schafshill on April 15. On April 17 we came to the Danube River opposite Weltenberg. We crossed the river on a raft-like ferry, with the current of the Danube River providing the power to move the ferry slowly, smoothly, and quietly across the river. A cable running from the ferry to another cable strung across the river kept the ferry from going downstream. We stayed in Weltenberg the night of April 17.

We walked through Helchenback on April 18 and Boganhausen (north of Pfeffenhausen) on April 21. The night of April 22 most of our group crowded into a small, beautiful Catholic Church in the tiny village of Margarethenried, but some men had to stay outside in a cold rain.

On about April 25 or 26 we walked near, and beyond, the huge POW camp at Moosburg, to which part of our group was returned on May 3 after we were liberated. We walked through Untermachensburg on April 27, Inning on April 29, and Vertin on April 30. A light snow fell on May 1 when we walked to Obertaufkirchen.

As we approached Gars-am-Inn, about thirty-five miles straight east of Munich, just before noon on May 2, we paused to look down on the village of Gars on the near side of the Inn River. Because the village was being used as a German hospital town, red crosses were painted on the roofs of some buildings. As we viewed the village and the river below, German troops blew up the only bridge by dropping the center into the river. We continued our walk to the town square, where our guards tried to get us to walk several miles downstream and cross the river on a dam. They promised us a good, hot meal that night. We had heard this promise several times before, but we had never gotten the good, hot meal.

The ranking American colonel refused to walk downstream and cross the river on a dam. He told us to spread throughout the village and ignore any order he might give to reassemble in the town square. Kessinger and I walked a short distance to a home where we were given hot water to wash and shave and some bread and jam.

During the afternoon our guards quietly disappeared. As darkness began to fall, American 14th Armored Division tanks rolled into Gars without firing a shot, and we were liberated, this time for good. Tankers gave us boxes of ten-in-one rations, and we proceeded to eat too much and get sick. The next day, May 3, we were transported by truck to the former POW camp at Moosburg, which was terribly overcrowded. I was transported with other former POWs to an airport at Ingolstadt on May 7. Two days later I was flown in a C-47 named "Ready Teddy" to Rheims for refueling and over Paris to LeHavre. During ten days at nearby Camp Lucky Strike, I was debriefed, deloused, given new clothing, and given a medical examination. I took a shower for the second time since December 14, sent a telegram to my parents, and started eating six small meals a day.

On May 19 I was in a group that sailed from LeHavre on the U.S.S. General William H. Gordon. After a stop at Port of Spain, Trinidad, on May 29-31 to unload some air force personnel and their equipment, we sailed to New York, arriving on June 4 to a gala celebration in the harbor. Interestingly, we docked between the Queen Elizabeth, on which I sailed to Scotland seven months earlier, and the Queen Mary.

After returning to the States in June, 1945, I was assigned as a company commander to a training regiment at Camp Robinson, Arkansas. I completed my military service in January, 1946.

I taught accounting and worked as an administrator at the University of Kansas for forty years, retiring in December, 1986, as Director of Business and Fiscal Affairs (Vice President for Finance in a business entity). I have been married 55 years to my wife, Phyllis. We have a son, daughter-in-law, and six-year-old twin granddaughters. I keep busy doing volunteer work, co-managing a bluebird trail of 85 nesting boxes at Clinton State Park, attending University of Kansas concerts, plays, and athletic contests, and presenting programs about Eastern bluebirds. On November 11 at halftime of the

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Kansas-Texas football game I was recognized for my fifty years of volunteer service to the University of Kansas football and basketball programs.

I have probably written far more than you and Bill Warthen wanted. You may use what you want. If you want more information or need clarification, please let me know. Please send a copy of this letter to Bill, because I do not have his U.S. mail address.

Best wishes to you for the holiday season and for the year 2001.

Sincerely,



L. Martin Jones

Formerly a platoon leader of Company G, 423rd Regiment, 106th Infantry Division.

Notes: The blunders made by General Eisenhower and his staff in the Battle of the Bulge are well documented in a PBS program, "Military Blunders: the Battle of the Bulge," and several books, one of which is "A War To Be Won: Fighting the Second World War," by Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, pages 463-472, copyright 2000.

My college roommate, Robert L. Coleman of Junction City, Kansas, was a P-47 pilot. He was shot down and killed on April 1, 1945, very near the village from which I watched P-47s strafe nearby villages. He could have been piloting one of the planes I observed on that Easter Sunday.

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December 20, 2000

Mr. Bob Thompson
7448 E. 68th Place
Tulsa, OK 39206

Dear Bob,

After I mailed my five-page letter to you yesterday, I had another e-mail message from Bill Warthen.

I enclose a copy of my e-mail response to Bill's most recent message. I will try to provide the same information to you and Bill.

Our weather here in Lawrence the past week reminded me of the weather conditions in the Battle of the Bulge in December, 1944.

Sincerely,



L. Martin Jones

Enc. Copy of December 19 e-mail to Bill Warthen

bwarthen@cybersouth, 03:29 PM 12/19/20, I mailed letter to Bob

To: bwarthen@cybersouth.com
From: Martin Jones <lmmjones@eagle.cc.ukans.edu>
Subject: I mailed letter to Bob
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments:

Bill,

Today I received your December 19 e-mail letter. But BEFORE I read your e-mail message, I mailed a five-page letter to Bob Thompson in Tulsa. Because I do not have your U.S. mail address, I asked him to mail a copy of my letter to you. However, if you send me your U.S. mail address, I will mail a copy of my five-page letter to you.

In my letter to Bob, I listed a number of blunders made by Eisenhower and his staff in the Battle of the Bulge. As a footnote to my letter, I tell you where these blunders are documented. Now I remember that I omitted one blunder made by Ike and his staff.

On December 10 the 106th Division moved into positions occupied by the 2nd Division. Before this time, the commander of the 2nd division had TWICE asked for permission to move two of his regiments from exposed positions on the Schnee Eifel several miles to the west to better defensive positions. He requests were DENIED.

After the 106th division moved into these positions, the 106th division commander, General Alan W. Jones, TWICE sought permission to move the 422nd and 423rd regiments from these exposed positions on the Schnee Eifel to better defensive positions several miles to the west. His requests were DENIED, also. Then on the second day of the battle, the two exposed regiments, 422nd and 423rd, were surrounded and cut off from other Allied units.

First, the two regiments were positioned poorly, and, second, they were denied permission to move several miles to better defensive positions. And, thirdly, they were told to hold at all costs. And, finally, they were denied permission to withdraw to the west until after they ran out of ammunition. Given these decisions by the top brass, the two regiments did not have a chance.

I am not bitter, really. But I would like for people to know the truth about the conditions under which we fought.

L. Martin Jones, 423/G

I haven't read your e-mail message carefully. I wanted to send this message to you first.

L. Martin Jones, 423/G