

## STIELDORF

The days and events are becoming a little muddled in my memory. I joined the C Company of the 78<sup>th</sup> Division, 309th Infantry Regiment, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, some time after the Battle of the Bulge. The battalion had lost so many men through that experience that they needed replacements.

I walked across the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen a few nights before it collapsed into the Rhine River. I was on the east side of the Rhine when the bridge fell. We had an area of only four or five miles east of the river when that happened.

I joined my platoon of C Company toward evening. We were right on the front. We could see the bonfires of the German soldiers ahead and needed to guard the area between them and us all night. Artillery was passing overhead going in all directions.

The next morning, another battalion moved up through our town. They went on to carry the front forward so that our battalion could pull back for a couple of days' rest.

When their tanks and weapons carriers came into the town where we were, the Germans began firing at them. They made two direct hits on the house that I was in while waiting to pull back.

After showers, clean clothes and a couple of days' rest, we moved upriver a little ways and came back up to the front in another area.

We waited at a set of buildings that must have been a farm site. We took some artillery fire there, but I only remember one soldier receiving an injury.

In the afternoon we got orders to move to the next town and search it out after another outfit had captured it and moved on forward.

We searched through the houses and other buildings. There were no people, of course. Finally, some people were seen coming out from a cave or protection of some kind when they saw that the danger of artillery was past.

It was about this time that two German soldiers were coming up the street with their hands on top of their heads. One was a middle-aged man; the other was a very young man. Apparently, they had hidden themselves when the German army retreated, and when we arrived and it was safe to come out they surrendered to us. It became my job to guard them for the afternoon, or until there were more prisoners to march back to wherever they took the prisoners.

Toward evening we got orders to move forward to the next town, after it was shelled by the artillery. That town, I later learned, was Stieldorf.

We moved through the town too fast and got past a sniper in a house. He began firing at us from behind. As we came out from behind a building and ran down the street to a house on the other side of the street, he had an open view, and time to do considerable damage.

When the man in front of me was about halfway between the building where we were waiting and the next house where we were advancing, I started running down the street following him toward that house. He went down, and he was calling for some help as I ran past him.

A little way past him I felt a sting in my lower left leg. Within two or three steps, something hit my upper left leg and knocked me down. I left my weapon, a 30-caliber Browning automatic rifle, lying in the street, and began to crawl toward the house. That was too slow, so I got up and hobbled into the house. This was March 20, 1945.

Once in the house, I took all the Sulfa pills in my first aid kit and drank all the water in my canteen, as per orders upon being wounded.

There was a light machine gun crew in the room where the wounded were gathering. They were firing out a window toward the front at the Germans moving back.

When the firing stopped, there were ten wounded in the room. One had a shoulder wound, and the rest were leg wounds. When the first aid crew arrived, the young German soldier that had surrendered earlier was there assisting the medics in picking up the wounded. He looked at me and shook his head. I have always wondered what he was thinking.

The young German was on one side of me, and a medic on the other, to assist me to the Jeep to leave. It had been long enough that my leg was getting very stiff and sore. They had their arms around me and I had an arm around each of their shoulders.

As we were leaving, I turned to see the soldier who had gone down just ahead of me in the street. But the medic put his arm up in front of my face so that I could not see his body still lying there in the street.

Harley Clare Headley – January 1995

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