

James G. Graff

U.S. Army 35th Infantry Division



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Combat Infantryman with 35th Division

In May, 1944, when I was 18, I was drafted into the U. S. Army from my home town of Middletown, Illinois and completed basic training at Camp Hood, Texas. After basic, we went by train and then were trucked to the Boston docks where, on December 22, we boarded the British liner, Aquitania and sailed for seven days. We had 8000 men on board and spent Christmas eve at sea. Our destination was Glasgow, Scotland. We were crossing the English Channel on New Years Eve. On January 4, 1945 we loaded into open trucks and drove about 90 miles with the temperature just above zero. Somewhere around Metz, France, I saw General George S. Patton, Commander of the Third Army with a pearl-handle revolver on him. We got the word that we were assigned to be 134th Infantry Regiment of the 35th Division. We finally got to the front lines in the dark and found a hole to sleep in. The next day the chaplain held a church service. Somebody said, "There were no atheists in a foxhole."

My unit moved up to Marvie and the next morning we joined elements of the 6th Armored Division pushing east. Later, they called this the Battle of the Bulge. We moved into Arloncourt and saw the knocked-out allied tanks and a field of

dead G.I.'s. Three tanks were still burning. We soon came under German tank fire and dug in. One man was killed and seven were wounded. Next we moved to Michamps which was practically destroyed. Several of the men had frostbite and their feet were frozen. As we walked across a field in knee-deep snow, we were greeted by heavy small arms fire. My weapon was a BAR and my partner fell face snow in the snow. I rolled him over thinking that he was dead, but when his eyes blinked, I knew that he had just fainted .

We jumped off again on February 10 preparing to cross the Roer River, but the night before the Germans opened the flood gates of huge dams below us sending millions of gallons of water to flood the Roer Valley. The Germans began to drop mortar bombs on us to cover their withdrawal. Several bombs fell close to us, one hitting the dugout just to our left. The next morning my left eye was swollen shut from the concussions and I went back to the aid station. The Captain, a medical officer, gave me some boric acid crystals. I soaked it, but it got no better. Then a lieutenant spied me and sent me back to a 35th Division hospital at Sittard, Holland. It was my first night's sleep in almost two months. After six days of penicillin, I was better. During that stay we had a German air raid on the hospital and our fighters managed to shoot down a couple of planes.

When I arrived back at the company, I was selected to go with a group of combat engineers (60yj Batt.) to cut barbed wire near the German lines. On our return we were strafed by one of our own planes and only survived by laying in some deep tank tracks. The next night, as we moved out to another town we heard small arms fire coming at us. One of our men had fallen into a creek about chest deep and we couldn't be seen. I went back, located him and cut off all his equipment. Then I carried him back to the road under fire. At our reunion in 2002, the 134th Infantry Regiment and the United States Army awarded me the Bronze Star Medal for meritorious achievement and exemplary performance of duty in active ground combat. It was a proud moment for me.

We moved up to the west bank of the Rhine River near Rheinberg. Barrage balloons were moored over the crossing sites, anti-aircraft batteries were dug in and scores of artillery battalions were firing in support of those crossing the river. At dark, we were strafed by German aircraft as we crossed. Clearing out Rheinberg, we encountered Germans in almost every house. We were 47 miles from Berlin. In about 100 days, my unit, the 134th Infantry, took three towns in Belgium and 57 cities and towns in Germany. There were many dead and wounded in these battles and many close calls for me.

We were relieved by the 90th Division and went back to France for R & R. Later, I served on occupation

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duty and on August 15, 1946 left on a passenger train for Camp Lucky Strike at LeHavre, France. With 15,000 men heading for home, we set out to sea on the Queen Mary. We encountered a hurricane about halfway across the Atlantic with forty-five foot waves breaking over the main deck. Everyone got seasick. We steamed into New York harbor on September 15 and docked at Pier 90. Back at Camp Campbell, Kentucky, I was discharged on April 24, 1946. The entire 35th Division was de-activated. So ended the story of the 134th Infantry of the 35th Division—a dam good outfit. I married my wife Alice, raised a family and spent the next 58 years farming at Middletown.

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