

Elbert J. Gebhardt

U.S. Army

106th Cavalry, Reconnaissance Group, F Troop



Elbert Julius Gebhardt, Jr.
U.S. Army, Tank Commander WWII

My name is Elbert Julius Gebhardt, Jr. and I am a World War II veteran. I served as a tank commander in Europe with the 121st Squadron of the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Group. F Troop started out as a motorcycle troop and ended up as a tank troop. Campaign participation credits were given for Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes-Alsace, Rhineland and Central Europe. Troop decorations awarded were the French Croix de Guerre with Palm, WW II Medal with streamer embroidered Moselle, French Croix de Guerre with Palm, WW II streamer embroidered Caen-Falaise and French Croix de Guerre, WW II Fourragere.

Personal medals awarded to me were: Bronze Star, Good Conduct Medal, American Service Medal, Europe-Africa-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with 4 Battle Stars, WW II Victory Medal, a "Thank you, America" certificate from the French Government, Sharpshooter Medal for the 45 caliber Thompson Submachine gun and the Expert

Medal with the 45 caliber pistol.

I enlisted in F Troop, a motorcycle troop, in the Illinois National Guard in 1939 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois. I was inducted into Federal Service on 25 November, 1940 and housed and trained at the Illinois State Fairgrounds. On January 4, 1941, I traveled by rail to Camp Livingston, Louisiana where we lived in the mud and gas-heated tents as the camp was still being built. Here, we trained on motorcycles learning motorcycle combat and riding traffic guard for the 1st Squadron horse portees, (horse trailers), on road marches and field exercises. On April 8, 1942, the unit was reorganized and F Troop changed from motorcycles to a tank troop with M-5 tanks with a 37mm cannon. From September 15 to November 10, 1942, we participated in large-scale maneuvers in Louisiana...ALO and also in maneuvers in Mississippi and Louisiana in 1943.

An interesting story called the "The Popgun War" occurred during the LA maneuvers. Two small boys, ages 9 and 11, were playing with a carbide cannon just as the Blue Army was advancing on the Sabine River. Thinking they were being fired on by the Red Army, the Blue Army fired back. The battle raged for half an hour before the boys were discovered at which time the Colonel in charge asked the boys' father to have his sons cease fire so the other war could proceed.

On August 25, 1943, our unit moved to Fort Hood, Texas where we became school troops for the tank destroyers. We moved by rail to Camp Shanks, New York on February 17, 1944. We set sail for Europe aboard the French luxury liner, the Ile de France on February 27, 1944 and landed in Glasgow, Scotland on March 9, 1944. We then moved to Doddington Park near Stoke-on-Trent, England. On my first mail call, I received a telegram saying that my mother had passed away. Needless to say, neither my brother, who was with the Army Air Corps in Africa, nor I, were able to attend her funeral.

Here the unit was reorganized, the 1st Squadron becoming the 106th Reconnaissance

Elbert J. Gebhardt

U.S. Army

106th Cavalry, Reconnaissance Group, F Troop

Squadron and the 2ND Squadron becoming the 121ST Squadron of the 106th Cavalry Reconnaissance Group. Soon after arriving in England, all drivers were taken to vehicle storage areas where they picked out their vehicle and drove them back to Doddington Park. This was no easy job for our large vehicles as the roads in England were very narrow and twisty. Our training continued until June 18 when we moved to South Hampton, loaded on a Liberty ship and landed on Utah Beach in France.

Following the break-out from Normandy, we were issued new M-24 tanks with a 75mm cannon which was a great improvement over the M-5. We fought through France and Germany. Our last conflict was at Salisburg, Austria. I returned to the states via New York and was discharged from Camp Sheridan at Chicago, Illinois on September 25, 1945.

I re-enlisted in the Illinois National Guard with the 106th Heavy Tank Battalion, the 44th Division on November 5, 1946 at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois and was discharged July 23, 1951. The highest rank I attained was Master Sergeant.

In WW II, F Troop, 121st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron lost 15 tanks out of 17, had 10 tankers killed in action and received 1 Silver Star, 36 Bronze Stars and 56 Purple Hearts. "The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe," is a book written about the experiences of the men and by the men themselves and can be purchased at the Illinois State Military Museum at Camp Lincoln, Springfield, Illinois.

Elbert J. Gebhardt, Jr
Springfield, Illinois