

Walter Harris

U.S. Army
90th Division, 359th Regiment



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U.S. Army
3RD Army, 90th Div. 359th Inf. Rgmt.

Walter Harris Remembers
World War II—(Age 18-July, 1944)

In my war, no one was in front of us except my Captain and my Sergeant. They were always up front. Sgt. MacMahon would say, this way or that way and we went. We never knew where in the hell we were till we came to a half ass little town that had a signpost.

There were five major campaigns in Europe. I made the last three. MacMahon (Sgt. Marlin L. MacMahon of Granger, TX) made all five, but he paid for it. In Amberg, Germany after the war, I saw him come walking through the barracks, his eyes sunk way in and he was talking to himself. He was tall and gaunt, thin as a rail--had a tousle of hair that always stuck up. He looked so old, but he was

only 25. He never wore a helmet—only a wool knit cap. The war hurt him. Hell, it hurt us all. Sometimes my heart hurts, I saw so much killing.

My friend, Carl Sabo, was in the 42nd and we talked about his Division coming up to the Ardennes for the Battle of the Bulge. The 90th was already there since November. The Germans surprised the hell out of us coming through the Ardennes forest in the middle of winter. It was to be the worst winter of my life, always cold, wet, dirty, little or no hot food, living in fox holes, the coldest winter in Europe in a hundred years. Then the Bulge began on Dec. 17th.



**359th Infantry Regiment,
90th Infantry Division
D-day Landing**

My company and Mac (my Sgt.) had landed D-Day June 5, in Normandy and fought the 11th German Panzer Division with its 200 tanks across Europe. We were still after them in Czechoslovakia. There's nothing like the sound of those tanks coming at you. They surrendered to my company in a place called Klatoie, Czechslovakia. They had 11 tanks left. A German

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general drove up one day in a jeep with a white flag. He said he would only surrender only to an officer of the same rank. Capt. Canning (John P. Canning-White Plains, NY) pulled his revolver, put it in his stomach and said, you lose, back in the jeep.

Back in Belgium, we were going up a hill. The snow was deep and hard. The Jerries were on top and you could hear the bullets ricocheting off the ice. The orders came to move and we went up that hill. Mac was in front. We would follow him anywhere. He was like God. He said do what I do and I did. He was the ultimate soldier--and a killing machine. We finally took the hill. But, our platoon was now only 7 men--should have been 30. We were a bunch of infantry replacements, 18-19 year olds, had not trained together until the Bulge. But, you never had to look behind you. You just knew your back was covered. You trusted them. Did I tell you that my company was replaced within 30 days after D-Day? All 250 men killed or wounded. It was a killing ground.

After the Bulge, our guys had bombed the hell out of the roads. The Jerries were firing mortars at us and then the whole world just exploded. I was bleeding from the head, back and legs and the medics picked me up. At Luxemburg, there was a hot shower. After you've had the GI's for a week that was the best thing about getting hit--the clean clothes. I was sick as hell, they stitched me up, shot me full of penicillin for pneumonia and strep throat and then yanked my tonsils. It was my first time inside since November. Mac came for me in 5 days and I went back with him.

My company was in Belgium, Company A, 1st Platoon. One day we were marching down a road. I happened to be walking with Mac and he stopped still and just looked. The Jerries had hung a GI paratrooper in a tree. Mac said cut him down, we did but had to keep going. We got to a place called St. Vith, Belgium. After 2 days, we took the town and were standing in the square. Hoblock, one of the 10 replacements that had come up with me was killed. That night Mac told us that we were better

men than those with him at Normandy and he was honored to serve with us. I never forgot that

We were in Belgium at a crossroads outside St. Vith. I was on outpost duty in the loft of a barn. The Jerries started firing mortars at us and I was blown out of the window onto a stone water trough, broke my glasses and rifle stock, hurt my back and took some metal, but nothing serious, except I couldn't see. Went back to the aid station, got new glasses and Mac handed me a new rifle. I was back in business.

We crossed the Rhine, got to a place called Villamellis, Germany sometime in April, 45. Lt. Canning said pointing ahead, see that tower--smoke pouring out--its Walthers Gun Factory--take it down. A guy with a 57 mm anti-tank gun came up. It wasn't worth a whoop in hell. He fired, it was a dud, fired again, another dud. On the third shot he took it down. We walked through the factory--lots of weapons--all kinds.

A guy named Mike Brocco and I were on guard duty--outskirts of Wallsassen, Germany. We were lying under a boxcar in the rail yards. What in hell was he doing there? We had graduated together from St. Mels in Chicago. Mike wasn't even in our company. He just appeared out of nowhere. That was why we won the war--everything was screwed up. About dawn--it was foggy, but we heard hob nail boots coming--it was 3 Jerries. They got closer and we saw one had a mauser. We killed them, found out that one was a woman. Our chaplain always carried a revolver -told us the next day that Theresa Newman, the stigmatist, was holed up in a basement and we could go pray with her but I had guard duty .

One day Lt. William Pough (pn Poe) came riding up--he had just arrived from Ft. Benning, GA. It was March, 1945. He had on a new uniform--the pinks--remember them. We had lost so many officers and he was a replacement. Capt. Canning had taken a terrible leg wound,

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but we got him back. Lt. Pough looked through his binoculars, saw the Jerries down below, grabbed an M-1 and started firing. Mac ran to him grabbed the rifle away cursing and said you wait till they fire first. The M-1 was a good weapon--it took a magazine with 8 shells. No one was in front of us, but the Jerries. We killed anything that moved or they'd kill us .

One day Mac said I want 2 guys. He pointed at the Sgt. "You and the kid from Chicago". That was me. We got in a jeep and headed off down a hill pulling up in front of a low brick building. He told the Sgt. to cover the rear and Mac and I kicked in the front door. There stood an old man with white hair and a room full of Hitler Yougen, kids about 13 to 15 years old. Mac sized up the situation and yelled at the teacher and the kids--go home, get out. The kids wore knives on their belts and Mac grabbed one as they ran out. He handed it to me saying, here's a souvenir kid, take it home. And I did.

On June 6, 1944, which was D-Day, I had graduated from St. Mels High School in Chicago, IL. I had turned 18 in February. After basic training at Camp Roberts, California, I was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey where we put out to sea and after 6 days arrived in Scotland. From there, we went by troop train down the coast, crossed the English Channel and arrived at LeHarve, France. By Thanksgiving we were in the south of France at Metz. Three weeks later General Patton swung our 90th Division north

in a 100 miles rush to the Ardennes Forest and the Battle of the Bulge began. It began on December 17, 1944 and the battle went on for 6 weeks.

Back in Amberg, Germany after the war, we moved into a deserted German barracks, laid around, read Stars and Stripes and Willie and Joe,

read about the war in the Pacific, got mail and drank fresh milk for the first time since leaving the States.



After 2 weeks we went back on guard duty and started restoring water and electricity to some German towns. Mac had 90 points so he prepared to leave us. I had the honor of carrying his B-4 bag to the jeep. I had only about 50 points, had to stay there awhile. I was transferred from one engineering battalion to another for nearly a year. I was the Company clerk in Nuermberg when I met a guy named Charlie Gan. His family had returned to Germany from Chicago, Illinois in the 1930's when Hitler had called for Germans to come home to the Fatherland. Charlie Gan mimicked Hitler saying, "Once a German, always a German". He was older than me and I wondered how he had escaped serving in the war.

We had to get our own laundry done and I found an elderly couple living in a 2nd floor flat in Nuremberg with their little granddaughter about 7 years old. I called her Blondie. That Christmas Day, 1945 I got some coffee, biscuits and chocolate and went to visit them. The grandfather said that Blondie's father, his son, had been killed in the Army in Russia and her mother was killed during an Allied bombing. They had a little Christmas tree and we sang "Silent Night" in German. In January, my replacement came. His name was Jacob Katz from New York City. He was a nice guy. I took his picture. On Feb. 16, I turned 20. I gave my dog, a Brittany spaniel named Caldonia, to Jacob Katz. In May, I went to Le Harve, France. I had 55 points. It was called Camp Lucky Strike.

We were preparing to leave and standing just behind me in line another GI was called out by the Lt. He asked the GI how many points he had. Ninety-one said the guy. How did you get that many--you were a replacement, weren't you? The guy said, "No, I came over in 43, but I spent a lot of time in the brig". Just as the line was moving up to board the USS George Washington, the same Lt. called me out and asked me, Where's your tie? I told him I didn't have a tie.

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He said he had to keep order so I would have to stand for court martial. In a tent nearby I got the paper saying I had been court marshaled and that was bad time. Along with 8000 GI's, I finally boarded the USS George Washington for home. I had 55 points. The next day the CO came into

headquarters with my court martial paper. His name was Blevins from the south side of Chicago. "Sgt. Harris," he said, "What's this all about?" So, I told him. He wadded up the paper and tossed it out the porthole window into the Atlantic. It was gone and my records showed "no bad time." On June 6, 1946, we came into NY harbor. The New York Times had a picture of the USS. Washington that said "D-Day Plus 2 Years" on the front page.

On the train back to Illinois were hundreds of GI's, all so happy to be going home. In three days at Ft. Sheridan, I was given an honorable discharge, a physical and got paid. There were many German POW's working around the camp living the good life. I was waiting for my parents to pick me up when one of the POW's made an attempt to escape. An MP fired at him with a shotgun, the shell ricocheted off the sidewalk hitting a Lt. in the leg. I saw that he had his arm in a sling and a CBI patch on his uniform. I thought what a tough piece of luck to have survived the China, India Burma theater and get shot when you finally got home.

Remember when we saw Band of Brothers and the old Capt.'s grandson asked if he had been a hero in the war? And the Capt. answered, "No, but I served with a company of heroes." That really got to me because when I look back that's what happened to me. I know I am a flawed man, but back then, I was just young and we did it together. We were brothers, too. I often think of all those guys who never made it home and all those wounded and I pray for them. I wonder whatever happened to them --to Mac and Pough and Canning. I pray for them. And at Christmas--it was such a bad time and when

winter comes I start remembering how it was. I just can't help it.

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