



Thomas F. Hill
World War II, Europe
U.S. Army, Corporal
Unit: 106th Division

Battle of the Bulge and
P.O.W. Stalag IX B
Bad Orb, Germany

Thomas F. Hill

Veterans
History
Project
Transcript

Interview tape donated
November 9, 2005

Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois



106th Infantry Division

Recipient of
Purple Heart
and
Good Conduct
Medals



Niles Public Library District
Veteran's History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Thomas F. Hill**

Rank: **Corporal**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Army**

Theater: **Europe**

Unit: 106th Division

A cassette tape of this deceased veteran's memoir of his experience in the Battle of Bulge and subsequent imprisonment at Stalag IX B in Bad Orb, Germany was presented to Niles Public Library on November 9, 2005 by his wife, Loretta Hill, in support of the Veterans History Project. The memoir had been recorded by Mr. Hill on cassette in 1983 at the request of his daughter at a time when he was affected by emphysema. Mrs. Hill also brought in a prisoner-of-war letter he had to sent to her for scanning. It follows this transcript and provides an interesting contrast between actual and censored experience.

This is Thomas Hill's rendition of the Battle of the Bulge and of his stay in Stalag IX B in Bad Orb, Germany (Veteran's words.)

002 -- near the Siegfried Line's pillboxes

On approximately December 15th, 1944, there were four of us up on the front line which was better known as the Siegfried Line where the Germans had a lot of pillboxes and things like that. The four of us would never go into pillboxes because nine out of ten times they had them hooked up so that if you walked into them away they would go; they just blew up - so naturally we stayed out of them. And we always got kind of close to them because it was some protection because sometimes the German artillery was coming in on us.

On December 15, 1944, quite late in the afternoon, we retired for the night. I always stayed about 30 yards from where the forward observer was, to his left. We had three lines open. My job was to keep two of the lines open between a half-way point between infantry and artillery with a third line which he used at all times. But once it got dark out there was no communications between infantry and artillery. The reason is you would be giving away your position so all during the night that night. Gosh, it was an awful lot of artillery fire - just about all of it German. We did not know it at the time but they were knocking out the 106th Artillery. So we were all waiting for morning to come so we could call back in and find out what's coming off. Naturally we couldn't see a doggone thing and we're dug in up here.

So anyhow about approximately 8 o'clock the next morning it started to get a touch light out anyhow and every morning at that time either me or Joe Gore would go over and get some coffee or rolls or whatever they had over in the infantry tent where you could go 2 to 3 blocks away from where we were located at. So anyhow me and Gore were standing there talking which one of us, whose turn it was, naturally, to go over and get it. So just about this time boy, was there a racket, just a terrible racket. So anyhow I got up and I looked, "Oh, my God!" There were German tanks coming towards us from, oh, the first time I saw them there, were I would say oh I would say a block and a half away. Man they just kept on coming and coming. I would say about approximately, oh maybe, 60, 70, 80 tanks over, spread out over about 3 blocks, maybe, 4 blocks, could be.

Now everybody says, they talk about the Tiger tanks, only about 1/3 of these were Tiger tanks. Most of them were the small tanks, much more maneuverable than the Tiger tanks were, but they just kept on coming. Oh, we had no choice, but just get down where we were at; we could not move so the tanks approached us. Oh, I would say, approximately 5 minutes, they were on us. They kept on coming by for, oh maybe, I would say 20 minutes, 15 minutes, something like that. It seemed much longer but that's all that it was – 15 to 20 minutes.

036 – 'Let's get the hell out of here!'

Now at this point we felt "Well, they're by us." So anyway we did get up. The German artillery was following them. They were coming up, oh approximately, a block and half, two blocks behind them. So as we watched them... again we're sunk. We're just in here, just the 4 of us, and we're up, we're about maybe $\frac{3}{4}$ of a block ahead of the infantry because we're fire direction. We're the ones who were calling back and telling our howitzers which way to shoot. So anyhow, there we were. But they only came, maybe about another hundred yards, and they quit. Then they moved back. Then they moved forward about a block to my left. Again, they came on very strong this time, very, very, very strong. What they done – they split us in half. Then, again they moved back and came forward again and split us again. In other words, they had us in 4 sections. So Winston, pretty smart fellow, says, "Come on, let's get the hell out of here." So anyhow we moved left. I would say, we just took off, is what we done. And we did, after going, maybe, 4, 5,

So we joined them. We kept on going and we ran into, approximately, I would say, another 150 so we were about 300 strong.

055 – hoping to reach Bastogne

At this time there was a Colonel Thompson; he seemed to be the head of the works and 2 majors. So what they done was they got up and they started talking, especially Thompson. He says, “Men, just follow me. I think we can get to Bastogne. Where I’m sure they’ll be able to hold out.” So we did. We took off and we followed him. They didn’t even go 20 to 30 yards. They hit a mine. There was Colonel Thompson, 2 Majors and a driver in a jeep. They hit a mine; they were blown to kingdom-come. My God, they were killed immediately. Whenever you run over a mine like that, the jeep flew about six feet into the air. The wheels flew off of it and when they come down – if nothing else got them, I guess the combustion would kill them.

Anyhow then the highest ranking officer they we had among us was a Captain. He told us, “Well, gentlemen, we’re just going to see if we can’t keep on going the same way, but no jeeps.” They would keep off the road entirely. We would walk on the side. Again, we took off, and all of us and a terrific amount of artillery started coming in on us. We couldn’t even tell from where it came, but I think it came from two directions. One was a little bit to the left of where we were and one back of us.

068- getting hit by artillery fire

This is where I got hit. I got hit in the left hand. That thumb was almost taken off, and I got 18 stitches later on, put in my left ankle, plus my neck stung like a son-of-a-gun. I was also hit in the neck. So anyhow it was coming towards dark at this time so anyhow we all dug in again. And I really felt lousy. Well, so many fellas had been hit by this time also from the artillery. Most of it was aerial burst where the bombs go up, about 10 to 12 feet above you. So anyhow we woke up the next morning and we continued on. One thing I’m very thankful for – I was with friends, and they helped me so I could walk a little bit anyhow. So we kept on and again we ran into a German pocket, I would say of about a 100. Again there was a battle there, and they backed off.

081 – aftermath of GI massacre(possibly at Malmedy)

Again, we took off. Now we were marching, I would say, maybe a day and a half something like that, but we did run across the 200 that were mowed down by the Germans. What happened

there, though, was – these fellows were all wounded, practically all of them, and the Germans were on the move. Naturally, the Germans could not take them with them, being on the move. They could not return them back because they had to keep on going along with the tanks. Really, I guess, it came down to – they had no alternative either. So anyhow what they done - they started marching them, and they marched them into a field. And in this field was 4 or 5 trucks, German trucks. Inside these trucks are machine guns. When they got them all in the center, they just let down the tail gate and killed every damn American there – approximately 200. We seen this but I can say this also, we were not the first ones there. There were others had been before us, because they had no dog tags on. All dog tags had been taken off. But there was nobody alive, either.

094 – marching as German offensive continues

So we took off again. It became night time again, so we just dug in. The next morning again we took off and started marching. I don't think anybody knew where they were marching to, to tell the truth. The captain who had us, he was a young fellow, probably 22, 23. Pfingsten was his name. He didn't know where we were going. Now I know what I didn't know then, of course at the time. Anyhow, after marching about approximately five or six hours we sat down to rest. More German artillery came in on us. We could not figure out even where it was coming from. Anyhow, we dug in again where we were at. After about a half-hour everything went quiet again so we got up and we started marching. Again, we ran into the damn German infantry. Another battle took place. Now it took its toll because at this time I know there was about 300 of us three days before this. I know there's only maybe a 150 of us, 175, something like that, left. How many were killed? How many were wounded? I do not know.

Anyhow night time set in again. We dug in again, and this time I would say 75% of us were wounded. We had been hit with artillery some way or another. So the next morning we woke up. Approximately, I would say, 100 yards behind us, there were 4 tanks. The other side of us about, in front of us, about 75 to 100 yards, there were 4 more tanks.

112- Germans make a "life or death" offer

When it got nice and light, three men came down, all carrying white flags, spoke to the captain and said, "Do you want to die or do you want to surrender? It's up to you." Frankly, we had

nothing left. We had no shells, no mortar shells or anything like that. We were done for. So anyhow we decided, the captain – I wasn't the one who decided, the Captain, he decided, OK, to surrender.

117-surrendering and marching

And when you surrender, anything else you have you have to give to them – which we did. And again they started marching us. We ended up in a field where there were approximately, I would say, 3 to 400 more GIs – some 20th Division, some 106th Infantry Division. There was part of an anti-tank division there, and again I would say, man, maybe 25-50% are wounded. Everybody seemed to be bleeding some way or another. So anyhow they kept us in a big field all night. Then we started out the next morning and we marched. From approximately 8 o'clock until 2 o'clock the following morning. Naturally, every couple of hours we did stop and we did rest. But by this time, now if you drop out by the way they kill you. It's all over.

We just kept on marching. And as I say, if I didn't have friends with me, there was no way I could have possibly made it. Anyhow we ended up in a great big field at 2 in the morning. The temperature at this time, I would say, maybe 20 above, something like that. We all lay down the ground.

133- how you slept in the cold

What you do is you lay down the ground and one man would get on top of you. You all huddle up real close together. Try then, you're so exhausted. You do fall asleep. For maybe, oh, a half-hour, forty-five minutes, hour maybe, and you change position. You'd be on the bottom. You'd be on the top. You done this for six, seven hours, until it got light out. But we all, everybody there, got frozen feet and frozen hands, fingers I would say. Because your feet and your fingers, all the skin, you could just peel it right off after a couple of days.

141 -- loaded into boxcars

But anyhow, they did load us on boxcars – 66 men to a car. These boxcars were about half the size of our cars. Now remember there is no latrine. There's nothing on these. Over in the corner is where you get rid of everything. 66 men, spend your time one hour down, one hour up, one hour down, one hour up – almost impossible to lay down, but that's the way we were for 9 days. We did stop at maybe, I would say, at 5 different prison camps, but they were all filled – no place for us. So we just kept on and on and on. We were in Frankfurt. Then we moved out of a

Frankfurt just a very, very short distance – which I'm pretty sure was Hanau – terrifically big railroad yards.

And it was just becoming dusk. It was getting dark, then all of a sudden, some Mosquito Bombers came over and dropped some flares. Boy, after that, the RAF came over there with the bombers and they just bombed the hell out of Hanau and the railroad yards. They had some direct hits on our cars. They done it for, oh I would say, 10 minutes maybe; then they left. They had gotten maybe 4 or 5 direct hits on certain cars. What you done was dig great big holes and shovel in. Take the dog tags off what was left. Anyhow we got back in the cars. We went back into Frankfurt where we went down another side track.

161- Stalag IX B, Bad Orb and the "s.-o.-b.s"

At the end of this side track I did see a big sign that said B-A-D -O-R-D something, Bad Orb. Here they got us all of the cars. I was practically being carried off; a lot of them were the same way as myself.

So anyhow this where I found out all the Germans knew was "son-of-a-bitch." All they kept on doing was calling us "son of a bitches." They kept on and on and on. Then they started stoning us, throwing rocks at us, bricks. We started marching. We were told by the guards we got to go about 9 miles, and it's all up. Remember, if you drop out, you're dead. So as I say, I had friends with me. We finally, finally did get to Stalag IX B which was approximately 9 to 10 miles above Bad Orb.

When we got into camp, they did put us in some barracks where we could rest. After resting, they gave everybody an old German canteen. I would say it was probably from World War I, and they gave you 2 potatoes and some greens. I do not know what kind of greens they were, but naturally you ate them like if they were turkey. Then they started interrogating us. "What's your name?" "What's your rank?" "What outfit you with?" "Where'd you come from?" Naturally, you are told to give nothing but your name, rank and serial number which I done and which a number of others did too. Us – they put out to stand out in the cold for about five hours. Anybody that gave, told them the information they wanted they stayed in the barracks. We

should have but like fools we gave them, name, rank and serial number only. So after about 5 hours, a captain came out and says, "Fellas, tell them what they want to know and come on back in the barracks. Big deal." But anyhow we did and we got back into that barracks again.

188- separating out of Jewish GIs

Then each day while you are there you got one piece of bread, you would get one bowl of potato, it's called potato soup, it'd be more or less potato peeling soup. But it was something anyhow. And after about, I would say, a week to two weeks, they separated all Jews from us and none of these Jews were ever heard from again. There was I would say, guessing roughly 30 to 40 of them. Nobody ever heard from them again.

196- dysentery

So anyhow this is the way it just went for, oh, about a little over 4 months, I guess. Everyday you'd get that one bowl of soup and that one piece of bread. We could not work. There were very, very few that could work. Those that could work they'd take out to work on railroads. But just a majority of us just had to stay in camp that's all. And, of course, there's no latrine or washroom or whatever you want to call it. It is a hole in the corner where everybody goes there. And naturally everybody got dysentery. We lost weight like I just couldn't believe it. I knew after about 4 months, I weighed in the neighborhood of 110, 115 pounds probably. There were an awful lot of fellas that died. They get infections; see they had nothing to give us to kill an infection so if you got a bad infection that was it.

208-prisoner-of-war camp justice

I'll just give a couple of the high spots. After approximately six, seven, eight weeks, 2 men they used to keep in the kitchen, the Germans kept two of them in, in the kitchen. This morning they're dead; they were killed. So anyhow they haul all of us out, have us 6 abreast. Commandant of the camp asks, "Who done it?" Nobody says anything. They took 6 men out and put them out and bang down they went. They machine-gunned them down. I was in the 4th line. I guess I'm not a hero because I'd already said about 4 Our Fathers and 4 Hail Marys. Anyhow he took 6 more. Then a chaplain, I do not know from what religion he was from. He asked for just a few minutes with the men which the commandant gave him. He talked to one man and said he was looking for a certain person in his barracks who was not there. So he went over, and he talked to this man, and the man confessed - him and two other fellas broke out of their barracks, went over to the kitchen and killed the two guards - for what reason? Who knows because there

was nothing there for them. So they put them up, right before us, just put them up and “boom” down they went. That’s the end of that.

223 – different work rules for Russians

And it was just, by the way this was a Russian camp. I should have told you. The Russians had to go out every morning and work. If they could not work, they killed them no matter what. There was no such thing as sickness, no excuses, where the Russians were concerned. You either worked or you die – one thing or other. With us if you could not work, they would leave you in the barracks; they did not kill you. This the way it went while we were in there.

230-the heavy bombing

And another high point, I would say, the middle of January or the end of January, a bunch of Mosquito Bombers, now Frankfort was 40 miles away, went over Frankfort dropped flares all over the place. This took place maybe 9, 10 o’clock at night. Then I would say a steady, oh twenty minutes to a half-hour the heavy bombers came over. They’re bombing 40 miles away, and the hills that we were on were just trembling, shaking. It was almost impossible to believe. All you could see was great big flashes, way off in the distance, 40 miles away. Then the barracks just rocked back and forth, back and forth. I don’t know how anybody lived underneath anything like that. But, evidently, they did.

So anyhow, men are dying are at the rate, I would say now, of 4 a day, 5 a day, something like that. See once you get this dysentery you lose everything. You just go in a hole and then you lay down and you just pass away.

246- hope and the liberating of camp

So it was maybe two weeks before we were liberated. This night we’re there and we look out and we can see lights from a long distance away. What they are, they’re our trucks all right, maybe ten miles away, fifteen miles away, I don’t know how far. We could see them which gave us some kind of hope. You see if you got some hope you can go a little bit longer. So anyhow the next three or four nights right in a row, we’re watching these trucks, and they were coming closer. There was no question about that. So then I would say on about on the fourth or fifth night, I thought I heard something outside. It was pretty noisy, but when you looked out, you couldn’t see anything. So anyhow but the next morning there’s a white flag on our camp. And we found out we had been liberated with no guards guarding us. Finally, we were along side of the autobahn. I would say, maybe, about 4 to 5 blocks above the autobahn is where this camp

was located. So then we see some big tanks come tearing, they were our Sherman Tanks come tearing in and knock down the gates and poured into our camp. We had been liberated. My God, how wonderful, just how wonderful it was.

268 – fright

But just before we were liberated, three days it was before that, when the Germans, a German Tank Battalion was moving up the Autobahn, below us there, and some of our planes did spot 'em, and for about two hours they did give them just one bad time where we felt that they would come up and kill all of us. They would leave us away with that but they didn't.

271-de-lousing

So anyhow from here we were flown into Camp Lucky Strike in France (Janville) where immediately they de-loused us. They filled up portable tanks, and we took showers, and they kept on spraying us and showers and sprays and sprays. You see, everybody at this time had lice. You took off your clothes. You looked like you were pregnant. Your stomach was out. Your chest was in, and you had sores all over your body. You were loaded with lice.

That was quite a horrible experience, but I did survive. I would say maybe, maybe one-third of us survived the ordeal. The others all died. But I often thank God for it. That is my life – the Battle of the Bulge and Stalog IX B, Bad Orb, Germany.

Reader's Note:

The following four pages provide:

scans of photos of Pvt. Hill stateside

scans of a letter and post card sent home from Bad Orb

and three photos reproduced from relevant Internet sites.

Photo taken at Camp Roberts, California, where Mr. Hill was sent for basic training. Mrs. Hill believes the photo would have been taken about May, 1944.



Photo taken of Mr. Hill with Tom, Jr., standing before home at 3747 N. Spaulding, Chicago. He was on leave after basic training in California.



Pvt. Hill at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, where the 106th received additional training.



A scanned copy of Corporal Hill's letter home to his wife, Loretta, appears below. It was written in Bad Orb on January 5, 1945. It was her first news from him after the Battle of the Bulge.

Kriegsgefangenenpost
Correspondance des prisonnier de guerre

1945
1. 5. 45

An Loretta Hill
A 8747th Spurling Ave

Deutsches Gebiet Territoire occupé	Südfrankreich France méridionale
Nichtzufolgendes schreiben Biffer les manichs inutiliter	

Empfangsort: Chicago Ill
Lieu de destination

Straße: W. 12th St
Rue

Kreis: Chicago
Arrondissement

Landesteil: _____
Dépt.

Gebührenfrei Franc de port!

U.S. CENSOR

Deutschland (Allemagne)

Lager-Bezeichnung M-Stammlager IX B
Lieu de détention

No. du prisonnier _____
Gefangenennummer

Vor- und Zuname: _____
Nom et prénom

23905
Expéditeur

Auf diese Seite schreibt nur der Kriegsgefangene.
Cette page est réservée au prisonnier de guerre!

Deutlich auf die Zeilen schreiben!
N'écrire que sur les lignes et lisiblement!

Dearest Loretta 1-5-45

I am now a prisoner of war in a German prison camp, but do not worry because we are treated good. I want you to send me a few things, some cigarettes, candy and canned meat and food, but see the Red Cross first to see how much and how often you can send me.

I don't know what information you have received about me but I hope you haven't been worrying to much, and please let my mom and dad know you have heard from me, I don't know why if mention I tho I know you would, we are allowed two letters and five cards a month, four will be sent to you.

I love always and always

Détachez le long de pointille
Hier abtrennen

Second communication from Cpl. Hill to his wife Loretta from Stalag IX B, Bad Orb.

U.S.A. **Kriegsgefangenenpost**
Correspondance des prisonniers de guerre

Postkarte Carte postale

An
A

Mrs Loretta Hill

Gebührenfrei Franc de port!

Absenders
Expéditeurs

Vor- und Zuname:
Nom et prénom
PLU THOMAS F HILL

Gefangenenummer: 23705

Lager-Bezeichnung:
Nom du camp
siehe Rückseite
voir au dos

Empfangsort: 3747th Spaulding
Lieu de destination

Straße:
Rue
Chicago, Ill.

Land: U.S.A.
Landesteil (Provinz usw.)
Département

11387
U.S. CENSOR
Deutschland (Allemagne)

Kriegsgefangenenlager M.-Stammlager IX B
des prisonniers BAD Orb Datum: 1-17-43
Date

Dearest Loretta, I hope you have
received the letter I sent you.
So far everything is going alright
here but I can never tell
you how much I am missing
you and Tom. Please always love
me. Love always and always, Tom

Sampling of topical photos from relevant Internet sites.



“Stalag IX B was located in Bad Orb approximately 30 miles northwest of Frankfurt. The camp held French, Italian, Serbian, Russian, and American P.O.W.s. Conditions in this camp were terrible, and Stalag IXB ranks as one of the worst German camps that held Americans P.O.W.s.” <http://www.lonesentry.com/>



The photo below was taken after the liberation of the camp in April, 1945. It is thought to have been taken by Dr. William L. Casey, an officer from the [23rd Station Hospital](#)

<http://www.lonesentry.com/>



collection of www.LoneSentry.com

“American prisoners of war were freed during the rapid advance through Bad Orb (by the 44th Infantry Division). Many of them were so weak from lack of food they had to be fed in their bunks.”

<http://44thdivision.efouever.com/stalagix.htm>

A helpful history of the 106th Infantry Division can be found at <http://ice.mm.com/user/jpk/stroh.htm>