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'Bulge' Made Him

Christmas POW

Twenty-six years ago this Christmas week, Americans and Germans were killing each other in the snow-blanketed towns and forests of Belgium. This was the Battle of the Bulge—Adolph Hitler's great gamble to cut the Allied offensive in half. Among the thousands of U.S. soldiers caught and confused by that counterattack, launched on Dec. 16, 1944, was James Teason of Elmhurst, then an Army medical officer.

Teason, an artist whose "Suburban Sam" cartoons are a regular feature of Press Publications, remembers it this way. . . .

Rumors flew around our 106th Infantry Division as much as the snow that fell softly on Belgium soil. As ambulance platoon officer of Company B, medical collecting company attached to the 423rd Infantry Regiment, I could sense something was building up.

Snow covered the terrain like a Currier and Ives Christmas card, but an unusual amount of "incoming" artillery shells quickly erased all thoughts of Christmas and home.

You could tell something was in the wind, because of the surge of wounded that poured into our operating room, which was located in a farm house. Both German and American soldiers were being cared for; before, we had had little German patients. This meant that patrols from both sides were clashing more on the line.

The rattle of ground fire increased, as did the snowfall. Jeeps raced here and there as the cold afternoon merged into darkness.



JAMES TEASON . . . He'll never forget that Christmas in Europe.

As our two doctors worked over the wounded, Lt. 'Pete' Petersen rushed into the room, his face as white as the snow which covered his uniform, telling of how he and his litter-bearers had been trapped by a German patrol.

About this time, which was early in the morning, a call came in from regimental headquarters telling us to pull out and back up the regiment with our medical company as it pulled back. Our regiment was being hit by a massive force of German Panzer troops.

(The German counterattack was spearheaded by nine armored divisions, four of them commanded by the fanatical SS.)

Our captain barked the orders to pack up and move fast. I recall the confusion and intensity of the situation; pancakes were still cooking on the field ranges, the coffee was still hot and warmed our hands. No time for foot lockers, extra clothes or anything, just get the wounded loaded into the ambulances and take off!

We have pulled into Belgium just a few days ago, to replace the Second Infantry Division. We had watched their vehicles pull out from their positions, most of them were shot up, including their ambulances. Now we were taking off. Six days on the line and now running. Orders are orders. Back up the regiment!

The mud sucked at the wheels of our vehicles. A Jeep, mess truck and the ambulances brought up the rear, filled with the wounded, including a German corporal with a grenade-shattered head. Just last night I had looked into his head and had seen his exposed brains. (He lived three days.)

I grabbed my map and plotted a fast course to the rear. I told my driver to head for the woods that sprang up from both sides of the small muddy road.

As we neared the woods, someone screamed, "German fighter planes!" I yelled to the men, "Hit the

dirt!" Dirt? It was cold mud!

The planes screeched back and forth spitting fire from their guns. No one was hit. I'm sure that they were after bigger things than a bedraggled bunch of medics. At the main road bodies were scattered like rag dolls all over.

A Jeep's motor was still running, the windshield shattered by gunfire. Down the road a line of 10 or so G.I. trucks were ablaze.

A tank! The German Tiger tank almost found its mark before you heard it fire. As we hit the ditch the single tank was firing over our heads; lying in the mud, you always think that you are the target.

Racing up the hill, zig-zagging all the way, my men followed one by one, until we reached some farm houses and dashed into one. As stragglers wandered in we put the wounded into a three story stone building. Lt. 'Doctor' Tenery settled down the men and cared for their wounds.

Many of the men were shot up pretty bad. We later found out that four or five of our own medics were wounded by machine gun fire. As darkness fell slowly on our hill top station, gunfire of all types spat throughout the night like the cackle of a winter storm.

From some of the soldiers coming into our station we pieced together our situation. Regiment was cut off from us, part of our ambulances had been captured and we were clearly isolated.

We couldn't make a run for St. Vith (where our medical battalion headquarters was set up) because of the wounded which by this time numbered 30 or so men. With only two ambulances it was impossible to evacuate the wounded. The mess truck was operating as a field kitchen and what little food we had was given to the patients.

As evening approached we began to worry about German pa-

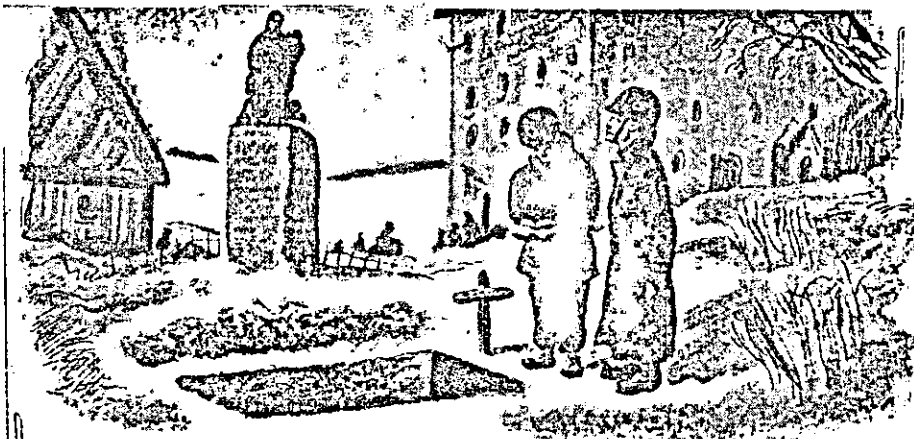
trols. We knew that they would shoot first, then ask questions. We left all doors open and painted red crosses on old sheets and hung them across the door.

About 10:30 or so, the silence was broken by German soldiers barking out orders in their language. Through the door came a German soldier dressed in white; with his machine gun pointed at us, he yelled, "Hands Up" in German. I had no problem understanding him.

His patrol consisted of eight men, all with automatic weapons. One spoke good English and while we attended their blistered feet, he said they had marched three days and nights to spring this attack. He said he had an aunt in Philly.

It was like a movie, the enemy mingling with us, cleaning their weapons, munching on their black bread and muttering like any other complaining G.I. Surprisingly, they left us and moved on.

Dawn came early. The skies that had been socked in for many days were sunny and bright. Planes high in the blue sky battled each other in dog fights. We had no idea that we were part of the Battle of the Bulge. All day German tanks crawled single file, headed for St. Vith.



"A SIMPLE SERVICE, but a touching one . . ." James Teason recalls in his sketch made at the burial of an American soldier in Schonberg, Belgium, in the winter of 1944.

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That afternoon we buried one of our own. A simple ceremony, but a touching one. The forests etched with white snow softened the stark reality of our simple service.

A German artillery outfit moved in among us. They told us of their hospital down in the town of Schonberg (Belgium). Our wounded were taken down the hill and were well taken care of.

Our men, as medics, worked in this field hospital every day. They told of hundreds of badly wounded men from both sides. Lieutenant Tenery, a surgeon, worked long hours saving many lives, both German and American. We worked in town and lived on the "hill."

One day a long line of 800 or so American soldiers passed silently through the town. As the end of the column neared us we were told by a gruff German sergeant to "Fall in!" We realized we were now prisoners and not floating commuters from the top of the hill.

The first day we found our way through shattered towns still smoking from battle. I soon spotted the faces of friends from both regiments of our division. They told of their experiences of utter confusion, death in the night, of heroic acts, of cooks fighting to stave off the Panzer force, of musicians who stood up and held back the enemy.

Our group of prisoners, tankers, recon, cavalry hunched against the rawness of the cold and shuffled along in a thin grey line etched against the bleakness of a winter scene.

That was one Christmas I will never forget! A wounded soldier, who had panicked and dove

through the window during a bombing raid by our planes, needed to be carried by litter. All day through the bitter cold we carried him, spelling each other.

That night our guard settled us down in a house with crude stalls of hay, a scene reminiscent of the familiar Christmas manger.

A German woman brought us hot food and we gave her soap (which was priceless at the time). We both nodded Christmas greetings.

We marched for 12 days, the snow and the cold biting into our bodies.

We were herded into railroad boxcars and taken to Stalag IV-B, a prisoner of war camp somewhere in German. Our march had taken us across the Rhine river, so we knew we were fairly deep into Germany.

Forty men to a hut; the cold seeped into every bone. Food consisted of weak soup and black bread. After six days in this hole all the officers were packed in boxcars and shipped out. We were stacked like sacks of grain. Sanitary conditions were grim. We had half of the box car and the two guards had the other half (the stove was on their half).

The train creaked through Berlin at night and we constantly worried about the train being bombed by our own aircraft.

One chilly dawn we found ourselves in Poland. The German guards marched us to our new prison camp, Oflag 64Z, in which many high ranking Italian admirals and generals, sympathetic to the Allies, were held.

Shortly afterwards we were told by the German commander of the camp, that the Russians were pushing in force from the East and would soon be nearing our camp. The camp was to be evacuated and we were to march back into Germany.

At dawn of the seventh day in camp, we started an eight day march through weather 10 degrees below zero. Some of us had no gloves. By now our long johns had rotted through. On the eighth evening we arrived in Wugarten, Germany, east of the Oder river. We were housed in a school house in the center of the town.

The next morning after an all night snowfall, the German guards fled from the advance units of the Russians. At about 10 a.m. The first units of a Russian tank outfit rolled into town. They broke into our school house, glaring at us with suspicion.

My weight was down by 40 pounds now and all of us looked pretty haggard.

The Russian troops were rough, bragging and constantly threatening us. Two of them spoke rough English. They told us of catching up with our German guards and killing every one of them! They also killed the mayor of Wurgarten.

We spent about 30 days with the Russian outfit while plans were being formulated to take us to Moscow by truck.

We communicated with the Russian soldiers by using sign language and my drawings. One Russian we "talked to" had been a prisoner of the Germans for nearly five years.

After 30 days we headed East. We passed through Warsaw, Poland, a city crucified by the German and Russian hate.

We finally arrived at a small rail road station. We boarded box cars and soon found out that our destination was to be the city of Odessa, Russia, on the Black sea. As the cars clacked across the rails, we could squint through the slats and see endless winter scene whose harshness softened as we neared the southern city of Odessa, touched by the war only here and there.

We were interrogated by a beautiful Russian blonde woman who spoke perfect English. All of us stayed in good quarters for about a week, where we had our first milk (canned) and sugar. We ate sugar on everything, bread, crackers.

After a week of this crude but hospitable life we boarded a British ship, HMS Circassia, and sailed as if we were any other pre-war tourists through the Dardanelle Straits and finally anchoring for the night at Istanbul.

On the first or second of April we arrived in Naples, Italy. We were housed in a grand hotel setting and soon received new uniforms, some back pay and, by gosh, all the officers were given a bottle of American bourbon! While in Naples we heard more about the Battle of the Bulge.

(The German thrust had been blunted by Allied air-power and by heroic stands such as that of the 101st Airborne Division at Bastogne. By the end of January, 1945, the Allies had regained all the lost territory.)

On Apr. 13 our Coast Guard ship sailed for Boston, Mass. On Apr. 15 a message came over the ship's loud speaker. "Our president, President Roosevelt, had died."

Touching American soil was one of the highlights of my life. I had left Boston Nov. 11, 1944, and here, after a whirlwind tour of Europe, I had arrived on the same ship that had taken me to England.



"A MEAN ONE," is the way James Teason remembers one of the Russian officers who posed for a sketch in the Polish camp in February, 1945.



STALAG IV B in Germany was a place, James Teason recalls through this on-the-spot sketch, where "the old seeped into every bone."

Suburban Sam Explains Other Brushes With Art

by MARLENE KASTEN

Nina Harris Allen alumnae club of Phi Beta Phi met with illustrator-cartoonist-artist James Teason of Elmhurst when Mrs. Teason was hostess for the meeting several weeks ago.

Creator of Suburban Sam editorial cartoons in The Press Publications, Teason introduced his audience of his world of art by complimenting his wife for working around him in his home-studio every day.

Depending upon is assignment, Teason is always facing some deadline. His current concerns at the time of his explanation of art involved all three of his interest areas.

As an illustrator he was completing his final sketches for the fifth of five 'Now You Know' books for Britannica. He explained the steps for the initial instruction sheet to the hard bound 32 page illustrated book bound for schools and libraries.

"I've been working on this project since last spring," Teason said. "Everything is checked and rechecked as for example . . . I drew this bird, holding his colorful watercolor sketch which feeds on certain caterpillars . . . and the bird is food for a particular type of hawk . . . all for one page in the book 'How They Stay Alive' preceded by 'Where Animals Live,' 'Mini-Animals,' 'Homes,' and 'Coverings.'"

"Before the pictures were accepted by Britannica, every sketch was checked by Dr. Solem at the Field Museum. Sometimes corrections had to be made such as number of spots on a leopard, height

of grass for cover, or attack formation. Each book involved 60 sketches and one layout to balance the few sentences on each page and the picture. Truly challenging as accuracy was the key word . . . even to colorings . . . just very exacting," he continued.

"Suburban Sam speaks for himself. He tries to face some weighty problems with a sense of humor. Not quite 'All In the Family' situations because our hero's name is Sam and he lives in the suburbs of DuPage county," Teason said as he shuffled some of his favorite situations for Sam.

And in the area of fine arts, Teason submitted a collection of paintings around the theme 'Mid-western Prairies,' for the Yorktown Festival . . . deadlines . . . entry dates . . . He's done seascapes and abstracts . . . like a sunflower . . . desert scenes . . . He received a first place for his 'Sunflower' in the Elmhurst Artists' Guild members only exhibit.

The women of Nina Harris Allen alumnae club expressed their appreciation through Peggy Wuerfel, president and interest through their questions.

The creative expressions through artwork intrigued them to such a degree that the Teason program will be followed by "Whimsical Figurines" presented by Charlotte Burgess for the luncheon meeting, Thursday, Feb. 24, at the home of Mrs. D. L. Cronin.

Membership is open to every area Pi Beta Phi. For more information contact Mrs. W. D. Wuerfel, Glen Ellyn, or Mrs. R. L. Wangelin, Elmhurst.