

REMACEN REMEMBERED

I will always remember Remagen.

I remember we were pulled off the front lines after a long siege of hard fighting so we might get a much deserved rest and replace damaged men, equipment, etc. This was memorable because we would be sleeping in tents (even though sleeping on the ground fully clothed and with our shoes on - this was a luxury!) for the first time in many weeks. We were happy to get off the "front lines". We had no inkling of what was to come.

We were destined not to get our much needed beauty sleep however, as we were unceremoniously hauled out of our sacks sometime in the early morning and loaded on to trucks. It was probably about two A.M. and we were sleepy and disgruntled. Also, trucks were scarce in the Infantry as we either walked or rode on the backs of tanks.

After a short time we were off-loaded on a cobble-stone street in a small German village which consisted of a ~~few~~ ~~houses~~ ~~on~~ ~~a~~ ~~hill~~ ~~side~~ ~~and~~ ~~we~~ ~~walked~~ ~~down~~ ~~the~~ ~~street~~ ~~and~~ ~~turned~~ ~~left~~. It was still early dawn, about five A.M. to the best of my memory, and this was our first view of the Ludendorff Bridge. We continued single file down and ^{ACROSS} the bridge. The bridge was of steel girder construction, had masonry towers at the entrances on both sides, and I believe had railroad tracks and a wood-planked walkway.

I think we G.I.'s sensed the great importance of this bridge even in our dazed condition. I know that I did. We guessed that this must be a giant "snafu" on the Germans part as we knew how hard they had fought for small strategic ground, and had vowed to defend the "Father-land" at the Rhine river in a "last-ditch" stand. Here we had breached this defence line, like a "hole-in-the-dike", and were ^{CROSSING} the river under light rifle and spasmodic machine gun fire. We were crossing the most strategic bridge in the early morning that the Allied High Command, including President Roosevelt, and General Eisenhower, did not know that we had captured. We learned later that the Germans, although experts at demolition, had "geefed" and due to a fluke, part of the explosives set to blow up the bridge had failed to detonate leaving the bridge weakened but passable.

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My personal feelings were of disbelief and awe as I looked down into the black swirling waters of this cold and swollen river. I wondered if I would be swimming back across it by nightfall. Could I swim it? Even though a very good swimmer, I hoped that I wouldn't be required to find out! In the mean while, we scurried across the bridge expecting the Germans to intensify machine gun fire at any moment. I wondered if our Officers had gotten us into another mess and I thought of the movies with Oliver ~~the~~ Hardy saying, "Well Stan, another fine mess you've gotten us into!"

Some how we get off the bridge and clawed our way up the steep hillside on the far side. There were apparently no U.S. heavy artillery or heavy tanks at this far end, only massed half-tracks with mounted 50 caliber machine guns, rammed hub to hub. I couldn't believe it. But more equipment was arriving every minute. Hand-to-hand fighting broke out in the houses on both sides of us. Our Platoon was slowly proceeding up the cobble-stone streets and fanning out northward when we were dive-bombed by Folk Wolfs and the old Stuka Bombers with the fixed landing gear, which came screaming down on us. Then three related things happened. First, we dived into a gutted house and dropped to the floor to avoid flying shrapnel, when my Buddy had an attack of the G.I.'s (Dysentery). My Buddy was a tall soldier from Quincy Mas., second generation, and as "game" as they come. I was sort of a leader because I was two years older and was vocal in my opinion. I stopped "Quincy" from going outside to relieve himself as it was too dangerous. I emptied the coal from a scuttle and gave it to him to get needed relief. The second thing that happened: another Buddy "Red" was climbing over the side of a half-track when the 50 caliber machine gun let loose (the safety catch had been off). The slug went through "Red's" beefy forearm and nevertouched the bones. The blood poured out of "Red's" sleeve in a stream. Now I don't like the sight of blood, especially my own, but I took "Red's" green jacket off and applied a tourequet with my wool scarf. We got him to a Medic in good shape and he thanked me later for my prompt help which I appreciated. Thirdly: my "Fox-hole Buddy", Sargent Rendall, appeared claiming the

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record as the first G.I. to have a romantic experience with a German girl across the Rhine River. I smiled in spite of my self. This was an encounter that they

~~didn't give medals or campaign ribbons for~~ ^{CAMPAIGN} ~~FOR~~ FOR WHICH THEY GAVE NO METALS OR CAMPAIGN RIBBONS!
BRIDGE

I understand from the newspapers that the ^{BRIDGE} collapsed about ten days later and our Engineers built a pontoon bridge for the heavy tanks and other heavy armorment that we sorely needed. Meanwhile, we had about four weeks of hard savage fighting (we lost more than a man a day casualty during this period) until we broke out of the "Remagen Pocket". This was like an apex because although we suffered heavy casualty wounded, we lost no more casualties killed. We continued to the Elbe river ^{ABOVE} ~~below~~ Berlin and stayed there while the Russans battered Berlin and the Eurpean war ended.

I will always remember crossing the bridge over the Rhine in the early morning, with the mist covering most of the water and shore, and the vague shapes at the far end of the bridge, and all this was a gateway to the end of ths war.

Yes, I will ~~say~~ always remember Remagen.

Moral: You may have to go to war to defend your country, but never ever defend war.

A strange, and almost comical, episode happened shortly after the Remagen breakthrough. We were moving up, and ^{ONE} no was shooting at us at the moment, so our Lieutenant thought it would be a good time to train the new replacements in infantry tactics. (Our platoon strength was approximately thirty eight and we ^{AVERAGED} ~~got approximately~~ twenty new recruits every two weeks to replace our casualties.)

We were in a meadow with a small hill to our right with a forest on the top and the Lieutenant ordered us to advance up the hill, keeping abreast of one another in a "skirmishers" formation with our M.1. ^{RIFLES} rifles at the ready, similar to peace-time ^{MANUEVERS} maneuvers. This wasn't such a bad idea excepting that no ^{THOUGHT TO} body had checked the top of the hill for enemy troops. Unknown to us, there were the remnants of a German Volkstrum Battalion with high ranking Officers hunkered down at the edge of the trees at the top of the hill. We got half way up the hill in our maneuver when our "Louie" thought it wasn't good enough and blew his whistle to recall us to the bottom of the hill ^{and} to try it over again. The next time we got three quarters of the way ^{UP} in our simulated capture of the hill before our "Louie" blew his whistle and we went down to try it over again. On the third try, as we neared the hill top, it proved too much for the nerves of the German soldiers camped there. They were completely confused by our tactics, threw down their weapons, threw up their hands, and ~~we~~ surrendered.!!

This, like so many ^{OTHER} happenings, seems hard to believe. The small number of enemy soldiers captured had little effect on the war; however, the large number of high ranking German officers who also surrendered made this a valuable capture. The completely unorthodox use of peace-time ^E maneuvers on the front lines, was certainly illadvised but it turned out very good. The Germans could never fathom how the Americans could "goof" so badly on tactics but win the battles. The episode about the capture of the high ranking German officers was covered by the "Stars and Strips" newspaper; however,, the ~~best~~ ^{bizarre} fashion ~~of~~ OF the capture was not mentioned.

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