

Summary of My Military Participation in World War II
and
Some Thoughts about Memorial Day
by
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During World War II, I was inducted into the U.S. Army on 19 May 1944 at New Cumberland, Pennsylvania and assigned to Camp Fannin, Texas for 13 weeks of basic training.

After completing basic, I was sent to the European Theater of Operations (ETO) where I joined Company B, 18th Regiment, 1st Division of the First Army under the command of General Luther B. Hodges.

I served on the front lines for 5 months through 3 major and several minor campaigns. I was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart with an Oak Leaf Cluster.

My first encounter with real live warfare occurred on Thanksgiving Day in 1944 in the middle of a battle which became known as "The Green Hell" or the "Death Factory" - a 50 mile wooded area on the German-Belgian Border called the "Hurtgenwald" or Hurtgen Forest. This battle which raged from September 1944 to February 1945 - the longest single battle ever fought by the U.S. Army - was so named because over 30,000 American soldiers were either killed or wounded.

After recovering from wounds received in this campaign, I participated in the Battle of the Bulge, the Capture of the City of Bonn and the Crossing of the Rhine.

My last day on the front line was 21 April 1945. At a small village near Halle, Germany I was seriously wounded by a close range gun shot from a civilian German sniper.

The next 13 months were spent in various army hospitals in Germany, France, England and the United States. From July 1945 to March 1946, I was a patient at the Woodrow Wilson Hospital in Staunton, Virginia. On 6 May 1946 I was discharged from the U.S. Army Convalescent Hospital at Camp Upton, Long Island, New York and from the U.S. Army with a Certificate of Disability Discharge.

With God's help, with prayers by friends and relatives and with the good care received from physicians and nurses, I recovered to the point where I was able to hold a full time position in my field until retirement. Despite being somewhat handicapped, I have been able to lead a reasonably normal life for which I am eternally grateful.

Now, what does this veteran think about on Memorial Day? First of all, what is Memorial Day?

On 5 May 1866, the Citizens of Waterloo, a small town in the Finger Lakes area of New York State - only 5 miles from where Mildred and I resided for 30 years - shuttered their shops, lowered their flags to half-mast and marched to the town's three graveyards to honor Americans who had fallen during the Civil War. Following the bloodiest of American Wars, that first Memorial Day was a solemn, painful event. Since then Memorial Day has been a day of remembering. Veterans parade, flags fly, "taps" is the theme of the day, service men - who someday may become the ones to be remembered - march in formation and politicians speak of the glory of sacrifice. Yes, Memorial Day is a day for remembering but so are the other 365 days of the year.

After 47 years this veteran remembers the many fine young men with whom he had contact on the front lines - some whose names he never knew and

others, his best friends - who made the supreme sacrifice. And there were several more so badly wounded their recovery was in doubt.

That first day on the front line I so vividly remember seeing for the first time a war casualty - a GI, whose name I do not know, lying fatally wounded over a platoon communication wire I was assigned to repair. Then the next morning I remember running toward a first aid station with several other GIs wounded by German artillery. A couple of them never made it.

One day after our Company attacked a German stronghold, I was stunned to see my best friend Laurie Lewis on the side of the road - dead. Laurie and I were inducted at the same time, went through basic training together and ended up overseas in the same Company but in different platoons.

My longest and closest friend while overseas, Sgt. Emil Uhler from Cleveland, Ohio was instantly killed on that final day - 21 April 1945 - just milliseconds before I was shot in the stomach by the same civilian German sniper.

Then there was our 28 year old Company Commander, Capt. Jesse Miller, who got in the line of fire during an attack on a German outpost and Sgt. Lee Angel, an Indian cowboy from California, our platoon guide acting as platoon leader who was killed the day after the capture of Bonn. Also, there was Tony Cuccio, an Italian boy from Rochester, N.Y., who was gunned down by the Germans as he tried to escape when part of our platoon was captured and Bill Queener who accidentally fell off a tank and was crushed to death.

I remember so clearly that day when MoMo Schussler, a Jewish boy from New York City, was hit in the chest by shrapnel as he and I dove for cover in the same fox hole. MoMo was badly injured.

On a dark and dreary night, as we were waiting to shove off for an assault on a small German town, Ed Noble our bazooka man "cracked up". His hideous screams still echo in my ears as we tried to hold and console him until the medic could render first aid.

I remember my sadness when I learned that my young cousin, 19 year old, Bobby Phyllis was killed in action in Italy. Bobby spent many of his boyhood days in the Bethel Community living with our grandparents Garry and Maude Kerr.

Last but not least, I often think of the worry and sorrow my parents, Harry and Lela Kunz, must have undergone when they received that telegram on 10 May 1945 which simply stated "The Secretary of War expresses his deep regret that your son PFC Kunz, Clarence E. was seriously wounded in Germany 21 April 1945. Hospital sending new address and further information". As bad as this was, think of those who received telegrams that their loved ones were killed or missing in action.

Memorial Day - pomp and ceremony, speeches, the glamour of the uniform, the glory of sacrifice - yes the nation needs it, but as individuals who have been there those who did not return and the loved ones they left behind are with us every day.