



With the Colors

Sept. 13, 1945

Mrs. Eldon Dewhirst, whose husband, Private First Class Dewhirst, was recently reported missing with the Twenty-eighth division in Belgium, in the historic stand about Bastogne during the German Christmas offensive, sends us this account of the Twenty-eighth's stand. She has arranged with a man in Pennsylvania, who picks up German broadcasts, to be on the lookout for her husband being reported a prisoner.

Gallant Stand of 28th Division

With the U. S. Twenty-eighth Division on the western front.—The men with the red keystone on their helmets had been fighting for seven days and seven nights. They had been fighting an enemy who outnumbered them seven and eight to one, an enemy who had the advantage of supplies and of machinery; of unlimited armor and artillery.

And now it was the morning of December 22 and the glorious Twenty-eighth division was near the end of the road. German spearheads were still striking savagely west of Bastogne in a desperate effort to reach the Meuse.

At 11:00 a. m. Major General Norman D. Cota, in command, stood in a battered, dirty field coat on the steps of a crossroads tavern in the tiny village of Vaux les Rosieres, twelve miles southwest of Bastogne on the main road to Neufchateau. Grimly he reviewed all that was left of his headquarters.

That morning, division headquarters had pulled out of the almost encircled village of Sibrec, two miles outside Bastogne. Every man in the column was ordered into nearby pastures. A few minutes later a colonel—the chief of staff—reported to General Cota that the count showed a total of 125 men.

Those of us standing there that morning saw General Gota's rough, huge, kindly face tighten a little. A few minutes later the colonel returned to our group to say, "We are standing right here."

That day will be remembered not only as one of the most glorious in the division's glorious history, but it also will be remembered as the high point in one of the great efforts of America's military history.

Now that the story can be told, it is merely justice to say that the Twenty-eighth deserves equal credit with the gallant men of the 101st Airborne division at Bastogne for the major fights in stemming the tied of the German drive. Three days before the 101st began its stand, the men of the Twenty-eighth were taking the full brunt of von Rundstedt's mightiest offensive in Luxembourg, fighting desperately in hundreds of scattered battles.

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On December 15, the "Bloody Bucket" division was stretched tight as fiddle strings along a 25 mile front on the Our river from the northeastern tip of Luxembourg to the vicinity of Wallendorf at the mouth of the Sure river. It was the widest front held by any division in Europe, five times the length of a normal division front and bigger than the front of some army corps. But this quiet sector with thin lines seemed justified. It was regarded, in fact, as a rest area and the Twenty-eighth after it had fought through Normandy hedgerows and helped to seal the Falaise pocket, had been sent here for three weeks of rebuilding after its bloody battle in the Hurtgen forest, east of Aachen.

The rest center had been organized in a little town of Clervaux. Here boys came in groups to relax, fish, drink beer, see movies, and visit the Red Cross club set up by Miss Peggy Henry of Pataskala, Ohio. They came in trucks from each of three regiments all serving in front line. To battle-weary men, the rest trips to Clervaux were like picnic parties.

Like a clap of thunder came an end to this winter idyl.

At 5:45 a. m. on December 16, the camp at Clervaux was heavily shelled. Soldiers on rest passes were thrown from bed, cut by shell splinters. They looked at each other in amazement. This had never happened before.

Three hours later whole companies of green-clad soldiers were fighting their way across the Our in dozens of scattered spots along the whole front.

Grimly the Twenty-eighth leaped to re-attack. Our artillery trained on Germans in the vital southern corner, mowing down hundreds as they struggled across a tiny bridge holding their flank secure.

By nightfall the whole central section of the front was a fluid mass of

penetrations and encirclements. It was a day and a night of incredible heroism, as thinly scattered troops fought to hold a paper-thin line. At Hosingen, one company reported 20 tanks coming down two roads from the east. A young captain gathered a weapons platoon from a company of engineers, a raiders platoon, and four tanks, and engaged the enemy. They battled all day and into the next. Then, late Sunday, encircled and out numbered, their ammunition gone, they radioed their battalion the situation was critical. They were ordered to withdraw if possible. Two company commanders radioed back, "We can't get out, but will make them pay."

Hours later a young lieutenant from the weapons platoon radioed he now was the only officer left and his men were fighting hand to hand, with no weapons except grenades. Five hours longer this little group held back the foe. Then came another call from the lieutenant. He was weeping now; weeping with pure rage.

"Down to last grenade," he said. "We've blown everything there is to blow. I don't mind dying but will never give up to these bastards."

A sob choked off his voice. The radio brought in the sounds of battle noises — the last ever heard of that company.

On Sunday, the Germans threw two more divisions, making a total of eight at the reeling men of the Twenty-eighth. Monday, they threw in another panzer division.

On two flanks, the 109th and 112th regiments moved with the punch, giving ground slowly, but blocking every effort to widen the gap. In the furious day that followed the 110th fought as few men are ever called on to fight.

Cooks, clerks, and chairborne officers at headquarters turned infantrymen to hold off the attack. Many of the headquarters personnel who had been forced to take to the woods infiltrated through surrounding Germans to fall back to the new quarters at Sibrec, twenty miles away. They had barely reached there when a German column pushing beyond Bastogne besieged the new command post and forced another withdrawal to Vaux les Rosieres.

By this time the Twenty-eighth had completed one of the greatest feats in the history of the American army. Against nine divisions they had held so firmly that the German timetable had been thrown completely off.

The capture of Bastogne, documents showed, had been scheduled for the first day, but it had taken four to surround it. Our command had been given time to bring in supporting elements, and to plant the 101st Airborne in Bastogne. The forces of the German drive had been blunted; the flanks had been held. The Twenty-eighth had made possible the smashing of Von Rundstedt's drive.

Reporting to the Army Ground and Service Forces Redistribution station in Hot Springs, Arkansas, Sergeant Virgil E. Bliss of Newton is now living in one of the four major Hot Springs hotels acquired by the Army to house the new installation.

A veteran of twenty-seven months overseas duty in the Asiatic-Pacific theatre, Sergeant Bliss returned to the states last month. Prior to checking in at the Hot Springs station, he spent a twenty-one day furlough in Newton and in Battle Creek, Michigan.

Mrs. Bliss is staying with her husband at the Redistribution station's Arlington hotel.

He will be in Hot Springs for less than two weeks, waiting reassignment to active duty. The primary function of the Redistribution station, to assign the returned soldier to the Army job for which he is best fitted, will be accomplished in surroundings designed for his rest and relaxation. Under these conditions, expert interviewers and classification personnel secure the maximum cooperation from the returnees.

In addition to reassigning the returned veterans, the Redistribution station is equipped to give the soldiers complete medical examinations and administer whatever medical and dental treatment is necessary to fit him for active duty. Military records will be checked and back pay brought up to date.

Aside from his necessary appointments, the veteran will be free to enjoy the resort facilities available at Hot Springs. An extensive program of entertainment and recreation has been planned for the returnees.

Under the direction of the Eighth Service Command, the Redistribution station in Hot Springs is one of the five recently set up by the Army Service Forces.

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Private Donna Bailey, the former Donna Emery, writes her father, Frank Emery of Newton, that she has finished her six weeks' basic training and is now taking an eight weeks course in the Motor Transport school, being now in her second week. She also said that with the ice and sleet

on the roads it is rather difficult to drive a one and one-half ton Army truck. The weather is still cold and unpredictable every day, but on the whole she says, "Come on in girls, Army life is great."

Her husband, Hildreth Bailey, is in the Army in France.

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Private Glenard Strole writes his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Dale Strole of near Rose Hill, from Germany: "I am well. I am in a Combat Engineer battalion of the Seventy-eighth division and a darn good outfit. Neil Romack is in the Eighth division not very far from me. I have been in Lamersdorf and Aachen, Germany. I can't tell you much.

"Before I came to this division, when I was in the trucking battalion, I was twenty-five miles from Paris at Etamps, France. I have been to Paris a lot of times.

"Please don't worry too much over me. I have a good platoon, a good squad and a good lieutenant, too. All of them are swell to me. Write me a long letter and let me know all about the farm."

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Corporal Earl D. Miller, 20, of Yale, has arrived in Italy and has taken up duties with a Fifteenth Air Force heavy bomber group. Trained as a nose turret gunner on a B-24 Liberator bomber, Corporal Miller is now a member of a group commanded by Colonel Thomas W. Steed of Etowah, Tennessee. This group has flown more than 170 combat missions against strategic targets in Southern Europe and the Balkans.

Corporal Miller entered the service on January 20, 1943.

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Private and Mrs. Lowell I. Lewis are here from California, visiting his parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Lewis of Hunt City. Lowell is working in the Army postal service.