

John Mock



John
November, 1945



John Mock

Place of Birth:
Eureka, Kansas
Active Duty Date:
1943
Unit:
3 rd Plt., L Company, 3 rd Battalion, 422 nd Infantry, 106 th Division
Location:
Auw, Germany
Arrival ETO:
December 10, 1944
POW
December 22, 1944
Rank: Corporal

The 106th Infantry Division was activated on March 15, 1943, at Fort Jackson, SC and was transferred to Camp Atterbury, IN on March 30, 1944. It was the last of the 66 Infantry Divisions that were activated during WWII. It was continually stripped of its trained manpower for service in other Divisions

or as replacements sent to replacement depots. Some were brought into the 106th at the last minute from other training programs in the Army such as the Air Corps where the need was not as acute as it was in the infantry. As a result, when the 106th shipped to France on November 10, 1944, a large proportion of the men were under trained and unit integrity was poor.

After a brief training period in England, the 106th landed at Le Havre, France. They were trucked to the area around St. Vith, Belgium arriving on December 11, 1944 and replacing the 2nd Infantry Division. The Division was spread thin along the snowy ridges of the Schnee Eifel as the Infantry Regiments moved into old German bunkers.

After only five days in the line, on the morning of December 16, 1944 at 0530, over 8,000 German artillery pieces blasted the American lines in the Ardennes. During the next three days, the German armor and infantry were able to quickly and stealthily surround the troops of the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments. The men of the 106th fought valiantly. But as they slowly ran out of food and ammunition, they lost their ability to fight on and were ordered to surrender. The Division lost 8,663 casualties. Over 7,000 men became POW's for the remainder of the War. It was a difficult defeat but the 106th was able to delay the German's timetable for the assault, a delay that they were never able to make up during the Battle.

The 424th Infantry was south of the Schnee Eifel and were able to avoid the encirclement. They were assigned to the 7th Armored Division and participated in the offensive at Manhay and the retaking of St. Vith. They went on into Germany and were at Mayen, Germany, at the end of the War.

Here is his story.

I was born on September 18, 1925. I was born in the oilfields since my dad was working there. We had oil on our place and were also farming.

I was drafted in December 1943. I volunteered for the air Corps, but failed the eye test; I went back home and waited to be drafted. My basic training started at Camp Fannin in Texas where I was put in communications. I did well enough on the tests so that I didn't have to go to the infantry then.

From there, I went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, with the 20th Armored Division. Each squad had a half track and we didn't walk anywhere, we rode. We would go out into the boondocks and have a class, and then we rode back to camp in a half track.

I started out in communications when stationed at Camp Atterbury located south of Indianapolis outside of Edinburg, Indiana. I was assigned to the third platoon, L Company, 422nd Infantry, 106th division. The 106th was formed at Camp Atterbury and at this point I was now an infantryman. I had a hard time learning the Morse code.

As we were building up the division, we had part of the Air Corps, because they had too many people. We got men from everywhere and it took a while to get them straightened out. We trained at Camp Atterbury for about three months and from there we were transferred to Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts for about 10 days. During that time we were going through all types of drills, such as lifejackets and lifeboat use.

From there, we were transferred to New York Harbor where we boarded the ship Aquitania for overseas. The ship was fast enough that we were not in a convoy. On the third night out, we picked up a submarine. We had a 7 inch gun aboard, a 20mm and a 40mm on both sides of the ship. If the sub surfaced, we could usually see it. It left a big wake that we could see. (The wake looked like a big wave on each side of the ship.) We out ran it. The ship was running wide open and vibrating all over.

The next day, we slowed down and conditions on the ship grew calmer and more settled down. Our ship was a British four stacker. It was a big ship, and had the biggest rats I've ever seen in my life. We ate British food and it was terrible! Hardtack, hard bread and pickles. We didn't see much of the British crew. We had bunks six high with just enough room to get into the bunk. I missed one meal because of an upset stomach but after that, no problem.

We provided the gun crew on deck A. I was on the 20mm and 40mm was next to me. The 40mm had two guns mounted together. The 20mm was like a big machine gun with a large ammunition drum. To cock it a cable had to be put on it and then had to be tipped in position so it could fire. It could not be cocked by hand. It had a large spring and was automatic.

We had to do lifeboat drill. Duty was eight hours on the antiaircraft gun, and then eight hours off to sleep and then back on gun crew. Because the galley was so far down to the bottom of the ship to eat and get back to bed, we would soon be awakened up again. It seemed like we had no sleep at all. Then every third day, we would get the day off.

We landed at Glasgow, Scotland. We came in and the Queen Mary or Queen Elizabeth was just leaving as we passed her. We had a destroyer on each side of us and escorts all the way into the port. From there we went on a train to Stow on the Wool (a town) in England. We walked all over the countryside. The old farmer's had stonewalls built up on the property lines that had been in place for hundreds of years.

From there we went to Southampton and boarded a ship. Here we were ordered to board an LCI that was waiting for us and unloaded us on Omaha Beach. Here we saw the concrete houses where every window and every door was a gun port. The whole beach was that way. We walked for couple of hours until we came to some open pastures. We are told to pitch our tents. It rained every night, and it was a mess trying to keep dry. The daytime was nice but it was rainy at night. We were waiting for the Red Ball express, a truck convoy, to take us up to the front. We were there about a week when they finally came and got us. This was around December 11 1944.

We rode the trucks to the Belgian-German border, got off and met the 2nd Division. We are able to talk to them for a few minutes before they had to move out. Our duty was to patrol and we had people stationed on the front lines watching the Germans. You had to get them relieved before it got light in the morning and after it got dark in the evening. At one place we put a piece of canvas going up and down beside the side of the road. Then we were pretty well invisible.

On December 14 we heard some loud speakers coming from German tanks. With the snow, it was very cold and no wind, everyone could hear the tanks revving up. On the 15th about 4 AM, the tanks started up again. On the 16th here they came, but they bypassed us. There wasn't any road by us, so they just went right by us. We are along the Siegfried line where all the pillboxes were. Col. Thompson had his headquarters in a pillbox, and even had telephone wires running into the back door.

The Americans had little wooden huts built, and you had to crawl down into them. The engineers had built little log cabins and each squad had one of them. The kitchen had one below ground level. We had a railing with wire and cardboard is a bed.

We were on the top of the hill in concrete bunkers on the backside of the Hill, because they were looking towards France. Our section was about 4 or 5 miles and had a little road around it. We went on trails and the road when we went out on patrol and it was all on foot. For supplies, we had one 6 x 6 truck. The 106th Division was spread out as far as 28 miles.

The Germans came into the little town Auw, behind us in the Valley, and I think the 81st Engineers were there also. The Germans took them prisoners. We came down out of the Hill and chased them back about a mile. It started to get dark and we were ordered to make a lot of noise. So we started to make noises, banging on trees and things we could find. As soon as it got dark, we put a dead man on a stretcher and moved out. We went back to the little town where our 105 was. The gun crew had ~~not~~ gotten caught. There was a stone wall around the barn. The 105 got right in behind the rock wall and was pretty well protected. We dug foxholes around this area and all around the edges of the town.

About 11 PM that night, the trees where we had made all the noise were hit by German artillery fire, and they made toothpicks out of them. They were up on a hill, and they did not know what we were doing. We waited a while but the Germans figured out where we were, or someone of the town told him. They were dropping rounds outside all of the buildings, but they didn't seem to want to hit the buildings in the town. The next morning there were two small tanks that came around the hill. The 105 got both of them. They were good, because it was about a half a mile shot. The next day there was a convoy that came out of the trees into an open field. There were two trucks and the 105 got them. Everything behind them was a team and wagons and that was their convoy. The 105 also blew up one of the team and wagons stopping the convoy.

The next day there was a tank coming toward us. He just came up over the hill to get the 105. We didn't hear him until he started shooting. I was out of my foxhole but sitting close by. You had to use your rifle as a crutch to slide yourself in but my feet did not make it. A shell hit 5 feet away. You couldn't hear anything. You feel pressure, your ears ring and you are stunned. He can't move or do anything for a while. In time, we could hear the shells going off. We were in front of the 105 and they were shooting at the tank.

When I got back into my foxhole, I found a piece of metal that had gone through my shoe. It didn't bleed too much, but the rest of the day, I just sat and started shaking and couldn't help it. I told Lieutenant Christiansen there was something wrong. I'm shaking but I am not cold. The sun was shining. He told me to sleep in the hay mound that night where it was nice and warm. I did, was warm but still shaking. Sometime in the night an old sheep came up there. He was noisy and snoring! The next morning I was over it.

Then the Captain said to go take Schonberg before the Germans got there, but they were already there and they started shooting at us. Then they started hitting us with tree busts and it made a lot more shrapnel. So L Company asked, what are we going to do?

Lieutenant Christiansen said we're going to head south and get back to the American lines. In the daytime we hid and tried to find some evergreens and put the limbs over

the snow to help us get warm. Then during the night, we would go single file through the snow. We saw a little town on our left and we could hear the Germans and saw the lights. It was night and they shot up flares and started shooting at us. The whole company was eventually surrounded. Lieutenant Christiansen was leading and he got shot in half, then they hit Captain Spudola and others. Another boy and I were about half way down the line and we got on our hands and knees and with our arms through the slings of our rifles. We were going through there fast and we were going to get out of there. All the ones that were hit were carrying on quite a bit and crying for help. We looked at each other and said, "We can't leave them," so we went back and stayed with them. We were then taken prisoner near Auw.

The Germans put us in an old school room. They had straw around the outside walls for us to lie on. The next day the Germans came in and asked if anyone was wounded. Eight or nine of us got up but I did not want to leave. The Sergeant said; "You better go and get that foot taken care of or you are going to be in big trouble so about 10 of us went to the first aid station. One guy had shrapnel in both legs and we ended up carrying him piggyback. They cleaned my foot up and put black coal tar salve on it, the same kind of salve my grandmother used back home in the '20s - "black coal tar salve." They wrapped it in crêpe paper bandages, because Germany didn't have cotton fields to make regular bandages. I didn't get any infection in it. Our feet and legs were also frozen.

The Germans didn't know what to do with us. We were wounded, and one day we stayed in the hospital. Then on Christmas Eve we stopped in a German first aid station. It was a house and barn with a big enclosed hallway between them. There was straw on the ground and we got a bowl of soup and a slice of bread. The Germans ate the same thing.

About 11 PM three German officers came in with a bottle of schnapps. We took a drink and they gave the wounded Germans a drink. They started singing "Silent Night" in German. We sang it in English. It sounds the same.

The boy who had shrapnel and his legs had to be carried piggyback. We told the guard about him. The guard said he would take him to the hospital. The next day we asked how he was doing, and we were told he died. You don't die overnight from something like that, so we don't know what happened to him.

We went from town to town along the Rhine River. We went through Koblenz five times and we saw that big church with spires each time.

A lot of times we were on regular passenger trains. One time one of the Germans got really upset because he had lost his family in a bombing. We had to go back to another car. Generally, the German guards were usually good to us. They didn't abuse us, and they didn't want to walk either. One day we were riding in a truck, and it started missing. So they pulled over. There is a big stove hanging on the side of the truck. They opened the top, put in woodchips and sealed it up. It had screws in it.

Then they lit a fire under the bottom one. There was a tube that ran from it into the truck tank on the top of the cab. They were making wood alcohol. They ran the stove for about a half-hour until he got enough alcohol, then started the truck and away we went.

When we crossed the Rhine River, they had little flat bottomed barges. They had no motors, but they had an anchor up in the middle of the river with a cable. They would use the rudder to go from side to side carried by the current. They could get a team and wagon, a Volkswagen, or some cows across on the barges. This is how they got across the Rhine because most of the bridges were blown up. When crossing bridges, there was usually only walking traffic. We walked around bomb craters in the middle of the bridges.

About January 18, we ended up in Stalag XIIA, Limburg Germany. I spent the rest of the war there. First thing in the morning we have roll call and they would count us. If we were short, we would stand there while they went in to check the barracks. Some of the men couldn't even get up and walk anymore. They would count them and then us again to verify everyone was present. We would get a bowl of grain like paste that they had roasted, and then we would get a loaf of bread to a six man squad.

BLACK BREAD RECIPE

Former prisoners of war of Nazi German may be interested in this recipe for World War II Black Bread. This recipe comes from the official record from the Food Providing Ministry published as Top Secret Berlin 24.X1-1941 from the Director of Ministry Herr Mansfield and Herr Moritz. It was agreed that the best mixture to bake black bread was:

- 50% bruised rye grain
- 20% sliced sugar beets
- 20% tree flour (saw dust)
- 10% minced leaves and straw

From our own experiences with black bread, we also saw bits of glass and sand. Someone was cheating on the recipe!

This bread recipe could have some protein in it. When the grain goes into the grinder, there could be some insects and maybe a mouse or two.

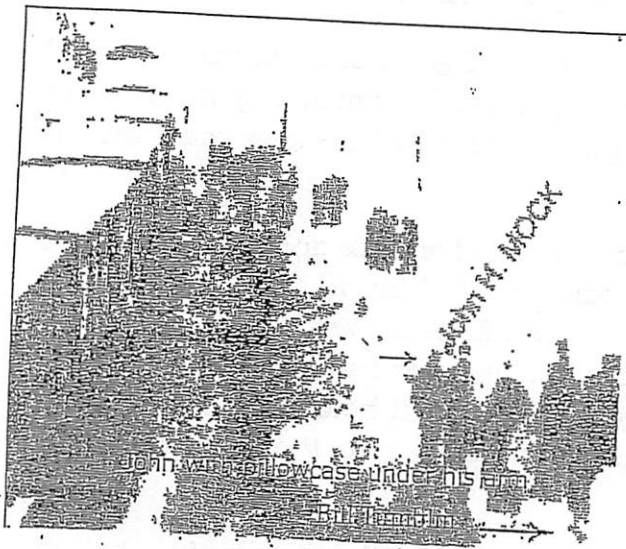
You sliced it so each man would get the same, and we took turns at picking first. At 4 PM we got a bowl of soup. It was cooked and the bugs floating on top because they had been cooked, and they didn't bother you any. We also got a small piece of cheese once a week. When we first got there, we got one cigarette a day. In February, we got two cigarettes a week, and in March, we got no more cigarettes. They were regular cigarettes.

group in sat down back to back down through the center of the car. We were just crammed in and could not lie down.

There was a big can by the door that was the toilet and the guards would empty it every day. That night we heard some machine gun fire and a grenade. Then we didn't hear anything else. The Americans had just bypassed us. The two POW's who could walk okay went out and got hold of the 99th Division. The rest of us were under the overpass popping cooties. We would take a louse and roll him around and when we dropped him he would walk off. You had to put him on your thumb and put him under your other thumb and pop him.

C Company, 393rd Infantry, 99th Division liberated us on March 28, 1945. Here they came. We were just skin and bones. They looked like the fattest GI's we ever seen. After our tears stopped, and we got our voices back, we started talking to them. When

they saw us, they said they had seen a lot of dead bodies but it had never seen anything like us. One of the GI's was Bill Tumblin who sent me a picture of the rescue.



That night we stayed in a house. I had a canteen cup, the German cup that is about twice as big as ours, and I had a square piece of blanket I used to put over my head to keep my ears warm. I also had an old worn-out razor that would not cut anymore, all in the pillowcase. A chaplain with the 99th division held a religious service on the side of the underpass.

I put an article in the 99th Division paper and talked to a lot of people who remembered the train at Borgholms. I found one guy in New Jersey who was also on that train. The men were from all parts of the different divisions. That evening the 99th Division came in with a weapons carrier. The whole back end was filled with fresh baked bread. It was great! There were 277 of us on this train. The next morning ambulances started taking the ones that could not walk. Each ambulance could only take four at a time. It was late that night before they took me.

We rode a long time but soon we stopped at a field hospital. There were a bunch of big tents with rows of cots. Two of us went to a tent and there was a nurse sitting at a desk. She just looked at us. We were walking skeletons, dirty and long whiskers and just skin and bones. I had on a German overcoat with the left pocket torn out.

She did not say anything. We started speaking English and told her we were Americans and had been prisoners of war. She started to cry. And then she jumped

up and took the man with me to another tent. She came back and took me to a cot. Then she left and came back with a bucket of warm water, soap, wash rag, towel, razor, a metal mirror and a new pair of pajamas.

I was to put my clothes in the middle of the floor because they were full of lice. After I got cleaned up, I shaved and was in pajamas, she came back with a coffee cup of sliced peaches. You cannot believe how good they tasted! We talked for a long time. We were the first prisoners of war she had seen. She said there would be an ambulance plane in first thing in the morning to take us to the hospital in Reims, France.

We got on the plane. There was one stretcher on the floor and then they were stacked up one on top of the other and on both sides of the plane, nothing but stretchers. At Rheims, we were put on the third floor of an old school house that had been made into a hospital and we were assigned to bed.

One evening meal was served by two German POWs, and we didn't go for that and complained. We didn't see them again! French workers served our food and they gave us bars of soap and clean pajamas. We went to the nurse told her we wanted G.I. soap because we were loaded with lice. We took shower after shower until got rid of lice.

We suffer from malnutrition, and I had trouble with my ears. They have been ringing for 65 years, and I can't hear out of my left ear. My feet had been frozen when we were walking in the snow. We had to cross a stream one night, and it had ice on top. So we were walking in ice water and our feet could never really get dried out. When I got wounded in the foot, I had to march without a boot.

In Reims for treatment, my feet were put in ice cold water and then warm water. Then every day, they made the water a little warmer, and that did more for my feet and circulation than anything else.

When we first arrived at the hospital we had to eat in bed. We were wearing red clothes and had to stay in our room. We could see a chow line down below us in the yard and they had on blue clothes. After five days we got ourselves blue clothes (not issued to us.) The reds were served first. After finishing eating we would go in the bathroom and change into the blues, go down the back stairs, and get in line again. We would take jello, fruit, pies and cakes all the good stuff because we were starved. One day the nurse caught us. She said, "We are not serving you in bed anymore." While in blues you could go back for seconds and have as much as you wanted as long as you cleaned up your tray. We started to gain weight then.

I was not sent back to the states until May 25, 1945. They wouldn't or couldn't send us home since we're walking skeletons! I weighed 105 pounds and was 6 feet tall, and I could touch my finger and thumb when I put them around my arm.

From Reims we went to Paris where a guide showed us some of the sites. We were there four days and issued new class A uniforms.

From Paris, we boarded an army DC-6 four engine plane. We landed next in the Azores for fuel just for a few hours. There was a restaurant there but it was closed but the lady running it asked if we were hungry. Well a little bit, we told her, so she opened it back up and made sandwiches and served pie. She wouldn't take any money when she found out we were POWs.

From there we flew on to Newfoundland, Long Island, Detroit, Chicago, Des Moines, and landed in Kansas City. Each man was sent to a hospital close to their home. The Army picked up three of us and took us to Winter General Hospital in Topeka, Kansas.

Of course my family was there. My family only knew I was missing in action and they first found out that I had been in a prisoner of war camp when I arrived at the Rheims hospital. There they took our names and addresses of our folks and sent a telegrams that we were okay. It had to be a shocker for the family but a happy one. I was discharged October, 1945.

When I was discharged from the Army, there were not many employment opportunities in my home community of Hamilton and Eureka, Kansas. I went to work in Hobbs, New Mexico. Everyone there was short of help. I worked overseas for oil companies for 19 years, so didn't marry. My job was chief mechanic for drilling rigs. I worked on offshore rigs, land rigs and helicopter rigs.

I taught local mechanics to do maintenance and overhaul of drilling equipment in the countries where I worked. We drilled wells in Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Singapore, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

After the war each state received a 40 and 8 box car from France refurbished for display. The one for Kansas is located at the American Legion Post parking lot in Hays, Kansas and has been converted into a small museum.

I retired in 1984, married in 1993 to a retired schoolteacher and World War II Wave veteran. We now make our home in Eureka, Kansas and have been very active in our community, especially veteran's organizations. I am presently Commander of the Air Capital Chapter Ex-POW's in Wichita. I am also an active member in the Disabled American Veterans in Eureka and past Commander in Emporia. In addition I am an officer in the Purple Heart, VFW Military Funeral Commander and former member of the Lions Club. My hobby is show cars.

John was awarded the Purple Heart, Combat Infantry Badge, ETO Ribbon with 3 Battle Stars, American Defense Service Ribbon, and the Good Conduct Medal.

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APR. 16, 1997

John H. Mock
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Dear John,

Regarding your article in the 99th Inf. Division Association, I was there. Having been part of a Rifle Co. (C-393) since before the Bulge I had learned to accept the sight of dead bodies, but nothing could prepare or condition one to see the sights of your fellows. I'm sure we did look like fat cats to you. After 52 years I can still see you when I think about that day in 1945. I was around you for a very short time as our Rifle Co. was ordered to move on and take the next objective. According to your article the rear-echelons came in and took care of you. I would love to have stayed back and given a personal hand to help. I hope you are enjoying a good life and health.

Best Personal Regards

Maurice Chandler