

# Uweiler: 1945

The following excerpts were submitted by Robert Cook. The first excerpt, from 3rd Division, 7th Regiment History, provides background concerning the WWII battle at Uweiler, Germany; the second excerpt, from Bob's book entitled "Just a Dog Face Soldier," describes his experiences before, during, and after his capture by the enemy.

## 7th Infantry Regiment History

"At about 0730 on March 15, 1945, in Uweiler, Germany, the enemy directed flak wagon fire and fire from self-propelled guns at the Second Battalion forces, and then at about 0800 closed in on the town with a combination of four flak wagons and nine tanks and tank destroyers, which included two "Tigers." It was a tough situation to be in without support of any kind. Attached armor had not gotten through to the battalion, and without communication, artillery could not be called into play. This was the fundamental reason for the almost complete destruction of LTC Duncan's battalion that day.

"The Second Battalion had gone into the night attack with 640 officers and men and in the space of several hours had been reduced to 184 scattered and ineffective personnel. Records compiled later showed that of the 456 personnel missing, 21 were killed in action, 72 were wounded and evacuated, 17 were missing, and 222 were taken prisoner. "Fox" Company had sustained the greatest losses. Captain Earl E. Swanson, one of the ablest company commanders to lead a "Cotton Baler" rifle company during the war, had risen from the grade of private, and First Lieutenant Robert W. Rankin, with thirteen of his men, gave their lives due to mines and exploding enemy shells." [124 stragglers later joined the unit.]

## Just a Dog Face Soldier

"As I remember, we started about

3:00 AM and were held up for awhile because of the minefield which had not been cleared and marked as it was supposed to be. Somehow, many of us made it through the minefield, mortar fire, artillery fire, and into Utweiler. I didn't know Captain Swanson, our CO, or Lt. Rankin, our Platoon Leader, very well, but it was really sad that they didn't make it. Both were good officers and both were killed in the minefield. There were eight or ten of us who ended up in a church with our squad leader, Sgt. Jacob Cohen. We soon began receiving rifle and tank fire, and one tank shell actually came in through a window and landed on the floor—a DUD! One of the guys, Radford Arms, a tobacco-chewing Southerner, said later, after seeing the dud, 'I dang near swallowed my tabacca!' In the church with us were 4 or 5 German prisoners and some that were wounded who were being cared for by one of our guys.

"About 11:00 AM, when I was at a window firing at a German coming around a nearby building, Sgt. Cohen yelled at me, 'Stop shooting. We're going to have to surrender!' I had had many thoughts about getting wounded or killed, but I had never thought about surrendering. One of the Germans indicated that he would go to the entrance and signal the Jerries that we were giving up. As he stepped outside, we heard a burp gun open up and the poor fellow was killed on the spot by one of his own.

"Shortly after, an SS officer came in with several infantrymen; he was waving a potato-masher grenade over his head and yelling, 'Amerika is kaput!' He began arguing with one of our German prisoners in a loud and threatening voice. Later, one of our guys who could understand German said that the SS officer wanted to kill all of us, but was talked out of it by one of our prisoners who told him we had taken good care of their wounded. We were then marched out of town, picking up other groups from our company

and battalion. While a small fragment had hit me in my leg when we were crossing the minefield earlier, I was able to walk. At the time, I had not wanted to report it for fear of having to leave my group and then not getting back with them. I still have that fragment in my leg, but it doesn't bother me.

"I think it was the next day when they stopped the march and put us in a chicken coop building. One at a time, we were taken before a German officer for interrogation. Of course, he wanted to know about our outfit and asked a lot of questions, but much to his disgust, I gave him only my name, rank, and serial number. He then proceeded to tell me all about the things he had asked me and then sent me back to the group.

"After several more days of marching, we crossed the Rhine River at Speyer and came to Ludwigsburg and the prison camp Stalag 5A. There must have been several thousand POWs there including Russians, British Indian troopers, French, British, and others. Our first food since we were captured was contained in Red Cross parcels, and it was much appreciated. The contents consisted of canned meat, biscuits, dried prunes, hard cheese, chocolate, KLIM (powered milk), tea, sugar, cigarettes, and Dr. Lyons tooth powder. I managed to trade my cigarettes and tea to some Brits for cheese, I think. Some of us knew we would probably have to make it last so we saved as much as we could. The Germans did give us a bowl of thin potato soup every day we were there. We were also given a roughly woven blanket and then moved into low, wooden barracks. The double deck bunks had wire stretched across the frames and thin straw-filled mattresses. I was near a small stove, which helped keep the chill off, since the weather was really cold.

"We were in the camp for about six days when they lined us up in columns of three or four abreast and marched us out of the camp. Little did we know that we would be marching for the next 35, or so, days. There was always a rumor that we were just going to the next town and would be put on trains, but it was not to be. There were several days of decent weather, but mostly I remember the rain and the cold. I know we were not fed every day, and I can't remember having

very much to eat when we were. One day, a couple of guys picked up some snails along the road, and when we stopped for the day in a field, they boiled them, but I couldn't do that. I recall that we got two more Red Cross parcels, but they sure didn't last long.

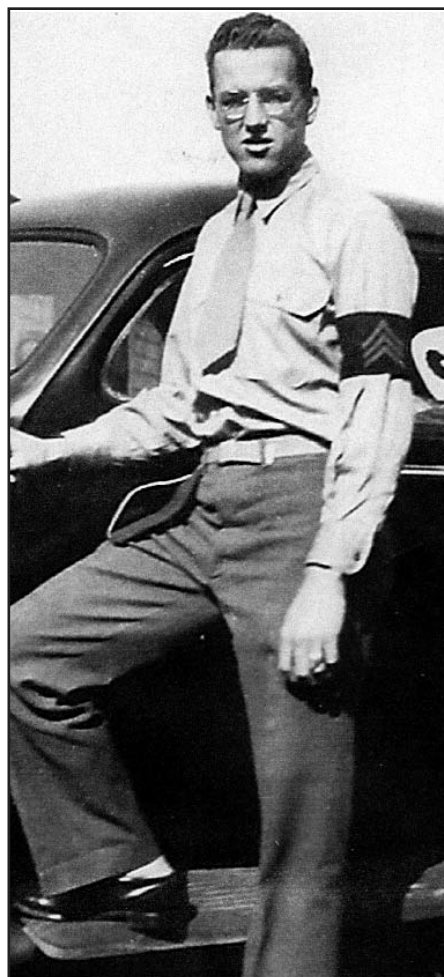
"The German guards were either very old or very young, and I never saw them do anything mean or hurt anyone, except on one occasion. We had stopped for the day in a large field along a river. Quite a few of the British Indians went down to the river to wash and many were in the water. I heard gunshots and then saw that an old guard was firing at an Indian who was swimming toward the far bank. I don't think he was trying to escape, but was just going to enjoy a little swim. At any rate, the guard fired five or six times and killed him. Later, we heard a German noncom chew out the old guard. I'm sure we would have continued our march the next day, but the Germans must have decided to grant the Indian troopers' request to prepare a funeral pyre. They managed to find some logs and build a pile about five feet tall, with their fallen comrade inside. The fire was quite intense and burned through the night.

"The marching wasn't all that bad, as would get rest stops every couple of hours. When it was time to stop, all up and down the line the yelling would start, "PISS CALL!" and then we would all get off the toad. Sometimes the call would go out when the guards did not want us to stop, which would lead them to un-sling their rifles as a threat and yell at us, 'GO, GO, GO!' When we did stop, we would either crap out on the ground, sit and BS with others, or take care of nature's call. When it was time to start marching again, some guys just couldn't continue because of fatigue, illness, or sore feet, but I don't know what happened to them. Later, I heard some Russians were killed as they tried to escape, but this must have happened either way back or way head of us because I don't recall any gunfire.

"We saw airplanes going overhead on occasion, and once we saw a large group (maybe 100 or so) of our bombers heading east, and we all cheered—much to the disgust of the guards. The air was filled with noise of the bombers, and it was a wonderful sight. One day, we saw a P-47

fighter strafe a nearby column of German soldiers and trucks; then it came down right on top of our column but did not fire. We all waved madly, and he made another pass and waved his wings. For a moment, it was scary, but fortunately he recognized that we were not the enemy. At that time, a large cart, piled high with suitcases and other baggage belonging to some German civilians, was part of our column. During the excitement of the P-47 fly over, some of the baggage fell off the cart, and an old German guard wanted to help put things back so he unthinkingly handed his rifle to one of our guys! Well, of course, our guy was not about to start shooting anybody, but it was quite comical the way it happened.

"The guards seemed to be resigned to herding this large group of the enemy on its way. One time, several of us got to talking to an older guard, and it turned out that he attended college in Minnesota. Somehow, he was forced into the Army during a visit to his home in



Robert "Bob" Cook

Germany. Another guard always had a German Shepherd with him so we never ventured close to him.

"Usually in the late afternoon, we would be herded into a large field for the night, but sometimes they managed to find space for us in several barns or buildings. One night we were in an open field and it was pouring down rain. Radford Arms and I put one blanket on the ground and snuggled together with the other blanket on top. How we managed to sleep, I don't know, but in the morning we had to wring out our blankets. I don't remember if we ever got dried out.

"There were between 500 and 1000 in our line-of-march; I had no way of knowing exactly how many. I know that many of them were soldiers from other countries. I felt sorry for some of the Russians, as they were made to wear wooden shoes because of previous attempts at escape. I don't remember many of the cities we passed by, but I know we crossed the Danube River at Dillingen, and we went through the outskirts of Augsburg. The rumor was that from there we were headed to Munich; however, as it turned out, we went south of Augsburg about 25 miles and ended up in the small town of Ettingen, which is about 35 miles west of Munich.

"There was a group of about 200 of us that were put into a barn in late afternoon on April 25, 1945, with probably 6 or 8 guards patrolling outside. We were just outside Ettringen, but I can't remember where the rest of our main group was. They must have gone on to the next town or stopped at the previous town. I was awakened the next morning by a lot of yelling and was told that all the guards had left the area. We went outside and wondered what was going on. We soon heard a tank approaching but couldn't tell if it was German or American. Cheering broke out when we saw that it was actually one of our Sherman tanks of the 12th Armored Division. What a moment that was! It was really not unexpected, as we had been hearing the sound of artillery the previous night. The tankers had oranges, which they tossed into the excited group of G.I.s. I didn't get one, but the important thing was that we were free."

—Submitted by Robert "Bob" Cook