



Joe Padgett – U.S. Army (WW II)

A year or so before Joe died he and I were sitting around the kitchen table and I asked him about World War II and his experiences. This is what we talked about:

Joe joined the service and was trained and assigned to the 965th Infantry Regiment, Battery 'A' - Artillery, as a forward observer. His S/N was 36725152.

He went into Europe 14 days after D-Day and fought in 5 Campaigns including:

- Rhineland
- Battle of the Bulge - Ardennes
- Normandy
- Northern France
- Europe

During his time in Europe Joe's travels included the following locations (spelling is probably off) Harstorf, Gramnitz (where he crossed the Elbe River), Hoort-Morass, Else-Allendorf, and Schoustadt. Joe supported not only the American armies but also the British Army in which he was not too happy about dealing with British officers.

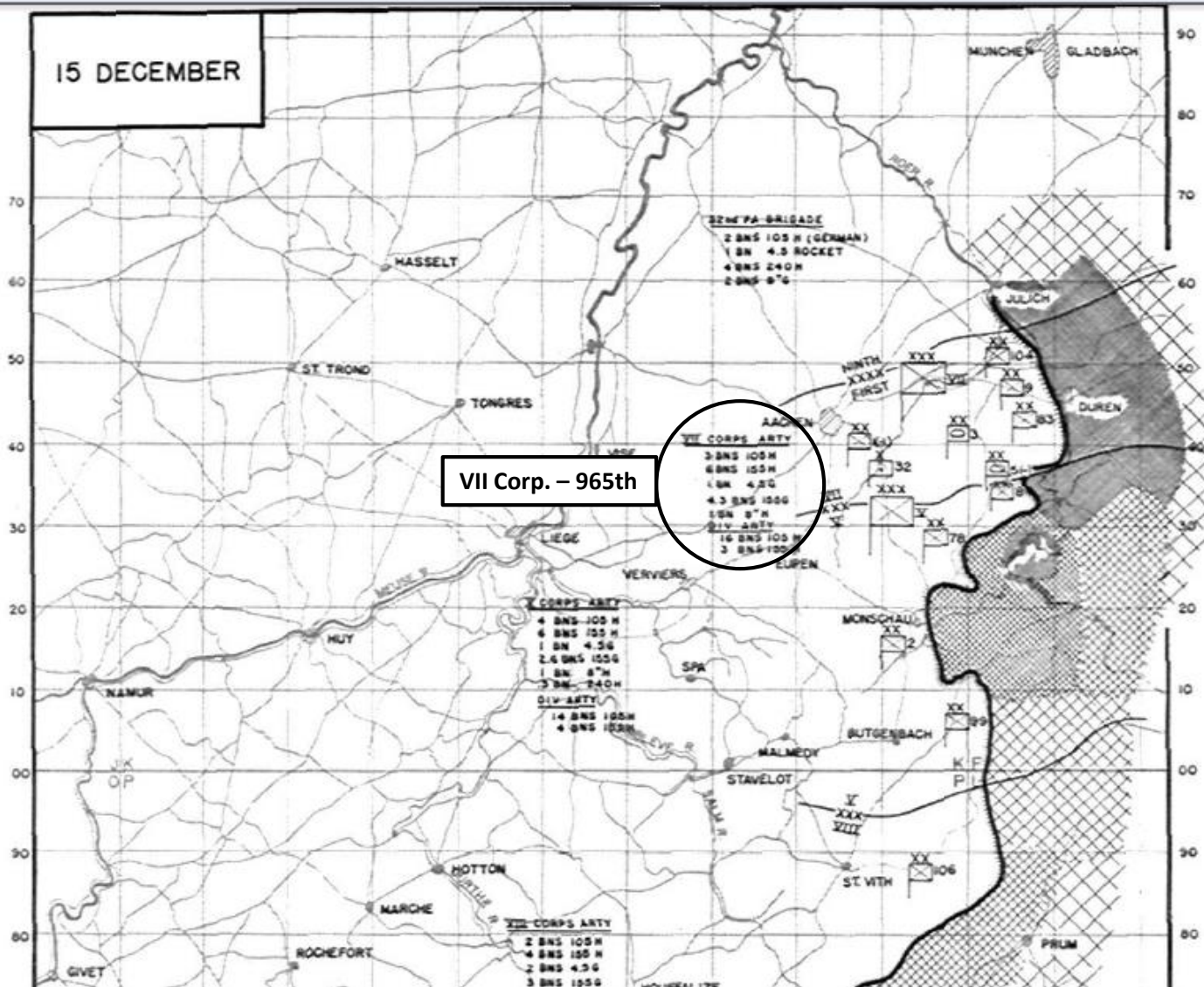
Joe said he was wounded once during an artillery barrage by the Germans while he was fixing a broken communication wire near his forward observation point ... he was hit with a phosphorus shell fragment and suffered a painful wound and burn. Joe said he patched it up himself, hopped into the jeep with his men because of an advancing German force and headed back to the U.S. front lines leaving all his equipment behind. During the retreat the Germans were so close that the jeep was under constant small arms fire. One of the men with Joe manned a 50 caliber machine gun mounted on the jeep and was firing constantly during their escape. Joe said had he not gotten out so quickly he would have been captured with other Americans forces and with them, might have been part of the Malmedy massacre.

When he got back he had a medic further patch him up before he headed back to a new forward observer post. Joe was also injured helping his artillery battery unload shells. I mention this because Joe told me, among his medals, he had received a Silver and Bronze star and a Good Conduct Medal along with his campaign ribbons, but never had received a purple heart.

A short time after our discussion I wrote to Senators Lugar and Bayh about Joe's wound and a possible post-war purple heart being bestowed on him but never heard anything back from either of them. Joe told me that he thought in 1973 his records in St. Louis may have been destroyed due to a fire.

Joe said he was discharged in May 1945 as a staff sergeant shortly after the war ended in Europe and was so happy to finally get to return home to Morocco. He beat the odds as he served for a year from June 1944 to May 1945 with the average life of a forward observer being less than 6 weeks. I listened to him in many discussions and discovered why during these conversations he, many times, drank so heavily ... he was trying to forget all the horror he saw, the emotions he felt for fallen comrades, asking why they had gotten killed and not him, the extreme pressure he was under behind German lines for the year he served and not wanting to make friends because he thought they'd be killed as all the others had before them.

Position of the American Forces (Battle of the Bulge)



Early in December 1944 the German High Command assembled two panzer armies with great speed and secrecy, and, on the 16th, launched against the First U. S. Army an all-out offensive which achieved a breakthrough on a front of thirty-five miles to a depth of sixty miles. The broad plan of the enemy was to strike toward the Meuse and on to Brussels and Antwerp, with the main effort driving through Liege.

Ten days after the initial assault the enemy had been fought to a standstill. Four main thrusts had been made by panzer spearheads followed by infantry divisions. The southern column, continuing as the secondary effort, had been stopped at Bastogne by the center of the VIII Corps, later reinforced by Third Army. The diversionary attack toward Luxembourg, against the right of the VIII Corps, had been turned back at the outset.

In the southern sector of the VIII Corps, fighter bombers and the combined observed fires from the reinforced 4th Inf Div Arty and a battalion each of the 28th Inf Div Arty and the 9th Armd Div Arty, caught the panzer columns and partially dispersed them before they could press home the attack. The second German bid to take Luxembourg was slowed, halted, and then turned back as infantry and armor counterattacked behind heavy supporting fires to retake lost ground.