

Herbert Michael “Mike” Sheaner Jr
106th Infantry Division, 422nd Regiment, Co G

After graduating high school in June of 1942 from Forest Avenue High Dallas, TX and completing one year of college courses at Texas A&M University, a draft notice arrived at his mother's home in the spring of 1943. Mike's presence was requested at Camp Wolters near Mineral Wells, TX. At Camp Wolters Mike selected the infantry from a menu of service options and was given an aptitude test. After scoring highly on the test he was placed in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). ASTP was a military training program designed to meet wartime demands for junior officers and soldiers with technical skills.

A few days later, he was on a train heading to Camp Wheeler, GA for basic training. Camp Wheeler was an infantry replacement training center where new recruits received basic training to replace combat casualties. Mike excelled on the rifle range and in wrestling. He recalled one wrestling drill in which the men would circle up with two in the center where they would wrestle until one was beaten. The winner remained in the circle to take on the next man up... one after another, until he too was beaten. Mike won his first match and then pinned down the next challenger. In the midst of wrestling a third man the lunch bell sounded and the men retired to the mess hall, leaving Mike undefeated.

With basic training complete, Mike and the others were sent to the University of Alabama for additional training as engineers. If all went to plan, the Army would send these newly trained professionals overseas to rebuild Europe after the war. Of course the plan did not go to schedule and the war was not over by Christmas. The need for frontline infantry replacements was great and in the spring of 1944 the ASTP program was all but eliminated and Mike was transferred in late April to the 106th ID at Camp Atterbury near Indianapolis, IN. It seemed a disappointment being classified a Private after expecting to come out of ASTP as a Lieutenant and having previously attain the rank of Major and Company Commander in ROTC.

At Camp Atterbury Mike continued to show proficiency with the M1 rifle. The entire company was tested on the firing range with the Captain looking on. Each rifleman fired rounds into targets at varying distances within a limited amount of time. As Mike fired his weapon, one shot after another found its mark dead center. There were four shooting positions; prone (laying down), kneeling, sitting and standing with 45 seconds to fire eight rounds. Standing was the most difficult position because of the weight of the gun. It took careful aim to steady the barrel in the standing position. His trick was to aim the rifle high then



slowly bring it down until the site was directly over the target. It was something he learned through ROTC training in high school. With a gentle squeeze of the trigger the shot was off.

The Captain took note of Mike's progress and came over to watch. A good enough score would not only win the "Expert Rifleman" designation but would also reflect well on the entire company and Captain. Just as the goal of having a perfect score became increasingly possible the ammunition clip ejected from the rifle with a ping and the remaining cartridges clanked to the ground. The Captain grunted and stomped off after seeing his chances evaporate. With only seconds left he gathered the .30 caliber cartridges with the help of the squad Sergeant, re-loaded and fired seven quick shots from the sitting position into the bulls-eye 500 yards away. The spotter announced over the loud speaker a perfect score.

In early June Mike was given a 2 week furlough and headed back to Dallas. On June 6th he was at his mother's home on Abrams Rd when he heard about the D-Day invasion.

Through the Spring-Summer of 1944 the division continued to be gutted, snatching the well trained men of the 106th and sending them to replacement centers. From April to July alone the division lost practically all of its infantry lieutenants and privates, a total of 600 officers and 6,600 men. The incoming replacements consisted of air cadets, other divisions and other sources such as disbanded military police units, coast guard, special training battalions and various other service commands.

Mike was spared being shipped out as a replacement with the others because of his expert rifleman designation. He had been designated Co G sniper and regimental runner. As such he did not belong to any particular rifle squad.

In August Mike received a 3 day pass and hitched a ride on a C-47 transport plane to anywhere. He didn't care where it was going as long as it was going south. He was the only person on the entire plane other than the Captain and crew up front. His plan was to get back home to Dallas for a couple days and return to base before they shipped out. The C-47 went south alright but unfortunately not to Dallas. A few hours later they landed in Mississippi. That was too far from Dallas so from there he caught a bus to Tuscaloosa AL. Mike rented a car and hooked up with a coed he knew from the University of Alabama and a day later took the train back to Indianapolis.

In September the division prepared to move by rail to Camp Myles Standish in Taunton, MA. Early one morning before sunrise the entire regiment assembled on the Camp Atterbury parade grounds awaiting arrival of a hoard of trucks that would take them to the train station. The Colonel couldn't stand to see the men idle so he gave orders to advance across the parade grounds, shoulder to shoulder, picking up trash, sticks, and gum wrappers..."anything that didn't grow".

Later on in October the division moved from Camp Myles Standish on to New York for departure to England. The 422d regiment crossed the Atlantic on the luxury passenger liner Aquitania while other units of the 106th crossed on the Queen Elizabeth. Both had been converted to troop transports. The ships were thought to be fast enough to out run any German U-Boat therefore no escort was given. Rumors abounded when the ship's makeshift bow gun fired toward a passing vessel in the distance. They were relieved to learn that the ship had simply failed to properly identify themselves as friend or foe.

They arrived in England on October 28th and were deployed in the Cotswold section of the midlands some 12 miles west and northwest of Oxford. They remained in England until the last days of November preparing for an expected early channel crossing.



The last day of November and first few days of December the Division embarked on the long slow fifty mile trip from Southampton to Le Havre, France at the mouth of the Seine River. From there they advanced to Rouen, France, a town about 60 miles up the Seine where Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake in the year 1431. They bivouacked in a general area outside of Rouen stretching northwest to Limesy and remained there eight days

camped in deep mud and open fields with cold drizzling rain falling most of the time.

On December 8th the division moved into the Ardennes to relieve the 2d Infantry Division, then in a defensive position, as part of the VIII Corps whose headquarters was at Bastogne. The route carried them nearly 300 miles through Amiens, Cambrai and Maubeuge in France to Philippeville in Belgium. After an overnight bivouac in extra deep mud near the latter town, they passed through Marche and the villages of eastern Belgium to the vicinity of St. Vith, arriving during the period December 9th to 15th. The relief of the 2d Division commenced on the 10th and was completed the 13th with responsibility for the defense of the sector passing to the 106th on December 12th.

The sector was a 27 mile front partly in Belgium and partly in Germany referred to sometimes as "The Ghost Front". The 422nd Co G was positioned on the left flank or Northern end of a fifteen mile stretch that ran through the German built West Wall known as the Siegfried Line. The position was high on a heavily wooded ridge called the Schnee Eifel (Snow Mountain) some 20 miles to the east of St. Vith. The road network throughout the sector was entirely inadequate for defensive purposes and had only one two-lane road leading away from the 422d and the 423d areas. The 424th was no better served.

Co G HQ was established in a bunker built by Germans as part of the Siegfried Line. Captain Kielmeyer told Mike he could sleep inside but instead he chose to take up residence in a foxhole just outside the bunker entrance. The thought was that he could recognize and react to enemy attack more effectively if he was outside. The foxhole was deep and covered by wooden logs for protection.



December 16th, 1944...Battle of the Bulge.

December 16th began just like any other day with Mike standing guard about 100 yds downhill from the bunker above an old logging trail that cut across the breadth of the mountain. His rotation as lone sentry in the thick wooded forest began at midnight and ended at 4:00 am. Below him another 100 yds was a squad size outpost that marked the farthest line of resistance. Standing silently next to a tree he would challenge anyone who might approach the company position.

After coming off guard duty at 4:00 am Mike was soundly asleep inside his log hut when the Battle of the Bulge started. Beginning at 5:30 am that morning "Operation Watch on the Rhine" as the Germans called it began with the Germans sending four divisions, two infantry and two panzer, to "take us out". Their purpose was to open a way through to Liege and Namur and on to Brussels and Antwerp.

During the first hour of the attack the Germans poured artillery fire into American lines to soften their positions. The greatest concentration was directed at the American artillery

batteries behind their frontline position. The initial barrage had the unfortunate effect of knocking out communication between Regimental HQ and the front line soldiers.

GI's in the Co G area responded with mortar fire repulsing the initial infantry attack at their front. As Mike emerged from his shelter he witnessed a German Captain and another young soldier brought up to the command post. They were badly wounded and died before they could be interrogated. The only casualty sustained by Co. G was a soldier who received a clean shot through the shoulder. A larger loss of life was averted when another GI picked up a live grenade thrown in by the Germans and tossed it back.

That first day their position was left relatively unmolested as Germans instead penetrated deep into the wooded hills to the north in an attempt to swing back south behind the Schnee Eifel and into the regiment's undefended rear areas. This ground to the North was thinly held by reconnaissance units. Hastily assembled engineers, artillery and northern units of the 422d blocked this move by nightfall.

During the early morning hours of the 17th the company prepared to move to Schlausenbach to protect Regimental HQ which was now at risk due to the encircling action by the Germans. Again Mike was on guard duty but this time as the squad in the forward outpost came up, no one came back down the line to replace them. That seemed odd. Something was obviously not right. After a while it became apparent that no one was coming down, so Mike went up to investigate. Back at CP the HQ Sergeant barked "where have you been?" As the entire company prepared to move the Sergeant sent a messenger down to bring Mike up, but the messenger went only about half-way down and aborted. Mike was only minutes away from being left behind.

After arriving in Schlausenbach early in the morning Mike and another runner ate what would be their last hot meal for the next four months in the regimental kitchen before joining Co. G already dug in on the North face of the hill behind Regimental HQ.

Occasionally a German patrol would poke its head over the opposite hill before being promptly driven back. About mid-morning a few men from signal corps came rumbling down the hill in a jeep. Co G watched from their foxholes as signal corps personnel scurried up a telephone pole in an attempt to re-establish communication with HQ. The men shouted warnings that the Germans were just over the hill but to no avail. They either didn't hear or were determined to finish their job. It didn't take long for Germans to begin firing on the signal corps men hoisted high on the pole and they quickly slid down and sped off in their jeep to where they came from.

Unbeknownst to Co G, or regiment for that matter, the Germans continued to push through their flanks on both sides. Finally word came from Division HQ in Saint Vith that they were to

attack and destroy a German Panzer Combat team on the Schoenberg-Saint Vith road in coordination with the 423rd regiment. It was believed that the 7th Armored division would attack simultaneously from the other side to pinch the Germans. Schoenberg held a critical bridge over the Our River that was crucial to the German advance on Saint Vith. It was also the only way out for the two regiments. On the 18th the entire regiment pivoted to an assembly area just south of skyline drive with plans to attack Schoenberg on the 19th.

Throughout the night the regiment walked under the cover of darkness toward the assembly area. It was so dark that they had to place one hand on the shoulder of the man in front to keep from being separated. They seemed to be lost most of the night as they crisscrossed back and forth in a creek bottom. After a while, men became so hot from marching that some discarded their overcoats and excess kits, leaving what amounted to a trail of crumbs. Finally they arrived at their destination with only a short hour or two to rest and catch some sleep.

As the morning dawned on the 19th Mike awoke to a quiet murmur circulating among the men from Co G HQ. From their position just inside a stand of trees they could see a German Panther tank sitting just outside the tree line to the right. Woods in general were not a good place to be when artillery was concerned. The Germans learned to aim for the tops of trees causing tree bursts that would send deadly wooden shrapnel raining down on the men.

The American counter-attack began with the crossing of an open field right in front of the Panzer with its cannon firing. Boom...boom, each time the cannon issued forth its report Mike would lunge to the ground, falling inside a tank track seeking the lowest terrain possible. In between shots he ran diagonally across the field and away from the tank until the field turned past a stand of trees toward the valley. Out of sight of the tank he came upon the site of a recent battle with overturned jeep and equipment strewn everywhere. He saw no dead or wounded but did find an unspent grenade on the ground and put it in his pocket. Other than his M1 with one clip of eight bullets, the grenade was the only weapon he had. From here he turned back up the hill toward the rest of the Co G men.

After entering the woods Mike jumped into the first foxhole he saw only to hear a Lieutenant yell out "*hey soldier get out of my hole*". Mike was in the perimeter occupied by Battery D of the 634th Antiaircraft Automatic Weapons Battalion Co C. After digging another foxhole in what would be his final position, Mike fired toward an invisible target in the direction of the German position. Tanks and heavy traffic could be heard rumbling down the road below them. At first they thought it was the 7th armored breaking through, but soon learned otherwise, as parts of Co. G crested the hill only to be driven back.

That night Mike climbed into the back of a 2 ton truck belonging to the AA battery along with another Co. G man who hailed from Fort Worth, TX for some much needed sleep. They knew the back of a truck was not the safest place to be if artillery or other enemy fire came in but

they were exhausted. He learned that one of his friends from Chicago was killed while crossing the field. He thought of a funny story his friend related that occurred back in the states; you have to understand men in the Army can be crude. It was expected in the mess hall when asking to pass the bowl of beans or milk or whatever you would say *"pass the f**king beans"*. Everyone said it, if not you didn't receive any beans. After months of practicing this new Army lingo, his friend was home on leave and enjoying dinner with his parents and girlfriend when he unconsciously let it slip, *"pass the f**king salad...uh, please"*

The next day, the 20th of December, Mike could hear a wounded German crying "wasser, wasser...water, water". Was it a trap? A temporary cease fire was called allowing time to remove dead and wounded soldiers who lay between the two opposing forces. During this time German officers notified the remaining American officers that all artillery would be turned squarely on them if they did not surrender.

Mike and the men around him were never dislodged, but with high rate of casualties, dwindling ammunition and lack of food & water, it became apparent that they would not achieve their objective. The advancing men of the 422nd, with the 423rd on their left, had run into a trap near Schonberg and were subjected to heavy fire from nearly all directions by tanks and artillery. By the afternoon it became evident to the regimental brass that the success of the mission was impossible. The paramount question for Col. Descheneaux then became that of saving as many lives as possible. In his view their situation was rendered hopeless by the great distance behind the American lines, the weather, low ammunition supply, and many other factors. And so, though the spirit of every man revolted against such a decision, surrender seemed to be the only solution to avoid needless loss of life and further suffering. A majority of the two regiments capitulated late in the day on the 19th on the orders of Col. Descheneaux. Mike and others including Captain Kielmeyer from Co "G", Co "H", and men from other units totaling about 500 found their way to the Regimental Motor Park, and held out until 21st December.

Sources: Herb Sheaner recollections

A HISTORY OF THE 106th UNDER GENERAL JONES' COMMAND

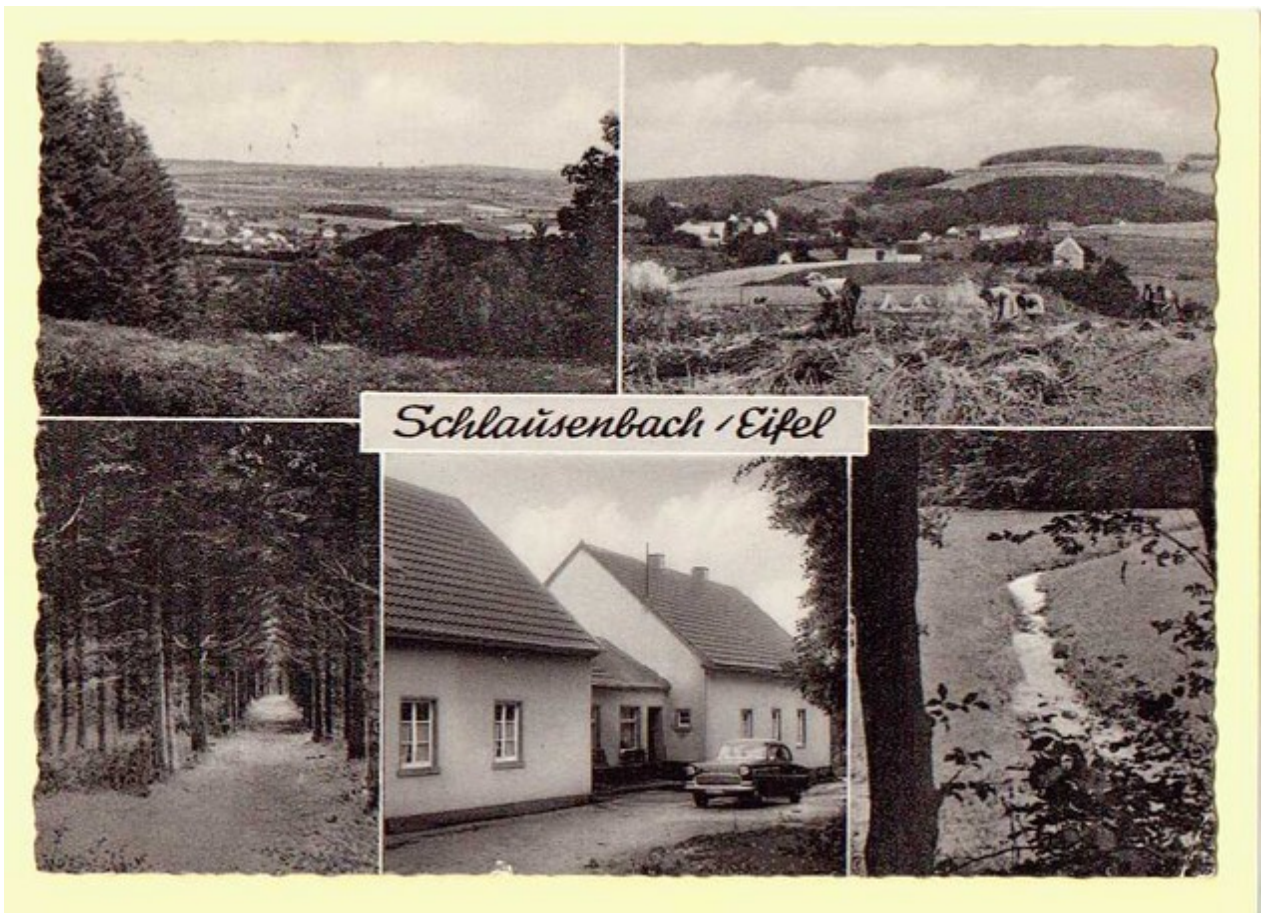
By ALAN W. JONES, Major General, USA, Retired - [web link](#)

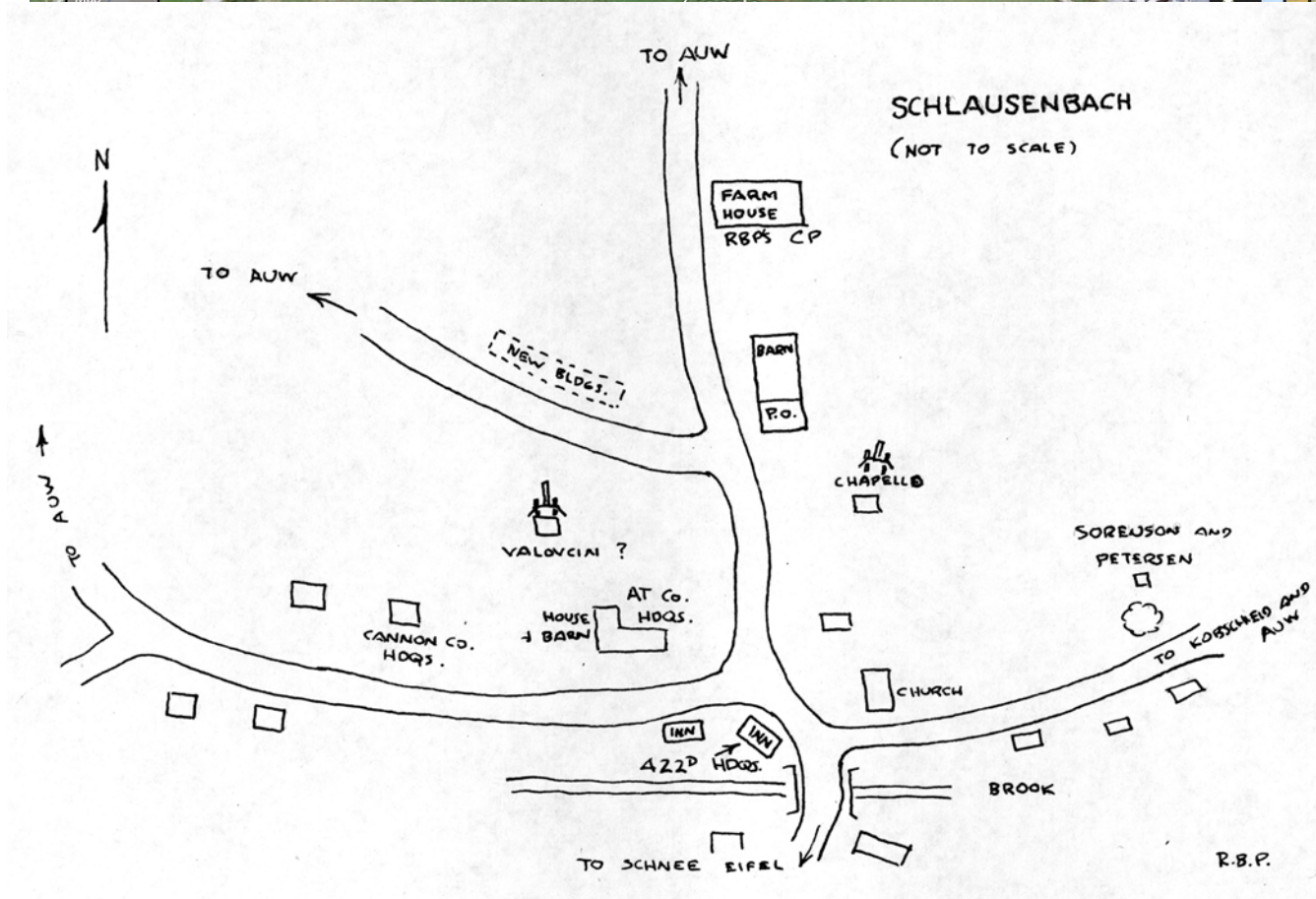
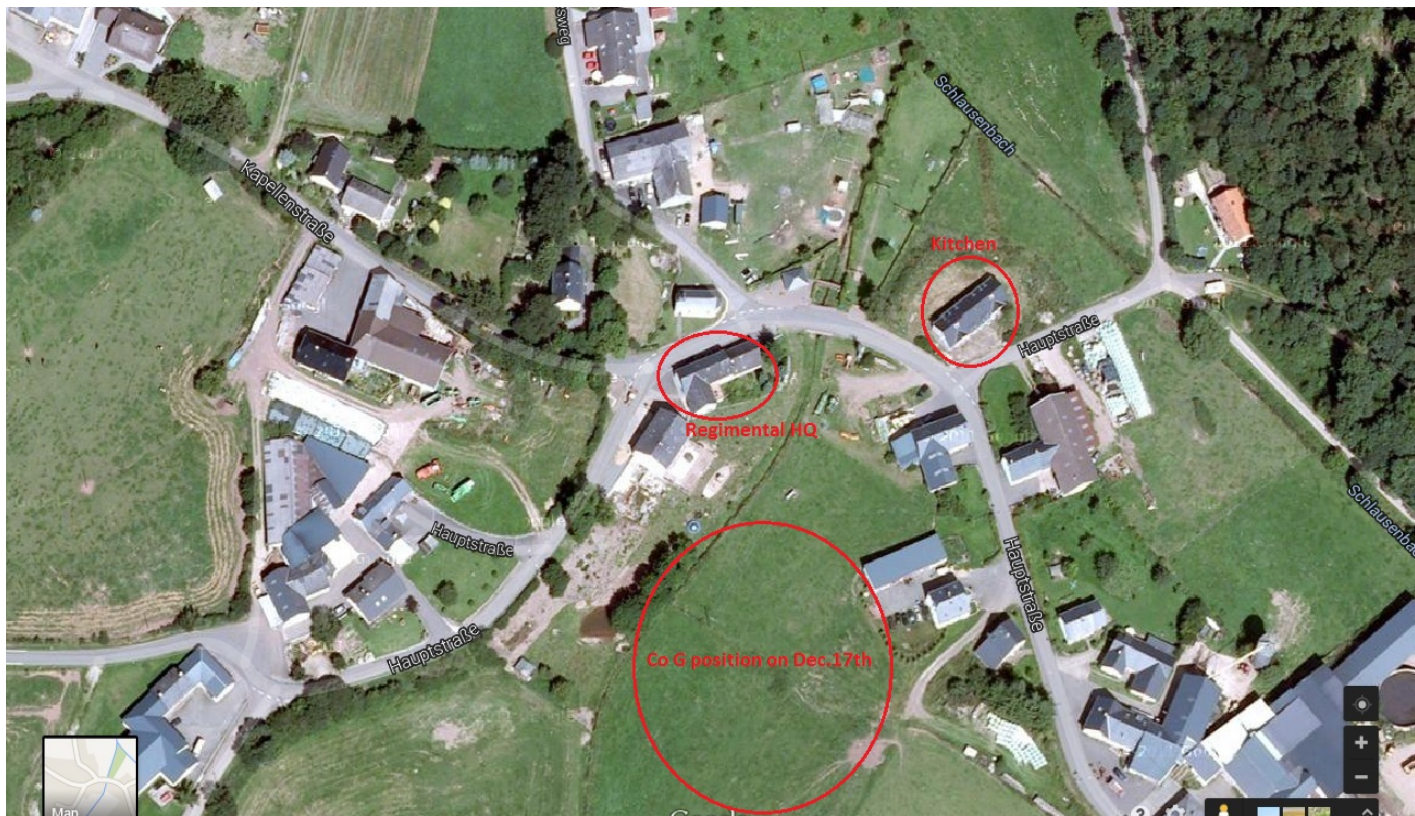
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE 422ND BEFORE AND AFTER

By Lt. Col. JOSEPH C. MATTHEWS, formerly Regimental Executive Officer - [web link](#)



M1 Rifle







Troop Ship R.M.S. AQUITANIA

