

COOKEVILLE MAN STILL REMEMBERS WWII EXPERIENCE

by Megan Trotter

COOKEVILLE -- Sam Howard Greenwood inspects his military jacket from World War II, pointing to various badges and medals. There's a Purple Heart, a rope at his shoulder from France, a sea horse patch for crossing the Rhine River, stripes to tell how long he served overseas.

"I've got so many I've forgotten what they all are," he said.



However he certainly has not forgotten the experiences that earned him his honors. Greenwood was a technical sergeant with the 159th Engineer Combat Battalion and was in charge of troops who built roads and bridges to get tanks and supply lines to their fellow soldiers across Europe. One road they had to build was about a mile long and 12 feet across.

"We were out there night and day, night and day. There wasn't any overtime, either," said Greenwood. "It was a lot of hard work. We'd turn on them old trucks, and two would lay

down on the hood and four or five could get in the cab, and we'd get three or four hours of sleep."

At one point he was riding in a Jeep with a comrade and superior officer when someone opened fire on them. They dove out of the vehicle and sought cover while trying to locate the shooter.

"All of a sudden it just died down and you could of heard a mouse sneeze. There we were, laying there afraid to move, afraid they'd shoot us; didn't know what to do. I guess we laid there for 20-25 minutes."

After no more shots came, they found each other, got back in the Jeep and headed for safety. Luckily, neither Greenwood or his companions were injured. They later found out that they had strayed between an American and German patrol who were involved in a skirmish.

The troops slowly made their way to Luxembourg where they were given the mission to secure the high ground of Hill 313.

"Most of us had never heard of the country of Luxembourg," said Greenwood. "It's a small country in central Europe. It's about the size of three of our counties back home, say Putnam, White and Overton counties."

While at Hill 313, Greenwood and his fellow soldiers came face-to-face with German troops at the Battle of the Bulge. The attack was an attempt by Hitler to split the Allied forces and capture key areas that would force them to negotiate a peace treaty in his favor. Greenwood and the rest of the 159th Engineer Combat Battalion were in their fox holes on the hill suffering through below zero weather -- the worst winter in recorded history there, says Greenwood -- when the battle started.

"I thought I'd go warm up by the fire, too, but just as I stuck my foot out toward the flame, the first German shells hit."

What followed was months of brutal battle that left an estimated 80,000 American soldiers dead.

"I don't see how -- the good Lord was sure with us -- with as many shells as they threw in there how it kept

from hitting directly in someone's fox hole," said Greenwood. "(Those who weren't there) had no idea of what we went through over there. They were back here working for good money with a good job, and a warm bed every night with breakfast the next morning."

Greenwood saw the bodies of thousands of fellow soldiers being brought back by the truckloads to be buried away from enemy soil. He also witnessed the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps that make him shudder even today.

"It's unbelievable how one human could do another human that way," he said with tears in his eyes.

The 159th Engineer Combat Battalion bravely defended Hill 313 during the battle, and Greenwood has been told, if they had failed, Luxembourg would have been overrun with German soldiers.

He was overseas a total of 18 months. When he returned home to Putnam County, he was a truck driver for a time, then owned a motel and founded Eagle Furniture, which he owns with his son, Sam Douglas Greenwood, to this day.

Since the Battle of the Bulge, Greenwood has been back to visit the site of the battle twice, once in 1993 and once in 2001. Each time the people of Luxembourg have treated him like a hero, he recounts with pride.

During one of his visits, he was invited into a museum and among the pieces of memorabilia from the battle, there was also a sign that he remembered placing with the rest of the 159th Engineer Combat Battalion at the end of one of their bridges. It was a sight that still chokes him up with pride when he sees the photo he took of it.

"I think the 159th Combat Engineer Battalion was made up of some of the finest men that ever lived," he said.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 10 November 2010, front page.



An old photograph of Sam Greenwood, right, with his fellow soldier and friend Harry "Slim" Midgett during the days in the army.



Local veteran Sam Howard Greenwood, second from right, sits with his family, from left, grandson, Sam Gregory Greenwood; great-grandson, Sam Jared Greenwood; and son, Sam Douglas Greenwood.

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