

BATTLE OF GRAND HALLEUX

WRITTEN BY JO ANN GILPIN AS TOLD BY RAYMOND DAUDT CO. G 505 PIR

My Great-Uncle Ray was a German-American paratrooper during World War II. When I found this out for the first time just a few years ago I felt compelled to hear about his service. I always knew that his brother, Ralph, was a paratrooper who had been killed when he jumped in Normandy, but I didn't know anything about Ray, except that he used to own an auto-body repair shop in a nearby town. It wasn't until I began to search out my family history that my Grandma Daudt mentioned that Ray had also been a paratrooper in the war. She went to her attic and pulled out a dusty old picture of a young man with bright blue eyes wearing a creased uniform and a hat with a parachute embroidered on it. She said she couldn't tell me any more, though, because, except for a few times shortly after he came home, Raymond never talked about his experiences in the war. So I made a promise to myself that I would go and speak with him, if only to express my appreciation of the sacrifice he made all those years ago.

I didn't know what to expect the first time I went to Ray's home to ask him to share his story with me. "So you want to hear about what I did in the war?" he demanded as I nervously laid my tape recorder on the table. "Well I went there, it was hell, and I came back. That's all you need to know." I suddenly felt like an intruder, not knowing what to say. But then, as we sat there in his warm kitchen he began to tell me bits and pieces of his time in the war. Fragments of memory mainly. And as the days and months progressed I returned to his home and he began sharing more and more. Of all the stories he shared, the one that struck me most was of a young family he stayed with at a battle in Grand-Halleux, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

On the morning of December 18, 1944 the 82nd Airborne Division, 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 3rd Battalion loaded up on huge tractor-trailer trucks headed to defend Bastogne, Belgium. Most of the men wore only light winter gear, a small number of weapons and ammo, and drew "K" and "D" rations for only one day. They were assured that they would be resupplied when they reached their destinations, and fortunately they were. But, the German SS units had their own plans, and for reasons better explained in Allen Langdon's book Ready: The History of the 505th PIR the 505th was diverted to defensive positions along the Salm River, arriving on December 20th.

"G" company, lead by Captain Isaacs, was positioned at Grand Halleux, Belgium. Isaacs sent Lt. George E. Clark's platoon to the east, across the bridge, where they set up defensive positions and an outpost about 300 yards out of town (Langdon 110). The outpost consisted of an 81 mm mortar and 5 men, Sgt Willie Beaty from Tennessee, Pvt. William Sanchez from California, Pvt. Wilson Whicker, Pvt. Thomas, and my uncle, a young German-American from Payette, Idaho, Pvt. Raymond Daudt.

It was on the morning of December 21, 1944 that 13-year-old Marcel Jeanpierre and his father left their home east of town to see if they could find more information about what was going on (Jeanpierre). Most of the houses in town had already been evacuated and the Jeanpierre family was one of the few remaining families left. While Marcel's father conversed with an American soldier in German, a young Californian soldier, Pvt. Sanchez, gave Marcel a chocolate candy bar. I'm sure this was quite a treat for a young Belgian boy in the middle of a war and a small act of kindness he would remember the rest of his life.

That afternoon, G-company set up their outpost near the Jeanpierre's home and later that evening some of the men of G-company settled into the Jeanpierre's home and spoke with

Marcel's father. According to Marcel's account Sgt Beaty spoke with his father in German, but I have been told by members of the 505th that Sgt Beaty didn't speak a word of German. The only one in the company that spoke fluent German was Pvt. Daudt, and he vividly remembers speaking with the young Belgian father.

At dawn on December 22, 1944 Ray and a few of the other soldiers left the outpost and went back into town. Ray was informed by locals that the SS were moving in on the ridge. According to Ray he tried to tell his superiors but they would not listen, him being just a young private and the information coming from locals. To protect the safety of the Jeanpierre family Ray tried to talk the father into taking his family and leaving but he refused. By midday Sgt Beaty set up the outpost in a vacant house next door to the Jeanpierre's. By this time they were quite certain the SS were coming and didn't want the family in the middle of the firefight, even though they feared they would be anyway. By later that afternoon, Ray and Marcel's father were outside talking. Ray was still trying to convince the young father to leave, but was reassured that the family would be safe from harm in the coal cellar. They then spotted a German lookout over the ridge. Sgt. Beaty ordered in artillery fire.

By 1700 that evening it was beginning to get dark. Sgt. Beaty and his men continued to set up in the vacant house while the Jeanpierre family next door gathered around the stove with nothing but an oil lamp for light. Somewhere around 1915 the first sounds of machine gun fire pierced the air.

Sgt Beaty and his small group of men were taking on an entire battalion of Hitler's 9th SS Panzer Division. According to Ray's account the Germans stormed down the hill lined up shoulder to shoulder. In the ensuing firefight Sgt Beaty was killed outside of the house by a grenade and Pvt. Sanchez was killed in the front doorway. The other 3 soldiers were somehow

able to escape. Pvt. Ray Daudt was among those who survived. He was positioned near the front window, which was shot out during the early part of the battle.

As night fell Ray continued to exchange fire with the SS. Then at some point during the night, as a light snow began to fall, he threw a grenade out the broken window and, as he puts it "the shooting stopped." He seized upon this opportunity to make a run for it on his own. Ray ran the 300 yards to the Plt. CP where his Plt. leader called out "What the hell is going on over there?" Ray replied "What the hell do you think!" They then evacuated the CP and retreated across the bridge at Grand Halleux as they were being pursued by their attackers. Just as Ray made it across the Bridge and dove behind a small brick ledge the bridge exploded. He was not expecting it, and he thought he was going to get his head blown off. Ray wasn't able to hear much for a few hours after this because he was so close to the blast. The destruction of the bridge basically stopped the advancing Germans. Those who tried to wade the river were promptly met with American firepower. There were some American soldiers who got stuck on the other side of the bridge when it was blown and had to sneak across later under the cover of darkness.

After a few days the 505th was ordered to retreat further and regroup. Ray spent more than 50 years wondering what happened to that Belgian family he stayed with. He had always wanted to go back to that little village, he told me, but was never able to. And then, one day as I was searching the internet for stories of Ray's unit and the battles he participated in I came across a story written by Marcel Jeanpierre that mirrored Ray's account of the family in Belgium. This story can be accessed at <http://users.skynet.be/bulgecriba/Beaty.html>. While some of the details were a bit different I knew that this account was written about the same incident. To put

it mildly, I was floored. It seemed unbelievable that these two men, separated by more than a thousand miles could be reconnected after more than 50 years.

On behalf of my Uncle Ray I would like to thank Marcel Jeanpierre for sharing his story and Henri Rogister for posting it on his website. I would also like to thank Chris Christensen for answering all my e-mails and putting me in contact with Eddy Lamberty in Grand Halleux, Belgium. Eddy has been gracious enough to meet with Mr. Jeanpierre and has sent me maps and several wonderful pictures. Each of these men, whom I have never met in person, have helped to bring Belgium back to Ray after more than 50 years. I could never thank you all enough.