

Text of the remarks presented by Edgar 'Dusty' Bredbenner

When WW I ended on the 11th day, of the 11th hour of the 11th month (11:00 a.m., November 11, 1918), this was called Armistice Day. I can remember the pride of the WW I soldiers and their many parades and gatherings. In the nineteen fifties this was changed to Veterans' Day, to honor all the servicemen and women, who served in the many wars. I grew up in Ithaca during the depression and very few had much in the way of luxuries. Food and jobs were in short supply and folks struggled to survive. I can remember the start of the C.C.C. programs. (Civilian Conservation Corps) Men joined up and received \$30.00 per month. \$25.00 was sent home and they could keep \$5.00 for personal use. Many camps were located in our area. These men worked on the many gorge trails, built park pavilions, did stone work as well as making tables and benches. All of our nearby state parks show the wonderful work of their labors. During the day the men worked for the CCC, and at night the army took over. They did military training and had good food. This also was a great source of manpower for the army during WW II. In 1940, the boy scouts looked for scrap metal and old tires for the war effort. I used to spot airplanes at night. Rationing came into effect and you needed coupons to buy tires, meat, coffee, sugar, gas and shoes. All for the war effort.

While I was in high school I worked for the Lehigh Railroad as a traveling mail and baggage clerk. This had me in excellent physical condition when I went into the army. I trained at Camp Wheeler, Macon, Ga. in the heat of the summer. It was hot and humid and I was in excellent shape and I trained in combat intelligence. I was sent overseas late summer of 1944, to join the 80th infantry division, one of General Patton's favorite divisions, a part of the famous U.S. Third Army. I was sent to Co. B, 318th infantry regiment and was given the bazooka, a rocket used to knock German tanks. I had a few major problems at the time. The bazooka was not heavy enough to knock out the heavy Tiger and Panther German tanks. I also had never seen a bazooka before and had no training on this weapon. I was also informed that I was the 9th bazooka man in 10 days! Some smart guy had to tell me that. I asked him if he knew so much about the weapon why didn't he take over the honors. After the first day in combat, I had to use the weapon, after a sergeant showed me the operation. I realized the problem was my assistant so I got rid of him and kept the weapon for a few months.

The 80th was one of the five "Work Horse division for General Patton". So called since we were at all times in his Third Army. The 80th had 129 straight days of combat. Our casualties were very heavy, one had no relief, not much food and few showers. We attacked every day and were wet and cold most of the time. We lived like animals in the ground and very rarely got in out of the cold and rain. Most of us had trench foot from wet feet and socks since it rained most of the time until it turned to snow. Our foxholes usually had a foot or two of water in them. You lived in the ground or got shot to pieces from the enemy's well aimed artillery, mortars and rockets, as well as by their snipers. The division, as well as myself, fought in France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria and ended up in Czechoslovakia. We were a very close knit unit and would do most anything for each other. Many men lost their lives helping out their comrades. We had what was called, "Esprit de Corps." (Closeness and unity) Most of us were wounded

many times, patched up and sent right back into combat. No rotation of troops, but many hopes and prayers.

One short, but very long battle for me was the Battle of the Bulge. (Ardennes) After our short rest we were ready to go back into battle in mid December. Our plans were changed and we were alerted for a move up north to help out the First U.S. Army after heavy German attacks in Luxembourg and Belgium. We were packed into open trucks, no blankets, no overcoats and the weather was near zero. After a two-day-and-night ride [during] which we did not stop, we arrived north of Luxembourg City on December 21, 1944. Early the next morning we attacked and battled into the village of Ettelbruck, Luxembourg, now called the Patton town. We were able to fight our way into a few houses in the southern part of town. We fought there for three days with the street fighting going back and forth. We had 220 men when we started the attack and lost many men there. On Christmas Eve we were alerted to move again. We were again packed into open trucks without any protection and very cold. We were to join the U.S. 4th Armored Division, one of Patton's favorites, for the attack into Bastogne to relieve the 101st Airborne Division surrounded and under heavy attack. Early Christmas morning we were deployed on the flanks, deep in the woods. Terrible fighting, terrible weather with much snow, wind and cold. We were able to move forward capturing some small villages. We, as well as the Germans, wanted these villages for protection from the cold. Villages were our only hope of survival. We had no overcoats, blankets, no camouflage clothing, no buildings and no fires to keep warm. Our company never did get to Bastogne, but was relieved by the 35th Infantry Division on December 28th. The company now was down to 20 men left from our original 220 men. We had moved north in 19 trucks and the company returned to Luxembourg in one truck. A PFC was our acting company commander. Two days later the company was back into combat with many new replacements. My story was shorter. On Christmas day I was wounded in the neck and in the back, and was seriously wounded in the left thigh by shrapnel. Our company medics patched me up and gave me some morphine and said, "The medics are not getting through because of the heavy enemy action and the deep snows. (This was before helicopters,) "You will have to hike back to the aid station or stay and freeze to death. Take your rifles and ammo because of snipers." Three of us hiked back five miles and finally reached safety. We had a few fire fights with the elite German 5th Paratrooper Division. With my thigh wound, one man with his heel shot off and another hit in the back and none of us were bleeding because of the cold. If you could not walk out of the area you froze to death. When the spring thaws came thousands of American and German bodies littered the Ardennes area.

I was told I was to be air evacuated to England and the USA. Sounded great to me. [We] flew on a C-47 medical plane in terrible weather. About 500 feet up we were hit by German fighters. The plane, on fire, was able to circle and land. Two nurses and some of the men were killed. Both pilots were wounded, but landed the plane. Very rough, but we were down. I was taken back to the Evac, hospital, sat in a chair and a doctor gave me seven shots of Novocain and opened my thigh to the bone. I was bandaged up and sent to a hospital in France for 3 months and then right back into combat. You did not

get out of combat unless you had a “million dollar wound”. I will not go into that. I was later made an, “Honorary Citizen,” of Ettelbruck, where I returned many times.

After serving as our national commander I am now the national historian. Many I.C. grads served their country in WWI, WWII and since. Very few know that [in] one of the major battles in the Pacific, Iwo Jima, one of the assault battalions [was] led by three I.C. grads. These three were classmates and joined the Marines and were captains leading this attack.

Most of the divisions sent overseas had about two years training. We younger and later replacements usually had about 16 weeks training. During the Battle of the Bulge some young men had just a few weeks training and many were killed in combat after 9-10 weeks in the army. Every boy in my high school class went into service. Many girls also joined up to help out.

You are very fortunate to live in the USA. We have a volunteer army and we live a very good life. We are somewhat safe and secure in the USA. Be proud of your country and the members of the military that serve us. I like to quote some of our military leader that I believe did explain some of the hardships that men went through in combat.