

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

My brother-in-law, James T. Van Arsdale, was in the Army in World War Two and fought in the Battle of The Bulge with the 101st Airborne and other American infantry men.

The time was December 1944 and everything was frozen; the American Soldiers had to use pick axes to dig a fox hole. While these Soldiers were in their foxholes, there came snow, rain and very cold temperatures – so cold that they had their feet and lower legs in ice in the bottom of foxholes. I think these men were trapped behind enemy lines, completely surrounded by Germans for about 44 days. All the time, the American soldiers had to listen to the German artillery going over their heads: something called “88s” or “screamin mimis” (because these shells made a loud screaming sound while they were in the air, but when they were going to fall, the noise stopped so that kept the American Troops always on edge).

This went on for weeks or months, 24 hours a day. Experts have said that this was a tactic by the Germans not only to kill but also to destroy the ability to think. For 44 days, these brave Soldiers that had been thinking of Christmas of 1944 and New Years of 1945 received only gifts of death. I am very thankful for my brother-in-law and all the other brave men and women and for their loyalty and service.

I went into the Army in 1953 and served in Europe for 33 months; that was almost 10 years later and I still saw a lot of destruction that made me think of all the children and what they went through. I married a Girl in Amsterdam Holland that was born in 1938, and I have stories from her of living through bombings and occupation of her country by an enemy and the murder of innocent people, but that is another chapter.