

War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Stephen C. Compher

Current home town: Oxford, PA

Age: Not given

Our Dad: An American Hero, Our Hero



Steve, Dad, Bob, Mom, John, Tillie, Terry

Picture taken in 2001

In loving memory of my father, Clayton Compher

Child of God, son of Charles and Matilda (O'Bryant)

Husband of Mildred (Shoemaker), father of Terry, Steve, Tillie, Bob and John

Grandfather and Great Grandfather

World War II Veteran

Clayton Compher was born in 1921 on a farm in rural southern Ohio where his German father and Irish mother raised seven children during the difficult depression years. He married Mildred Shoemaker in 1939 and began working as an electrician at the Mead Corporation paper mill.

In 1943, he had two children and an automatic draft deferment, as well as an overwhelming desire to serve his country. He asked that Mead *not* apply for any more deferments for him. He entered the service in 1944 at Camp Fannin in Tyler, Texas for basic training and joined the 12th Armored in January 1945 in France, where he saw his first action at Colmar. He fought with the 17th AIB, through France and Germany to the Austrian border, until the end of the war. He was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart.

He returned to Ohio in August 1945, where he built the family home. He worked as a farmer and a part-time electrical contractor, along with his full-time job at the Mead, to support his growing family, which now had five children. He moved into management at the Mead and retired from there in 1982.

Over the years, he served on the school board (ten years as president), held several leadership positions in his church, was a Sunday School teacher, was a Masonic Grand Master three times, and organized annual fundraising programs to benefit poor families in his home area.

He returned to Europe in 1971 for the 12th Armored Reunion, and with his family in 1987 and 1990 to retrace the division's movement through France, Germany and Austria.

He attended the museum dedication in Abilene, October 4-7, 2001, and marched, in uniform, in the parade with his wife, all five children, 3 grandchildren and 1 great grandson. He died one week later of a massive heart attack while leading the evening service at his church.

History of the 12th Armored Division

The 12th was termed the "Mystery Division" since it was one of the few units taking part in General Patton's gigantic push into Germany that could not be mentioned by name in the press for security reasons. Known as the "Hellcat Division," the division averaged 20-25 miles per day in its swift movement forward.

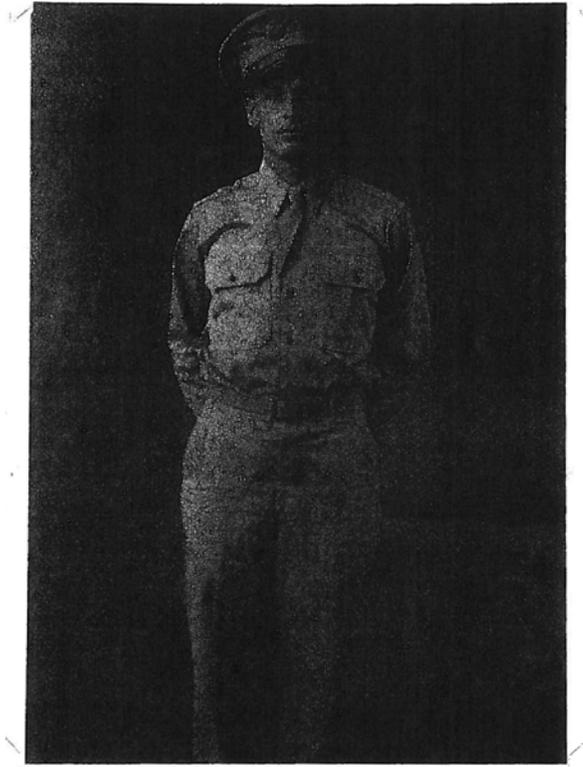
In the space of one week, from March 18 to March 25, the 12th took dozens of towns, captured over 6,000 prisoners and disarmed half as many more, sending them back to surrender to trailing infantry outfits while the armor pushed on. In one day, March 19, the Hellcats captured 2,500 prisoners, three ammunition dumps, a regimental supply train, 400 horses and 700 trucks and wagons. In addition, they seized an enemy hospital with patients and equipment intact.

The next day, the division took approximately 2,200 prisoners, killed about 1,000 Germans and destroyed a locomotive and 6 cars, 20 tanks, 20 anti-aircraft guns, 15 artillery pieces and 50 wagons. For good measure they also shot down 2 Nazi fighter planes.

Other highlights:

- **Herrlisheim:** Outfought two crack German Divisions for 12 days, routing the enemy from Alsace-Lorraine.
- **Colmar:** Forced the Germans from their last stronghold in France by liberating Colmar.
- **Rhineland:** As Patton's 'MYSTERY DIVISION' made the slash from Tier to the Rhine River in less than 72 hours. Cleared the entire Saar Palatinate of the enemy in less than a week. Moving from the Rhine to Austria in 37 days, capturing 63,013 prisoners.
- **Dillingen:** Captured intact the first bridge over the Danube River as the Germans were in the process of blowing it up. This saved thousands of lives in the concentration camps just down the road.
- **Landsberg:** Liberated 5 concentration camps, all satellite camps of Dachau. Landsberg Prison is where Hitler wrote "Mein Kampf".

After this, there were a couple small battles, before the war was over.



Just got my uniform at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indianapolis, Indiana
Needs a little pressing, don't you think?

A Soldier's Church

Dad wrote this during a 2-day rest period behind the front line. This was the only break he received from the action. Churches were the targets of the Air Force because, particularly in smaller towns/cities, their bell towers were the highest point in the area. German artillery spotters used them to target American troops.

It is early on this Sabbath morning.

We war weary soldiers are seeking.

A place to worship our dear Savior.

To lay our burdens at the feet of our Master.

Upon the hill there stands a church.

So this brought an end to our search.

Although the walls and ceiling are all that's standing.

It still was evident that was the Lord's building.

In the distance we can hear our guns pounding.

The right to worship they are sounding.

We are just a few miles back to rest.

Soon again we'll be our turn to go and do our best.

So thankful we are to have stored in our hearts.

Encouragement from our Lord before the action starts.

To use this bomb-torn church we are willing.

But remember it's just an earthly building.

The bell this morning was not heard ringing.

The village people under its roof calling.

Because the belfry where once it rang so clear.

Now lays crumbled on the ground so near.

But inside the soldiers were crowded together.

To hear the chaplain's message of our Lord and Savior.

The songs we sang in our hearts caused rejoicing.

Even though it was just a war-torn building.

At home this morning the church doors are opening.

And the people have no fear while they are worshipping.

We know that our country, God has wonderfully blessed.

Because our homes and churches stand unmolested.

And the soldier's say to you at home, over there.

Stay down on your knees and remember us in prayer.

When our earth's work is done, we have a peace in knowing.

That in heaven, not made with hands, we have another building.