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On the morning of December 26, 1944 approximately 9 AM I was lying on my bunk reading. Captain Walters Hammergren, our Glider Operations Officer, walked into the room and asked, "Who needs flying time?" Flight Officer Doug Carter and I both said, "I do". That was the start of the day I will never forget. Captain Hammergren said, "Get your combat gear – draw ammo and three days ration and report to the briefing room at 10 AM." We did. C-47 crews of the 95<sup>th</sup>, 96<sup>th</sup>, 97<sup>th</sup> and 98 were there as well as glider pilots from each squadron.

The briefing officer had a map of our destination and indicated that the field where we were to land had been in control of the Germans, then 101st Airborne – changing hands several times in the past 24 hours. However, it was not known who was in control of the field at the time of the briefing.

After the briefing, we were taken to our gliders. The ground crew had been loading and lining them up for take-off. I understood that some of the gliders had been loaded with medical supplies and some with him ammunition. Some have food. I opened the door to the one that Flight Officer O. B. Blessing and I were to fly and saw that we had a cargo of gasoline – 55 Jerry cans of it.

The flight went smoothly until we hit the German lines – then the most beautiful fireworks appear! The sky was full of tracers and bursting anti-aircraft shells. The sound of small arms fire passing through the canvas-covered glider reminded me of a popcorn machine. Flight Officer Bailey and Carter's glider had a shall pass through the left wing, leaving a hole a couple of feet wide and bursting right above them, however, they were able to land safely. All aircraft survived the gunfire – C -47's return to base safely – although not without damage – and all gliders landed safely.

We spent a very **cold** night in a concrete building that had the door and most windows missing.

The next morning we walked around and observed a number of German prisoners digging graves for some of their frozen comrades.

Later that morning the gliders from the 439<sup>th</sup> Troop Carrier Group came in. We had arrived at dusk and the anti-aircraft fire had difficulty getting our range due to visibility, but that morning was bright and their aim was much improved. We watched as aircraft – the C 47's and gliders were shot down. Some of the crew managed to bail out; others were not so lucky.

That evening we were given the duty of guarding German prisoners. About 25 prisoners were loaded into 4 x 4 2 1/2 ton trucks with three glider pilots to the truck as guards. I believe there were a dozen trucks. Third Army tanks had opened the road into Bastogne and we were able to take the prisoners to the rear. The truck in which I was riding got to close to the edge of the road, which gave away and the truck rolled over on its side – with the tailgate in the middle of the small but deep stream. No one was injured in the accident, but some of the prisoners that have been wounded were in pain, especially those on the bottom of the pile. They were unloaded and return to the compound at Bastogne. We three glider pilots – Flight Officer blessing, Captain Hammergren, and myself were put aboard the last truck which was without a tarp. It had only U. S. Personnel –glider pilots and C-47 crew members that had been lucky enough to come down in friendly territory.

Several of the vehicles carrying prisoners did not have on tarps and a number of Belgian citizens were standing in the fields adjacent to the road and were throwing stones at the Germans as they went bye.

Their aim was pretty good, too. They did notice that in our truck all were Americans but not before one rock was in the air. I was hit on the left eyebrow and was cut. Blood ran down my cheek and froze.

When we arrived at the town where we were to turn over the prisoners, I went to a first aid station and had them clean it up and put a bandage on it. They asked me my name, rank, serial number and organization. They said I earned a purple heart! They didn't get the information!

After getting rid of the prisoners, we were taken to the train station and put aboard a train to Paris. However, we spent as much time on the siding and waiting as we did traveling. We finally arrived at our base on 30 December.

I had decided to make a career of the service early in 1940 so I remained in the service. I had a number of job duties such as Glider Pilot Assistant, Adjutant; Squadron Personnel Officer, Squadron Supply Officer; Group S-4; Wing Asst. S-4; Supply Division of Headquarter Tech, Training; Headquarters Squadron Commander; Asst. Base Supply Officer; Asst. Supply Officer of 1009<sup>th</sup> Special Weapons Squadron Western Field Office. I retired May 31, 1961 in the grade of Major with 21 ½ years of service.

--Charles F. Sutton

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