

# DOWN and GONE !!!

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Bastogne was a small town in southeast Belgium, near the Luxembourg border. It was also in the Ardennes Forest in an area east of the Meuse River, covering part of SE Belgium, Luxembourg and NE France. It also was an area where the American forces were spread out too thinly along that part of the front lines.

It was the winter of 1944. Cold. Snow. Through this area, the German forces launched a massive counterattack in order to swing north through Belgium and deprive Allied forces of the use of ports along the Belgium-Holland seacoast.

Also, into this area, under the command of Otto Skorzeny, English speaking German troops, wearing U. S. uniforms and bearing U. S. arms and equipment, were infiltrated to create maximum chaos and confusion.

The Screaming Eagles of the 101st AB found themselves in the middle of this mess. One of them described it in one word:

"NUTS!"

On Christmas Day, at Chateau Dun, France, the 439th TC Group was given the mission of flying 52 C-47s, each towing a CG4A, to an LZ near Bastogne.

Resupply !!!

In 91/439 there was a GP named John D. Hill. A guy named John Neary told the GPs that the 91st was only going to use 13 gliders and that the GPs would draw lots to determine which 13 GPs were going. The gliders were to carry 105mm ammo with a sack of detonators perched in the co-pilot's seats.

Hill said his name was not chosen, but one chosen GP did not want to go. Hill said that being young and bored "and not being of sound mind," he volunteered.

Naturally, Hill got the 13th glider.

The outfit flew at about 1000-1500 feet to about 50 miles from the front lines, then descended to about 300-350 feet, as they

approached enemy front lines, hoping to surprise the Germans and to be less of a target.

Hill said about ten planes and gliders passed over the enemy before they realized what was happening. Now old John D. Hill, sitting back there talking to himself in lucky glider 13, said he could see tracers arcing upward a few planes ahead of him.

His towship was hit by ground fire. Hill hung on tow. Before they reached the LZ, Hill saw three men parachute from his towship. The aircraft was on fire, but Hill said he knew that Joe Fry was still trying to get his glider to the LZ.

Just as they were coming near the LZ, Hill said he saw Fry jump from the escape hatch. Hill didn't see the chute open because he had cut loose about the same time.

On the ground, Hill learned that Fry's chute had caught on the tail and had opened only when the C-47 blew up. Fry, badly burned, was picked up in a 101st jeep and taken for medical treatment. The other crew members were captured by German troops.

101st HQ was in the Bastogne Town Hall. Hill and other GPs were asked to help evacuate German PWs that night as Patton's Army was expected at any time. When Patton's tanks arrived, Hill and other GPs were given submachine guns and loaded in the back of open-air Army trucks with 20-30 PWs.

Hill said they made it through the lines and left the PWs 30-40 miles beyond the battle area. The GPs were given K-rations and rode a train of cattle-cars to Paris. They heated their rations on the locomotive.

In Paris, Hill and the other GPs were grabbed by the MPs, because the Germans had dropped troopers in the area dressed as GIs. They called their outfit and were taken back to Chateau Dun the next day.