

# Neither Rain nor Dark of Night Stopped These Men

by Joe Carselle, Stan McElvain, and Arch Handy, all of 398-2B

The December 10, 1944 edition of *Beachhead News*, the publication of the VI Corps, Seventh Army, to which the 100th Infantry Division was assigned during the campaign in the Vosges, headlined a four-page story:

“FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HISTORY AN ARMY CROSSED THE VOSGES”

“For Centuries Military Men Considered the Vosges Impregnable. In the Fall of 1944, VI Corps of the U.S. Army Broke Thru.”

On May 7, 1945, the day before V.E. Day, Lieutenant Colonel Harvey C. Weisel, Jr., commander of the 2nd Battalion, 398th Infantry Regiment, recommended that his Headquarters Company be awarded the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque. His recommendation read, in part:

“During the period from November 8 to November 20, while we were fighting for the city of Raon l’Etape, supplying the rifle companies became a major problem. The few mountain trails that did exist had been made impassable by the late autumn rains and were useless to our forces. Each morning during the period members of the Antitank and Communication Platoons carried sorely-needed food and ammunition forward, assuring the riflemen of a steady flow of supplies. At the same time, the A&P Platoon was engaged in clearing paths through the numerous minefields that infested the area and the Intelligence Section manned forward observation posts overlooking the foe’s positions.”

Lieutenant Colonel Weisel had personal knowledge of the justification for the award. On one of our trips up a mountain we met him and his radioman coming down from a visit to one of his rifle companies. He saw what we were doing; and we gained tremendous respect for him and his superb, on-site, leadership.

*History of the 398th Infantry Regiment in World War II* (Infantry Journal, 1947, p. 28), lauded the accomplishments of the

“carrying parties (which) were organized to bear rations and ammunition by foot . . . a long and tedious process . . . holding on to communications wire . . . in the pouring rain . . . over unfamiliar and mined territory. Too much cannot be said of these men who made it possible for the Regiment . . . to push successfully through the Vosges Mountains.”

This is the story of an exceptionally memorable experience of four men of the Anti-Tank Platoon—Joe Carselle, Stan McElvain, Arch Handy, and the late Mike Ferruza.

It rained throughout the day and night. In addition to our personal weapon, ammunition, gas mask, canteen, etc., each of us carried a case of K Rations and several bandoleers of ammunition for the troops on the front line on top of the mountain. We climbed the mountain in daylight and came down in complete darkness. The men of the Communications Platoon had laid a phone line the entire distance. To come down after dark, the only hope of our staying together on the path and not drifting into dense forest was for the lead man to hold the wire with one hand and the hand of the man behind him with the other. Each of us held hands and, miraculously, got to the bottom safely. A round trip of a “carrying party” took about eight hours.

On the night of our experience, the four of us were to meet a driver with a jeep and trailer. We found him and another man who, in the intense darkness and hard rain, we could not see; but they said that they would be prepared to transport us in a very short time. After several minutes, we found that the jeep was still there, but the men were gone.

While we deliberated what to do, we heard a voice, thankfully in English, not German, calling out. We responded. He told us that he was a sergeant in a medical unit, not ours. He said that he could lead us out while continuing to try to find his men.

After an hour or so, we were out of the dense forest. Our guide said that he would leave us, as he was going in another direction and continue looking for his men. He told us that there was a house, or old chateau, some distance away. Carselle took charge and led us to a building, which we discovered was crowded with soldiers. We were able to enter but found that there was no space to lie down, or even sit. We were thankful, however, that we were safely off the mountain and out of the rain.

When daylight arrived, we left, anxious to find our unit. Upon our return to HQ, we were told that we would have been entered on the morning report as “Missing in Action,” within the hour. We realized that we had not gotten our rescuer’s name nor unit, but agreed that he was a Hero. We hoped that he had found his men and that all were safe.

While we were in the Army of Occupation—Germany, after VE Day, May 8, 1945, the award of the Meritorious Service Unit Plaque was approved. We affixed it to our uniform and wore it with pride, as we reflected on our experience in the Vosges, and especially after finding a copy of *Beachhead News*, December 10, 1944, which stated, in part, “mud and rain, snow and sleet . . . congratulations and a place in history is due every man who served in a Carrying Party in the Vosges Mountains campaign.”

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