

Wallace Blanton Wright

Sunday, June 1, 2003

Summary of an interview with Wallace Blanton Wright, born December 5, 1925, on his experiences during World War II. His home was in Asheville, North Carolina. The Interview was conducted by Lou Harshaw.

Blanton was attending a small two year college, Asheville-Biltmore College, located in his home city of Asheville when he was drafted into the United States Army on February 23, 1944. He was classified for the infantry. There were around 600 young men from North Carolina who were inducted at Fort Bragg along with Blanton. This group also included his close friend, David Hildebrand. The Colonel came in and asked if they wanted to go to West Point. Blanton didn't go.

Blanton was then sent to Mineral Wells, Camp Wolters, Texas for Basic Training. He was classified as a private. He was there in Basic for 16 weeks. Blanton said the Basic Training was harder on the boys from the north than on those from the south. When asked why, Blanton said that it seemed the boys from the south were used to rifles and guns, had lived more in the out of doors, fishing, hunting. Somehow they seemed to be tougher physically than the northern boys.

After Basic, the group was scattered, sent in all directions all over the US. Blanton was attached to the 63rd Division and sent to Woodville, in southern Mississippi.

He was classified as a Scout and given training in this job. It meant that he would be "out front" of the troops, in the Infantry, would be seeking out information on the enemy to bring back to the officers of the Allied Forces. The whole division was at Camp Vandorn. The officers cut out the men displaying high intelligence (ASTPP), they were given the nickname of "Hot Shots." Blanton was among these.

Blanton, along with his group was sent to Camp Shanks, Hoboken, New Jersey, by way of New Orleans. This trip took about two days on a troop train.

At Hoboken, the men had some time off and his parents came to visit with him for two days. After this the Division was broken up into three regiments. Blanton then was sent overseas to the European Theater, landing at Toulon, and was attached to the French Third Army under Colonel Warren. From there Blanton was sent to Strasbourg. Blanton remembers that it was winter and very cold. He traveled by a 40 and 8 train. It was here that Blanton suffered an invasion of lice. He also spent Christmas of that year here. It was east of where the Battle of the Bulge took place. They went south to the town of Colmar. They were heavily shelled by German Forces.

It was here that Blanton was attached to the 3rd Division, 4th Regiment which was about 5000 strong. He was among those constantly on patrol. A patrol was sent out every night. At this time there were no attacks and none were made. Even though this was French territory, most of the population spoke the German language.

They hiked all night to an area designated as "Hill 216." Blanton says this was not actually a hill but just a large, fairly level, field. There was about an inch of snow on the ground. They had to go through a large mine field. They had no mine detectors. About eight men ran through the mine field. One got through and Blanton angled to the right and went through in his footsteps. At this point they broke through the German lines and went to a cannel. Here they stopped. By this time the men that had been in the Battle of the Bulge were coming in. These were the men from the 28th Division, called the "Bloody Bucket."

They were relieved by the 28th Division and Blanton and his group attacked again, ten miles to the south toward Colmar. They were under General Patch who had fought in the Pacific. However at this point they were taking orders from the French 1st Army, General Leclerc.

Blanton was wounded at Gepsine (spelling?) and sent to Epinal to a French hospital. There Blanton was in the hospital for five weeks. He received the Purple Heart. Everyone was being sent back on the line. They were getting ready to hit the Ziegfeld Line so they raided the hospital for men. Blanton was sent back before he was completely well. He was sent to Company B, 254th Infantry Regiment. Blanton's division got back together at Saarbrucken. They assaulted the Ziegfeld Line in three days of heavy fighting. There were mine fields. The mines were white so the American soldiers could see them and go around them. Blanton and his group marched 70 miles in three days, met up with Patton's third Army. Blanton and his group went to Mannheim. Patton's Army went to Heidelberg. Blanton's group broke through and took Heidelberg. The German's surrendered the town because they didn't want it torn up.

There were large numbers of Germans surrendering. They were sent, sometimes with no guards, back through the Allied lines. Blanton was still holding the rank of private, but was now a squad leader. (With apologizes this part of the interview and the progression of the fighting is a little unclear to the interviewer.) They were now on German soil, they crossed the Rhine over a pontoon foot bridge.

After this, they became mobile with two and a half ton GI trucks and raced from city to city through Germany. They were fully mobilized and leapfrogging the towns. They went all the way to Austria where they stopped. No Americans got to Berlin. During this action, Blanton was lightly wounded twice but did not go offline. He was made Staff Sergeant during this time.

It was here that they heard the news that the war had ended. As Blanton remembers someone came in and said "It's over." Blanton then went to Nancy by truck. When asked if he celebrated, Blanton said, no, he just went to a Red Cross shelter and went in and went to bed. With the war in the Pacific still going on all the men thought they would be sent to the Pacific Theater. Some were. They were sending men everywhere, some were sent to Italy and then on to the Pacific.

Blanton was sent to Reims, France. He was Staff Sergeant of an Anti Aircraft Company 546. All guns were gone. They were using trucks to send all manner of equipment to Le Havre. Blanton were at Reims during the Fall and winter of 1945-46, from July until February. At this time Blanton had German PW personal during all the labor of the camp. He says they worked well. He was made 1st Sergeant, Technical rank. Blanton tells the story of how they had a German clerk who spoke seven languages filling out forms for them. They had to have three copies. The

German told Blanton that the reason the Allies won the war was because the Germans had FOUR copies of every form and they were busy filing that fourth form.

Blanton traveled to Le Havre and then boarded a victory ship while carried around 8000 soldiers and after about four days at sea arrived at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. He tells the story of how, on board the ship, they were "hot bunking" or using the bunks for rotating sleep times of about eight hours, first with one man for a sleep period and then another would take over the bunk. Sometimes the bunks would be used by three men for the bunking.

From the Brooklyn Navy Yard, Blanton was sent to Fort Dix and with no leave on to Fort Bragg by train. At this point they were on their own. Discharged. They heard of the end of the war and the Japanese surrender. All pressure was off. Blanton had been gone for about two years total.

After the war he was accepted at Wake Forest University and attended on the GI Bill. He finished with a major in Business. Blanton came home after school to go into the family accommodations business and gift shop on Tunnel Road in Asheville, North Carolina.

He had met his wife Nancy while they were in school. They were married in Asheville on April 2, 1949.

Blanton's Division has had several reunions in the years since the war. He wrote a book of fiction about his experiences.

In reflecting on his war experiences Blanton said they went in as boys and came out as men. In service he learned that you do not let anyone "run over you" That you learn to stand up for yourself.

To the young men now in service he says: Get out, go home. Don't fight any more wars. We have had to do it with a civilian army.

For his service, Blanton was awarded, on February 1st, 1945, the Croix de Guerre, a French Military Decoration for Bravery in Action.