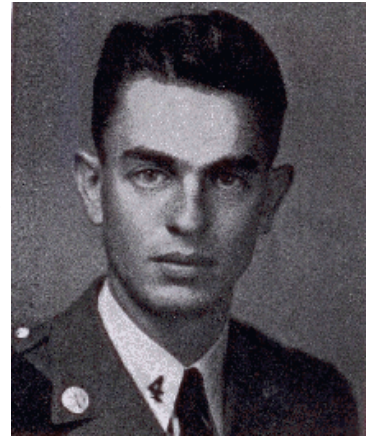


## At the Point of the Bulge

It had been quiet in the forest. Snow had a way of dampening sound. And it was cold, very cold. The men were huddled together in their fox holes fighting a mostly losing battle to keep warm. The sun wasn't up yet, and when it finally did bring in the new day, it would remain hidden behind the gray clouds that had limited aerial reconnaissance. It promised to be another dreary, cold-numbing day, just nine days before Christmas—a white Christmas for certain. Grady Lemuel Wise, Jr., of Newberry, South Carolina was among the cold soldiers of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division standing watch in the thick, snow-covered forest.

Wise was born near Prosperity, the youngest son of Ida Fulmer and G. Lemuel Wise. He attended O'Neal grammar school in Prosperity and graduated from Bush River High School in 1939.



“G. L.” Wise was among the 706 “rats” reporting to the Clemson College campus in September of that year. War had broken out in Europe at the beginning of the month, but the members of the Class of 1943 couldn't have known how those events overseas would alter their young lives. At Clemson, G. L. was a vocational agricultural education major and a member of the FFA. Like all of his classmates, he participated in the Reserve Officer Training Corps. His class was the last to complete the traditional four year course of study before the expanding needs of the military intervened.

Upon graduation in May of 1943, Wise was inducted into the Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. After completing basic training, he was assigned to Company M, 422<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment of the 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. The division moved to Camp Atterbury, Indiana for further training.

The 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was the last of 66 US Infantry Divisions activated during World War II. As a result, the 106<sup>th</sup> was repeatedly stripped of manpower that was needed elsewhere. This was particularly true after the high battlefield losses suffered during the Normandy invasion in June 1944. Men from other training disciplines, like discontinued aviation cadet programs, were transferred into the 106<sup>th</sup>. As a result, by the time the division finally departed Boston Harbor for Great Britain in November, most of its men were only partially trained.

The 106<sup>th</sup> finally reached the battlefield on December 11, 1944, relieving the 2nd Infantry Division in the Eifel mountains of eastern Belgium and western Germany. According to Army doctrine of the time, one division should be responsible for no more than 5 miles of front. As the division settled into its new positions, the 106<sup>th</sup> was covering a front of almost 26 miles.

At 0530 on Saturday, December 16, 1944, 1,600 artillery pieces began to hammer an 80 mile wide sector of the Allied front lines in the Ardennes Forest. The heaviest blow of what became known as the Battle of the Bulge fell in the center of the sector where the German's Fifth Panzer Army attacked toward Bastogne and Saint Vith in Belgium. Allied commanders were surprised by and unprepared for the violence, aggressiveness and sheer weight of the German attack, the brunt of which fell against the green troops of the 422<sup>nd</sup> and 423<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiments.

Within three days, German tanks and mechanized units had surrounded the two regiments in the vicinity of Schonberg, Germany. German officers, under a flag of truce, came forward to urge the American regimental commanders to capitulate. In the face of the Germans' overwhelming advantage in fire power and their own dwindling supplies of food and ammunition, the two regiments surrendered. The Germans

captured more than 6,000 GIs, the largest American surrender of the European campaign. G. L. Wise was among the new prisoners-of-war.

Wise and many of his comrades were sent first to Stalag IV-B at Mulberg, about 70 kilometers northwest of Dresden. From this camp, Wise mailed a January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1945 postcard to his mother in South Carolina.

*Dearest Mother—I've been very worried about you. I'm safe and well. I've been a German Prisoner at war since Dec. 19<sup>th</sup>. Please don't worry about me for conditions are O.K. All of my buddies are here with me. Check with Red Cross on packages. Send all cigarettes possible...*

Cigarettes were the currency of choice in the prisoner-of-war camps. It was rumored that with 2,000 cigarettes, one could actually buy his way to freedom in Switzerland. Of course no one ever had 2,000 cigarettes with which to test the theory.

A second post card dated January 21<sup>st</sup>, was received from Stalag VIII-A at Gorlitz, over 100 kilometers east of Dresden near the Polish border. Again, his first order of business was to reassure his mother. "I'm still a prisoner and in good health," he wrote, before requesting a tooth brush, soap, towel, candy, concentrated and dehydrated food, and, of course cigarettes. While Wise couldn't say so, the Germans were having a difficult time feeding their own people at this late date in the war. The nutrition of POWs was not a high priority.

Sadly, this was the last communication G.L.'s family received. In the harsh winter weather, with poor shelter and little food, Wise developed pneumonia. He died on March 10, 1945 near Erfurt, less than two months before V-E Day.

G. L. Wise was buried in Germany. His remains were later returned to the United States where he was reinterred. G. L. was the second Wise son lost in Europe, his brother David having been killed in Normandy the previous July.

In addition to his mother, Wise was survived by five sisters and four brothers, one of whom was serving in the Pacific.

