

Lucky To Be Alive
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My father, Owen McKean Laughlin, was part of the 80th Division, 2nd Battalion, 318th Infantry. He was made squad leader his second day at boot camp. After arriving in Europe, he was made acting sergeant of his group. He was injured during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944, and later received the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart.

My father often told stories about his experiences in WWII during the fall and winter of 1944. He talked about being in the woods of Bastogne and sleeping in the snow, and about the day he was shot during a confrontation with a resistant group of German soldiers. That day, his troops were moving through the woods, encountering small groups or individual Nazis who either fled or fired at them. Suddenly, he came upon what he called a nest of Germans who began firing aggressively at him. Dad asked a couple of soldiers to fire a few shots into the pile of brush around the enemy's hole. Then, he took a grenade in his left hand and his rifle in his right, and began to run toward the nest. Just as he dropped down to take a position, he was shot in the arm. He managed to crawl back to where his men were, and one of them helped dad to continue firing with his left hand, until the group of Nazis finally broke up and retreated. That ended the resistance and company advance continued.

He was one of many injured at Bastogne, but he always said he considered himself one of the lucky ones, because he might have been killed. He was sent first to a Paris hospital and then transferred to a hospital in Stourport, England where his right arm was amputated. That operation saved his life, since gangrene had developed and he almost died.

My father received the Distinguished Service Cross for bravery, and the Purple Heart for his injuries during the Battle of the Bulge.