

Mémoire from Claude R. Cruise, Bluefield, VA

I trained with Troop D, 23<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron in Camp Chaeffee, 16<sup>th</sup> Armored Division. I served in the Reconnaissance Troop of the 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry (Old Hickory) Division.

In April 1945, we linked up with the Russian army on the Elbe River at Magdeburg, Germany. I was a messenger to the Russian command post. Bob Lingsmith, from Youngstown, Ohio, accompanied me. Our job each day was to deliver a packet to the Russian C.O. and return it to our C.P. This was good duty, because we were free for the rest of the day. Later on, we would drive back over and party with the Russian soldiers. They liked our cigarettes and candy, and we liked their vodka.

On or about May 8, when the war was officially over, we delivered the packet as usual and started back. A large Russian tank was backed off the road facing a cleared field with woods behind it. Two Russian soldiers were standing beside the tank, so we stopped for a few moments and gave them cigarettes, and we chatted with them in our, and their, meager German.

Suddenly, the soldier I was talking to jumped up into the turret of the tank and started firing the machine gun in the direction of the woods. I looked and was horrified to see he was firing at a line of German civilians moving out of the woods.

All at once I found myself yelling, "Nyet! Nyet!" and running toward the civilians. The soldier ceased firing when I ran in front of his gun. I then went over to the people, who turned out to be a dozen or more old people and young women leading or carrying young children. The strangest thing was that they didn't scream, stop walking, or anything. The kids didn't even cry.

I asked them to show me their papers, which I pretended to check, and then began to pass them on down the path.

When I finally looked back at the tank, I saw the two Russians and Bob staring open-mouthed at me. I yelled at Bob to come down and help me check the papers, which he did. We waited until the people were safely out of sight, and then left.