

Army Volunteer Becomes A Medic

Imagine being a soldier in WWII and it is early in the morning and you decide to make some hot coffee for yourself to enjoy. So you begin to heat up the coffee in your canteen and once it is done, it is too warm to drink. Then you decide to put the canteen outside of your foxhole for it to cool off for a moment when suddenly the canteen is blown away by enemy gunfire. Now that has got to ruin your morning. Just imagine it was your finger or something else put outside. Well, this coffee incident did happen to my grandfather, Marvin Kruse. He not only lost his coffee but also his canteen.

Marvin Kruse was only 20 when he volunteered for the Army in September of 1942 not aware of what was ahead of him these next few years. He began basic orientation in Rockford, Illinois as any other soldier did but was then transferred down to Louisiana and was welcomed into the 28th Infantry to begin training for thirteen weeks. Now it came time to find out where soldiers would be going and more importantly, what they would be doing. Kruse was permanently assigned to the 28th Infantry and to be a combat medic on the line. He wondered why he was chosen for that job and he was told for a few reasons. He had a higher IQ, he was more agile and short, and they wanted farmers since they were used to hard work. That is how Kruse got started in the war. From there he was trained to treat wounds which included three things: stop the bleeding, prevent shock, and get the wounded out of the line of fire and back to the Aid Station. Now he was ready to go across seas and go into the battles of the War.

Kruse took part in the end of the attacks in Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. Normandy, France was the first big event that America took duty in once entering the war. America has prepared for this invasion since the beginning of 1943. Before the attack took place, the Allies bombed the German line on the coast to make sure their military strength could not increase. The Allies, who included the British, Canadians, and the Americans, then attacked on June 6, 1944 with three million men, 5,000 large ships, 4,000 smaller landing craft, and more than 11,000 aircraft ("War"). The Germans were attacked with many waves of Allied forces. Kruse and his Medical Battalion came in about on the eighth wave after most the damage was done. They eventually pushed the Germans back and won the Battle of D-Day. The Battle of the Bulge did not take place until the winter of 1944. Here the Allies were advancing to the border of Germany attempting to cross the Rhine River but the troops were pushed back further by the Germans, cutting through southern Belgium and getting surrounded in Bastogne ("Battle"). The US Third Army had to come from the south to break through the German lines in order to save Bastogne and the name Battle of the Bulge came from the shape the of the battleground as if appearing on a map. In this battle, Kruse was part of the troops that revived Bastogne. His Division became very important at this point, as well did all the other Divisions throughout the

war. Just as every other soldier has stories to tell of war, my grandfather does also. But what makes my grandfather's stories so interesting to me is because he was a medic on the front line and that sounds like a very important job to save as many as possible.

However, before the Bulge happened and when the Allies were advancing into German territory, the Germans forced the Allies to battle over the town Aachen, Germany and the Huertgen Forest in Germany. According to Kruse, Huertgen Forest is where his division suffered the most and 6,000 of the 9,000 men were lost in just fourteen days and could not advance from that point. More detailed work that the 28th Infantry went through after Huertgen Forest was to regroup in Luxembourg and then head back to Belgium. Kruse and Division found a town to stay at but the enemy was still near. Kruse and some other Combat Medics got word that there were some wounded in the next town over, so they went over there to help them out. Unfortunately, the Germans were too close and they had to go back to their town. In these situations there were four options given to each soldier. one, be killed; two, wounded; three, be captured and four, retreat. None of those options were something to volunteer for. So, now the whole Division headed out to get away from the enemy and walked all day to end up in Arlon, Luxembourg where they have already once been. Here the troops found the 9th Armored Division, so they decided to stay with them and follow them. That is when they marched up to help Bastogne but in the process of this, 5,000 men were lost and the Division was wiped out.

They needed lots of help in order to stop the Germans now so more and more troops were gathered together. The 28th Division is now ordered to go to Colmar, France and assigned to First French Army and take the city. Now the Division was advancing well but this city had deep snow covered mountains, making it too hard to get wounded back. The town also had mules so Kruse and the other Combat Medics placed the wounded on the mules to get out of the deep snow to take them back to the Aid Station.

At this point, the War was coming to end and there were Germans surrendering everywhere. Once a German came out with his helmet off, they were giving up. A few times Kruse and the squad (4 in a squad) experienced some enemy soldiers who wanted to be captured, so they came out of the woods wanting to help carrying back the wounded to the Aid Station. Their enemies would not shoot them that way. When times got real bad with mass casualties, the Germans and the Allies made a truce to take care of each other's wounded with so many in the way. At another time, Kruse and the squad were in their foxholes and they had a communication wire to tell them which foxhole a wounded man was in. The squad in one situation, were carrying the wounded out to the Aid Station and a German patrol came across their path. The Americans were not sure if they were going to be shot or captured, so the Germans searched them for any weapons and found nothing. The Germans took them for a short while but realized that this Medical squad was not harmful and let them go back to their

work. Also, it was common for the Germans to come through the Aid Stations and search for any weapons and just move on through since the medics had no weapons and the wounded could not fight. There was no point in capturing anyone.

Kruse was not only captured during the War, but the medic was also injured. Once the Division landed in Omaha Beach in Normandy, Kruse jumped from the deck of a ship to the landing area and he landed wrong on his ankle and sprained it badly. Two men had to help him walk off where he could rest it for the next few days. Then later on in the War when the Division was in Germany, Kruse re-hurt his ankle and this time he had to go to the hospital for a week. Luckily for his case, the Division was in no major battle at the time so he only missed an ordinary day which Kruse describes as "a day where you can take care of the wounded without being overworked." Ordinary days were not always a good thing though. Kruse says you are "better off being busy, that way you have no time to think about what is going on around you. If you had time on your hands, you would start to wonder about if you were going to die and pray for the dead and the living."

Obviously, being a medic is not an easy job. Kruse shared some techniques used and other common things that happened on the line. The wounds were mostly artillery and mortar shells. The mortar shells had a bigger radius so that could do more damage and shrapnel was a problem too. Arms and legs were the most often hit targets but if it was just an arm, the soldier himself could walk back to the Aid Station to save time with the medics. The medics would help those who called for a medic right away. If there was no call for a medic, then the assumption of death was presumed and left the dead were left but according to Kruse, what he heard the most when a soldier was wounded was a call out for their mother. Since no mother was to be found, they had to call medic in order to be helped.

When treating a wound the first thing to do was to stop the bleeding with a compress as much as possible. Sulfa packets were applied for every man down and morphine was used only on the severely wounded. Then treatment for shock had to be done otherwise the man would die and many did die of shock. If they went into shock, there was no coming out of it and turning the color gray/white was a sign of shock. Kruse said a common problem with bringing the wounded back was that the soldiers would be happy they are off the line of fighting since they are wounded but then they would go into shock afterwards and die. The last thing to do was to get the wounded out of the line of fire. The last thing they wanted was the already wounded, wounded again so they had to do their best to get him out of there.

In the episode "Bastogne" of the series Band of Brothers, a company is fought hard combat and suffered many casualties. The medic of the episode got to the soldiers and suffered very little with getting the wounded back to the Aid Station. There were Jeeps there a lot to help. Kruse responded to this episode saying that this was not always true, "Jeeps were never around and

you had to depend on yourself and the other medics to get them back." They used whatever they could to make a stretcher to carry a man back. Kruse also said that the episode was very accurate with the combat fighting but not when the medic befriended a female nurse who ended up dying in the end. He said that he never saw any women or black people throughout the war but that shows that the medics can die in the war just as the rest did.

One night after a long few days of hard work, Kruse and another medic, Pat Morris, were told to go back to the station and rest up. Well, Kruse found a great spot to hide out in a barn on top of some hay. He expected that Morris would be right there next to him that night but instead Morris was helping a Jeep across a creek when suddenly they were shelled at. Morris was killed. Kruse got up the next morning and asked where Morris was and then was told that he was killed that night. If Morris had been with him in the barn asleep, the medic would have lived.

According to Kruse, these medics were real good. When on the job they never got scared or did not know what to do. They were well trained and what they did not know, they learned as time went on. Kruse said some on the way overseas got what was called combat fatigue where the medics would be afraid of what is going to happen and freeze, but once it came time for the real thing, each medic was trained to know what to do in many situations.

Trench foot was a problem for many soldiers that were not prepared completely. Trench foot happened when a soldier would wear the same pair of socks through water and the socks would not get to dry out and then would start to eat at the foot. In bad cases, the foot would turn into gangrene. Kruse said he was always prepared for that. He always carried an extra dry pair of socks with him and every night he would change his socks since they were trained to know. The episode "Crossroads" makes a reference to this when a new soldier joins the company and all the guys that have been there asked him many questions to see how prepared he was and one question they asked was how many pairs of socks he had. The new soldier said he had one extra pair, and the others said to always have four pairs. Kruse said it was "very important to take care of your feet and that you never heard of a medic with trench foot." That would be bad for a medic.

When asked what his worst experience was in War, Kruse replied saying, "everything about war was a bad experience, but the battle of Huertgen Forest was the worst." The medics were overworked and could not keep up with the casualties. They had to work over 24 straight hours. Another bad experience he had was when the Division had to retreat when Germany once came at them out of a field blowing whistles. The Germans had whistles to communicate to each other and when those whistles could be heard blowing, that was never a good sign (Kruse).

Back into Huertgen Forest, the Division had to attack a town. Some buildings had Germans in them and others had Americans in them. Kruse and some other medics were trying to protect

the wounded by getting them out of the damage path so they decided to put them in the basement of the first building of town. Shells were flying throughout the town and some ammunition was hit causing an explosion. The building with the wounded caught fire so now the medics had to save them from a fire. It was dark outside but the medics did succeed with getting them to a different building. Kruse was awarded a Bronze Star for his heroic effort. I do not think I could ever do that and I am proud to share his stories because he volunteered for everything he went through.

Being a medic on the front line is a job I definitely would not want. It is very important for you to respond to those calls for medics right away since those men are depending on you to save their lives being the only hope they have. That is a huge responsibility and when interviewing my grandfather I learned how bad it was for those soldiers out there and I realized how good our lives are today. Respect for these men that survived this War is very important since Americans alive today probably would not be here today if it were not for them. My grandfather really made an impact when he was telling me these stories and I was excited to learn about what he did in World War II and to see all the medals he had received.

Works Cited

"Bastogne." Band of Brothers. Dir. David Leland. HBO, 2001.

"Bulge, Battle of the." Rand McNally Encyclopedia of World War II. 1972 ed.

"Crossroads." Band of Brothers. Dir. Tom Hanks. Per. Shane Taylor. HBO, 2001.

Hills, Henry M. "Treating the Wounded in the Battle of Bulge." Healers in WWII: Oral Histories of Medical Corps Personnel. Ed. Patricia W. Sewell. North Carolina: McFarland & Co. Inc. 2001. 245-259.

Kruse, Marvin. Personal interview. 27 April 2002.

"War." World Book Encyclopedia. 1968 ed.