

# Bill Kishner's infantry division earned its 'Iron Men' nickname

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with The Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

The Germans defending the old French fortress city called them "The Iron Men of Metz," and iron men they were. They were the men of the 95th Infantry Division of Gen. George Patton's Third Army who were ordered to capture Metz.

Bill Kishler was one of the combat infantrymen in Company "K" of the 2nd Battalion in the fall of 1944 and winter of 1945 when the 95th Division spent 100 continuous

days in combat. It was the GIs versus a bitter winter as well as the German army.

William G. Kishler was born in Trenton in 1921. He attended local schools and graduated from Trenton Catholic High School in 1940. He was inducted into the U.S. Army on Sept. 28, 1942 and was initially assigned to a medical chemical warfare decontamination unit. As the threat of chemical warfare subsided he was reassigned to the 95th Infantry Division. The 95th was formed during World War I at Camp Sherman, Ohio, and after the war reorganized at Oklahoma City, Okla. as a National Guard Division. At the outbreak of World War II the division was called into active duty and supplemented with newly inducted men.

Bill trained with the division in Texas, the California desert, Louisiana, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and was then transferred to Camp Miles Standish, Mass. in preparation for overseas deployment.

## VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

With the division he crossed the Atlantic to England and then across the English Channel arriving in France early in October, 1944 as part of Patton's Third Army.

As Bill recalls, "General Patton was moving so fast that he kept far ahead of his supply lines, and there was a shortage of truck drivers. When they found out I had a military license, I was drafted to drive truckloads of supplies to the front. The supply line was known as 'The Red Ball Express' and had quite a reputation for delivering the goods that were badly needed by the advanced troops." Bill drove for a short time until other drivers were assigned, and then returned with his own unit.

On Oct. 19, 1944, the 95th entered the front lines at the Moselle River bridgehead south of Metz. Early in November they took the offensive and advanced on the old fortress city. Metz was heavily fortified and had been part of the old French Maginot Line. When the Germans occupied France they modernized the fortifications, reversing the guns as a defense of Germany. Up until this time the Germans had fought off every allied attack on the city during the war. Bill recalls that the 95th linked up with the 5th Infantry Division and there was fierce fighting before the city fell on Nov. 21. In the final days of the fighting there was a lot of hand-to-hand fighting as the 462nd Volksgrenadier Division made a last stand. It was here that the Germans began calling the 95th "The Iron Men of Metz," a nickname that was officially bestowed on them in 1967. It was also here that Bill won the Bronze

Star Medal for meritorious action in combat.

As the division continued to push forward it seized Boulaise and went on to Saarlautern, another stronghold in the German's own Siegfried Line, or West Wall.

Then it happened. On Dec. 16, 1944, 250,000 German troops and armor attacked 83,000 Americans stretched along the 85-mile Ardennes front, and the Battle of the Bulge was on. The six-week battle was the biggest in Western Europe during World War II and resulted in 180,000 casualties.

Bill recalls that the 95th was ordered to hold the front lines as other units raced to rescue the Americans trapped at Bastogne. "There was no way to escape the snow and cold, and a lot of the men suffered from chapped hands, split lips, colds, pneumonia and frozen feet," he continues. "We were stiff and exhausted and often slept out in the open wherever we happened to be. Some times we were lucky enough to find an old building for cover and to heat up our rations." As he rubs his hands together, he says, "I can still feel the cold after all these years." After the Battle of the Bulge, his division went on to capture Hanan, Kamen and Dortmund. When the war ended they were just north of the city of Leipzig.

Over 5,200 medals were awarded to men of the 95th "Victory Division," including two Medals of Honor. They had lost 1,128 killed in action and triple that number wounded and non-battle casualties. Bill's decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Good Conduct Medal, Europe-Africa-Mid-East



Bill Kishler, in combat gear, at Indiantown Gap, Pa. in 1944 before going overseas to join Patton's Third Army.

Campaign Medal with four bronze battle stars, and just recently the New Jersey Distinguished Service Medal. The French Government also authorized the division the Metz Liberation Medal, French Liberation Medal and the French Fourragere for the Croix de Guerre.

In July, 1945, Bill returned with the division to the U.S. and began training for assignment to the Pacific, but in the meantime peace was declared making it unnecessary. While home on leave in July, 1945 he married his wife Catherine, and after his discharge from the Army on Nov. 19, 1945, returned to live in Trenton.

In 1950 the Kishlers purchased their present home at 91 Helen Avenue in Lawrence where Bill still resides. Catherine passed away in 1982, and his daughter Margaret Totent resides with her family in Illinois.

Bill was employed by Baldwin-Hill Company for 23 years, and then at Thiokol Company until his retirement in 1984. His hobbies include making wood-

craft, which he donates to charity, and gardening, and of course is an active member of VFW Post 3022 where he enjoys seeing old friends.

*The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment, and a summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles.*

*All material should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, NJ 08638. Inquiries may be made by calling 882-9108.*

