

*Byrd Alva Austin*  
*February 10, 1918 - April 19, 2013*



*45<sup>th</sup> Division - 180<sup>th</sup> Infantry  
Company H*



*Entered Service 1/28/1941  
Discharged Service 07/31/1945*

*Decorations and Citations*

*Purple Heart  
Bronze Star  
Good Conduct Medal  
American Defense Medal  
American Campaign Medal  
European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal  
With a Bronze Star, Silver Star, & Bronze Arrowhead  
World War II Victory Medal  
Army of Occupation Medal with German Clasp  
Combat Infantry Badge  
Honorable WWII Service Pin  
Marksman Badge with a Machine Gun Bar*

**This letter was written to Papaw by his son,  
Garry Austin and was read at the funeral**

Dear Dad,

I am not worthy,

I am not worthy to tell your story. I feel you have left it on my shoulders, but can I. Someone must!!!!. You and I sat in your back yard, one evening and you spoke endlessly, for 2 to 3 hours without stopping, of some of your experiences of World War II. I had heard and lived them my whole life. I told my wife, Darla afterwards, that I should have had a recorder, but if I would have, would I be writing you this letter.

I do remember,

I remember being a youth and listening to stories told by Uncle Art, Uncle Lloyd and You,

I found,

I found pictures of the AWOL tree, the night after you passed. (AWOL meant absent without leave) There are now tear drops on them!!! Every time we passed that tree, you brought it to my attention. That tree on the side of the highway near Agawam Oklahoma, South of Chickasha. I read on the back of these pictures "The AWOL tree caused me to spend 10 days in the guard house and fined \$10.00. My wages were just \$21.00 a month in 1941. Came home for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and went back on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Art and I came home and was standing under the AWOL tree and could not get a ride. Art said "I will get on the other side of the road and the first one to get a ride, that's the way we will go. So, he got the first ride and instead of going to Ft. Sill, we went back to Bradley and stayed for 7 days AWOL. Lighting struck the tree in 1989.

I do remember,

I remember you and Uncle Art and was stationed in Camp Barkley in Abilene, Texas. You and Uncle Art were in the movies in Abilene on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, You and Uncle Art came out of the movies and found out the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. I can not imagine being in your place and I can not judge your response. You and Art's response was to get drunk. In order to obtain whisky, in Abilene, Texas in 1941, first you got a prescription from the doctor and then went to the drug store to get it filled. You said the line at the doctor's office was over a block long when you and Art arrived, but, I'll bet, you two got drunk.

I do remember,

I remember you were stationed in Louisiana for more training and then were in New York before going overseas. I remember the story of you and Art throwing a man off the train, later Art would pay a price,

I do remember,

I remember you talking of North Africa.

I'm Thankful,

I'm thankful that in the Invasion of Sicily, due to late changes in orders, you were not part of an amphibious landing in which all participants were killed.

I do remember,

I remember being a youth asking numerous times “How many Germans did you kill” and you would always tell the same story. The first German soldier I saw was setting on a terrace or levee in an orchard with his back to you. You would put your sights on him and could not pull the trigger, saying to yourself, “He’s not going to do anything”. Your second thought’s were, “He may shoot one of our guy’s” and put your sights on him again. You would continue to put your sights on him and would say some excuse as to why you couldn’t shoot, until I would ask” Did you shoot him or not” and your reply was always “ Nah, he just up and walked away”. I remember he later shot you and you got your first Purple Heart.

I do remember,

I remember the day you rode to work with me, so you could spend the afternoon with a gentleman in Eldorado, Oklahoma. I’m so sorry, I don’t remember his name, but I do remember him being an older man who had lost a leg due to Diabetes and sitting in a wheel chair. I remember that he had saved your life three times, The evening after invading Salerno, in Italy, you were digging a foxhole to spend the night in and this gentlemen came to you and said “Austin, do not finish digging that foxhole, if you do, you will die’. Two other men finished the foxhole you had started and the first artillery shell that came that night landed there and killed them.

I’m so sorry,

I’m sorry that you asked me to go with you to Europe for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of World War II and I did not go. I remember that your number one objective was to visit a town you called TipatipARosa. A town near Rome Italy, where the citizen’s had hid you from the German’s for six days. Oh, How I would have loved, to have been there when you went back, after 50 years. Oh, How I would have loved to have met the mayor. Oh, How I would have loved to have been there to meet all the people who came out to meet and thank you. Oh, How I would have loved to met the people that remembered you. Oh, How I would have loved to have been there for the holiday you caused. Oh, How I would have loved to have sat by you, at the dinner, they had in your honor. Oh, How I’m sorry, I was not there.

I do remember,

I remember you were injured at the Invasion of Anzio. I remember that you claimed to have been the first soldier admitted to a tent hospital on the beach. I remember that there were 4 or 5 beautiful nurses waiting on you hand and foot. I can visualize you lying on a cot with white sheets, smoking a cigarette. What I can’t visualize, is when the first German artillery shell hit the beach near the tent, you grabbing your rifle and leaving. When the nurse asked “Where are you going” your reply was “it’s safer on the front lines”.

I do remember Colonel William S Harlan,

I remember Colonel William S Harlan. I never heard you call him anything but Colonel William S. Harlan. You were his jeep driver in Southern France. I remember you and him were driving down a road in a valley, near a cemetery. The German tanks topped a hill on one side of the valley and the US tanks topped the opposite hill. A battle erupted and you and Colonel William S Harlan hid in the cemetery. After the battle your Jeep started and it ran temporarily and died, upon raising the hood, you discovered the engine had several holes in it. Two weeks later, you found Colonel William S, Harlan in an outpost looking through his binoculars, you tapped his shoulder and upon turning around, he became snow white, he thought you were a ghost and had been killed at the cemetery.

When I worked in a packing house in Oklahoma City in 1973, there was a USDA inspector that would stand and watch me work, he was an older man and always had one arm in his white frock pocket. After several weeks he approached me and introduced himself as, William Harlan and I said, "Don't you mean Colonel William S Harlan" and he said yes. He kept his arm in his pocket because he had lost his hand in the war. I had many conversations with him and he said of you "Of all the men he had served with in the war, you were the best and he loved you like a brother."

I do remember,

I remember calling you on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D Day, and asking you what you thought of it? Your reply was" It wasn't nothing, I had already made 4 invasions by then, they were rookies" I know you had invaded Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and Southern France.

I do remember,

I remember going to a movie with you in 1970, being 17 years old and a typical teenager, who was easily embarrassed by their parent. At a particular scene in the movie I could not believe how long and loud you laughed, when no one else in the theater was, embarrassing me to death. Yes, George Patton was directing traffic in Northern France at a mud hole intersection. After the movie, while walking to the car, I remember asking? "What was so funny about Patton directing traffic, you embarrassed me to death". Your reply was' It was a lot funnier the second time I saw it, than the first time"

I have it,

I have a copy of the letter sent to you by Edgar Edwards, a platoon sergeant in World War II from Surfside Beach S.C. The letter read: "Do you remember the time we were bogged down and holed up for 3 or 4 weeks in a deep snow. It was sometime in Feb. 1945 as well as I remember. My troops hadn't had a warm meal in months. One day, I looked out of my fox hole and saw this jeep coming through the snow pulling a hot meal trailer. The German mortar shells were falling all around it. You were driving that jeep. I found out later, that you had had asked to do that. It sure meant a lot to us. Thanks a lot Buddy".

I do remember,

I remember. When I was a very young child, we would be driving down the road and you would smell the odor of a decaying animal, you would immediately stop the vehicle and vomit. I thought that this show signs of weakness and was ashamed but later in my life I was told why you did this. You had been there to liberate Dachau and other concentration camps and the reason you became ill was the smell brought back horrific memories of those concentration camps. I remember seeing pictures that you took of dead bodies stacked as high as a building and bodies on or by the ovens.

I do remember,

I remember that your company, company H was the first group at Dachau concentration camp. Company G was recognized as the first and received a presidential citation and I always felt you had regretted not receiving it. I was told by you, why your group was not recognized and I question it now. I question your excuse after reading the history of the 45<sup>th</sup> division. **It states “The soldiers of the 45<sup>th</sup> division who liberated the camp were outraged at the malnourishment and maltreatment of the 32,000 prisoners they liberated, some barely alive, and all victims of the Holocaust. After entering the camp, the soldiers found boxcars filled with dead bodies of prisoners who had succumbed to starvation or last minute executions, and rooms adjacent to gas chambers they found naked bodies piled from the floor to the ceiling. The cremation ovens, which were still in operation when the soldiers arrived, contained bodies and skeletons as well. Some of the victims apparently had died only hours before the 45<sup>th</sup> Division entered the camp, while many others lay where they had died in states of decomposition that overwhelmed the soldiers’ senses. Account conflict over what happened and how many German troops were killed. After investigating the incident, the Army considered court-martialling several officers involved, but Patton successfully intervened. Some veterans of the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division have said that only 30 to 50 German soldiers were killed and that very few were killed trying to surrender, while others have admitted to killing or refusing to treat wounded German guards.”** Perhaps, I will never know what role you played that day.

I do remember,

I remember Elmo T. Smart. Until he passed away, every time you came to Wichita Falls, he would come to my house. Elmo T. Smart seemed to be a simple man, but can I guess about what kind of ageless bonds were created between men during that war? Elmo T. Smart would carry a blanket around all day, lay it down that evening and you or Uncle Art would hide it, and later use it. Elmo T. Smart would ramble around asking, “Has anyone seen my blanket?” and everyone would deny seeing it. The next morning the blanket would mysteriously appear. When Elmo T. Smart was informed of its location, he would reply “How did that get there?” would pick it up, carry it all day. That evening the process would start all over. Out of 551 days of actual combat, I wonder how many nights to you spend in a fox hole or in a bombed out building.

I do remember,

I remember as the end of the war was near, things had begun to improve and Uncle Art had gotten a chocolate cake from home. I can visualize, him sitting on the ground with his back against a tree, slicing the cake. You and other soldiers were watching and wondering whether he would share. A German 105 artillery shell struck the tree right above his head and Uncle Art bled out of his nose, ears and mouth. No one had cake.

I was honored,

I was honored to have gone with you to your 45<sup>th</sup> Division reunions. I was honored to have been there in that circle of men with you. On the way home you asked me a question. "Do you remember the picture of the dead German, leaning against a tree, which was passed around? At that time, you were doing something that very few men have ever done or will ever do. In that circle of men, there were 5 Congressional Medal of Honor Winners".

I do remember,

I remember being at my sister's house in Center Colorado, sometime around 1985. I was instructed to "Come on". On the way to the vehicle I questioned where we were going? Your reply was "To get my pistols" On the way to Del Norte, Colorado, upon requesting clarification as to where we were going, this was your story. "You had found two matching German Luger pistols in a disabled German tank; they were in a Walnut case with red velvet inside. You had carried them around for a couple of days and a colonel took them away from you. You had discovered that he lived in Del Norte and we were going to get those pistols". No one answered the door after knocking several times; you said your usual "Hun" and we left. I remember that whenever a town or village was taken, the jewelry stores, camera shops, banks, etc. were pilfered. The French Franc was used to start fires and for toilet paper, after the war, it was still good currency and you had wasted millions of dollars. The officers' could ship items home and they could have been millionaires.

I do remember,

I remember being with you at the Veterans Center in Ardmore, Oklahoma. You looked out your room window and saw the Army Reserve vehicles next door. You told me that Colonel William S. Harlan had come by to see you and you were ready for active duty. At age 93, you still felt your patriotic duty to serve.

I'm sorry,

I am sorry, I am getting old too, I am sorry that I do not remember more of your experiences. I wish I had that recorder that day. Soon, all of your generation will be gone and so will their memories, just as yours has gone.

I'm sure,

I'm sure that when you got to heaven, mother was there to greet you and when you and Uncle Art, Uncle Lloyd, Colonel William S. Harlan, Elmo T. Smart, the gentlemen from Eldorado and many others are sitting in a circle talking about World War II, just as we did at that reunion. God will be there sitting beside you, because of the work that you and the others did for him.

When I think of all the blessing's that God has given me, a wonderful life, a wonderful wife, wonderful kids and grandkids. I often wonder what I have done to receive these blessings.

I think God has blessed me because of the work that you did for him!!!

Your Grateful Son,  
Garry Arthur Austin

P.S. I tried, but I feel it was not enough to honor you!!!



Dad + Art Selzer



AWOL Tree  
Agawam, Oklahoma  
South of Chickasha





## COMPANY HEAD- QUARTERS

### 1st ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT):

Pfc. Silvio Cummo,  
Natick, R. I.  
Pfc. Mearien Slagle,  
Murphy, N. C.  
Pfc. Ferrell D. Knott,  
Cordela, Ga.

### 2nd ROW:

Pfc. Raymond S. Uewellyn,  
Dorchester, Mass.  
Sgt. George N. Economou,  
Manchester, N. H.  
Sgt. Clinton P. Charles,  
Newbury Port, Mass.  
1st Sgt. William H. Dickson,  
Blair, Okla.  
1st Lt. Lionel V. Childress,  
(Comdg. Officer),  
Tahlequah, Okla.  
2nd Lt. Roland G. Fecteau,  
Bristol, Conn.  
Cpl. Paul P. Nobile,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.  
S Sgt. Franklin Waller,  
Staten Island, N.Y.

### 3rd ROW:

Pfc. James L. Garrison,  
Asheville, N. C.  
Pfc. Cortez T. Fuller,  
Haworth, Okla.  
S-Sgt. Floyd Dabbs,  
Eufaula, Okla.  
Pfc. Aldo J. Menegus,  
Clifton, N. J.  
Pfc. Charley E. Ogle,  
Hanna, Okla.  
Pfc. Byrd A. Austin,  
Paul's Valley, Okla.  
Sgt. Louis E. Mansfield,  
Cobemet, Okla.  
Sgt. Archie M. Gilliland,  
Sulphur, Okla.  
Pfc. Nicholas J. Potocnak,  
Fulton, N.Y.  
Pfc. Rinaldo W. Russo,  
Providence, R. I.  
Pfc. Claude H. Denning,  
Dale, Ind.

Pvt. Henry K. Dulaney,  
Los Angeles, Cal.

### 4th ROW:

Pfc. Donald Wannager,  
Detroit, Mich.  
Pfc. Willis L. Phillips,  
Stapleton, Ga.  
Pfc. Louis J. Karbowski,  
Aurburn, Mass.  
Pfc. Harvey E. Westley,  
Berks County, Pa.  
Sgt. Augustus B. Sunce,  
Godwin, N. C.  
Pfc. Stanley Wyzinski,  
Dickson City, Pa.  
Cpl. Henry J. Wochter,  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

### NOT PICTURED:

Pfc. George W. Weissert,  
McKeesport, Pa.  
Sgt. Desmon C. Palmer,  
Eufaula, Okla.

