

LUCAS C. MARTIN

Born April 15, 1922 in Clovis, New Mexico and was raised in Los Angeles CA.

Enlisted in the Army E.R.C. radio repair and operation program in October 1942.

Activated in July 1943 at Fort McArthur, CA. and took Army Air Force basic training in Miami Beach, Fl. Was P.T. instructor while awaiting A.S.T.P. assignment. He spent one semester in an engineering course at Oklahoma A. & M. until the program was terminated in March 1944.

Was assigned to Co. L, 409th Infantry at Camp Howze, T.X. as a Rifleman despite corrective glasses and nine months of radio training. While cleaning garbage cans on K.P. an A.S.T.P. friend suggested he ask permission of the C.O. to see the Regimental S-I Officer regarding his radio training. After enduring verbal abuse from the first Sergeant he saw the S-I officer which resulted in a transfer to the Communication platoon, HD CO. 3rd Bn. 409th as a wireman and radio operator.

He remembers with some emotion the first day of combat Nov. 16th 1944 with the dead of both sides lying stiff where they fell. Later, German dead stirred no emotion.

Then, being under enemy fire at places called Taintrux, Provencheres, the Siegfried Line (twice), Sarreguemines, LaWalck, Pfaffenhoffen, Reisdorf, Sharnitz, Schwaz etc, and the bitter cold.

With wars end, trading with the friendly common Russian Infantry for occupation Austrian Schillings used to send a room full of flowers by Western Union F.T.D. to all his female relatives –which they never forgot.

In June 1945 was transferred to the 83rd Chemical Mortar Bn. slated for the invasion of Japan. After V.J. day transfer to a Signal Bn. for occupation duty in divided Vienna.

Earned the Bronze Star, Combat Infantry Badge, E.A.M.E. ribbon with three Battle Stars, Victory Medal, Good Conduct Metal, the American Awards and Austrian Occupation Medal.

Discharged in April 1946. Attended Pepperdine College and U.S.C. on the G.I. Bill. Graduated with a [B.A. in](#) 1949 and a Masters Degree in Social Studies.

Entered Federal Civil Service in California as an S.S.A, Claims Rep. and retired as Management Division Director in Washington D.C. in 1979.

Married LaVonne Spinks on August 8th 1947. They have two sons and four grandchildren, all college graduates.

Baptism

November 16, 1944 saw the first attack of the 3rd Battalion, 409th Regiment, 103d Infantry Division toward Taintrux, a village near St. Die, Alsace, France, the division objective. St. Die was a vital link in the German defensive line of the Vosges Mountains.

The Germans had pinpointed the Battalion forward observation post (O.P.) and their artillery and mortar fire had cut all but one telephone line to the Battalion Command Post. It killed Private Robert T. Miller and wounded several men, including the Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Snyder, who was wounded in the hand. We never saw him again.

P.F.C. James A Cerretani and I were ordered to lay another telephone line from the Battalion Command Post to the O.P. As we neared the O.P., situated at the edge of a wood, enemy artillery and mortar fire came in, bursting among the tall trees and sending shrapnel earthward. As we lay on the ground two medics came up the adjacent path dragging a wounded soldier between them. Blood and excrement stained his long johns (his pants had been removed) but as he passed us he said..."dig your holes deep, deep..."

As they passed we scrambled up and quickly covered the short distance to the O.P where we made the wire and telephone connection. Fire was still coming in so we jumped into an empty uncovered foxhole (a lesson--cover most of your hole with logs, branches and dirt).

There was a bloodstained bandage, carbine and grease gun (a cheap sub-machine gun) in the hole. A 3d Division G.I. had "borrowed" my new M-1 rifle from a jeep in which we had given him a ride a couple days earlier. He left his rusty, beat up rifle for me. I took the carbine and left the rusty rifle in the hole. Cerretani took the grease gun and carried it for only a short time since it jammed easily. He "borrowed" a carbine and

tossed the grease gun. I carried the carbine through V-E day without a comment from anyone, though my weapon was suppose to be an M-1 rifle.

Lucas (Luke) C. Martin (former P.F.C.)
Communications Platoon, Headquarters
Co., 3Bn., 409 Infantry

Recorded Interview
Nashville 2009

Lucas (Luke) C. Martin, Hdqts. Co. 3rd Bn. 409th

I was born on April 15, 1922 in Clovis, New Mexico. After high school I went in the CCC for six months. After the CCC I went to work for Lockheed Aircraft Company in Burbank, California. I heard about Pearl Harbor on a car radio. It seemed unreal. I did not think much about it. I didn't think it would affect me in any particular way. My future plans at that time included getting a job and making some money.

I enlisted in October, 1942 in the Enlisted Reserve Corp. I was in a program where I learned to make and repair radios. I was going to get drafted later that month so I enlisted in order to hopefully choose a program that would benefit me after the war. I went to nine months of radio training in California sponsored by the Army and the Enlisted Reserve Corp. Then I was called up and put in a uniform on July, 1943. I was shipped by train to Miami, Florida where I took U.S. Army/Air Force Basic Training in Miami Beach, Florida. It wasn't difficult at all. We did calisthenics on the beach, marched down the streets singing patriotic songs, and took classes in the hotels we were quartered in.

After a period of time in Miami Beach, I signed up for the ASTP. While waiting to be assigned a college I became a Physical Training Instructor on the beach. When I was assigned to a university, I was

transferred and took a train to Oklahoma A and M in Stillwater, Oklahoma. I began classes to train to be an engineering officer. I was there for one semester and then in March of '44 the Secretary of War terminated the program and sent me to the 103d Division at Camp Howze, Texas. I was assigned to L Company, 409th Regiment.

I was assigned to Rifleman Training even though I had Radio Training and wore glasses. While doing KP, washing out garbage cans from the company kitchen, a friend came by who had been with me in ASTP. He said, "With your training you should ask for a transfer." So I asked the First Sergeant of L Company about a transfer. On my behalf, the First Sergeant asked Captain Gatlin whether it was OK for me to go see the Personal Officer at Regiment. They couldn't refuse me because in the Army if you make such a request they had to give it to you. Reluctantly, the First Sergeant cussed me out and said I could go. I saw the Personnel Officer at Regiment.

A week later I was transferred to Hdqts. Company Third Battalion in the Communications Platoon. We did 25 to 35 mile marches with full packs. We took classes and policed the area just like we did at Camp Howze.

We were shipped to Camp Shanks, New York by train. It took three days and nights to get there. On the way, the train would stop once a day and we would get off and perform physical training exercises. The women in the towns would offer you donuts and coffee. When we got to Camp Shanks I got a pass to New York City and a buddy and I went to the top of the Empire State Building. We ate at an automat; I had never seen an automat before.

From Camp Shanks we boarded an impounded Italian luxury liner, the *SS Monticello*, which had been made into a troop transport. The bunks were four high and about twenty-two inches apart. We had our duffle bag and our M-1 rifle in the bunk with us which made it difficult to sleep. In addition, our bunks were down several decks and below the waterline which made it very hot. We got to go on top for maybe thirty minutes or an hour if the weather was OK. Then you had to go back to your bunk room. The food was Navy food. There were a lot of beans as well as powdered eggs for breakfast. I was on the transport with a buddy, James A. Serratani. I had met him in the Headquarters Company, Third Battalion, Communications Platoon.

We left New York on October 6. Two weeks later, on October 20th we landed in Marseilles. It was a very cosmopolitan city and the people were very friendly. It was crowded with various types of soldiers: Black Senegalese, Moroccans, Algerians, in the uniform of the Free French or British Army. There were Indians, Americans, and Canadians. The city was full of soldiers, bars and brothels in certain areas. It was not a clean city.

We were ordered to march five miles to a plateau to pitch our pup tents, called a bivouac. It turned out to be twenty miles in the rain. When we left Marseilles, we left by truck up the Rhone River Valley. We went all the way up to Nancy, which is halfway up France from the south. Then we went to Epinol and bivouacked there in pup tents. We were trucked to the foot of the Vosges Mountains in the province of Alsace in France. The province of Alsace, the heart of the Vosges Mountains, borders Germany. We were ordered to walk up this mountain, following a very minor track almost like a firebreak. Jeeps could get up it but not big trucks. So we marched up the mountain in the dark. I saw my first dead German. He was

lying frozen by the side of the path. The first American casualty was a fellow in the Communications Platoon, Company L who stepped on a “Bouncing Betty” mine. A “Bouncing Betty” mine shot a canister up about three feet and then it exploded. It shot shrapnel in a 360 degree arc. The fellow who stepped on it was killed and the guy next to him; four others were wounded. They were in the same platoon I had been in. If I had stayed in that platoon I would probably have been killed or wounded. This happened before we entered combat.

We had relieved the 3d Division. They were in position on top of the mountain. That is where I lost my brand-new M-1 rifle. We gave a 3d Division soldier a ride in the jeep and he stole my rifle, leaving his rusty beat-up rifle in the jeep for me.

Our captain was Captain Martin Gilligan of the Headquarters Company Third Battalion. Our objective was a hill mass; I didn't know this at the time, of course. Nobody told you anything except where to go and when to go. The 409th was assigned an objective to capture some mountains which overlooked St. Die, France.

After we captured St. Die, which took a week, the Germans blew it up and burned it. I learned later the Germans did the same thing in WW I. I have five stories that I have written up which tell what we did for the next two to three months after our combat in the mountains.

I only saw prisoners when rifle companies captured some. Most of the German prisoners had gotten rid of their steel helmets and had on field caps. That was kind of a sign of surrender. Rifle companies captured Germans and brought them through to the Battalion Headquarters. Then they took them back for interrogation.

After the war I saw Russian soldiers. My friend, Serratani and I traded with them across the river. They had come up the Inn River Valley from the east after conquering Vienna which was one hundred and fifty miles away. The Russians occupied the eastern part of Austria and we occupied the western part. The soldiers we saw were combat infantry, very poorly equipped and dressed. We traded our goods with them for Austrian Occupation shillings. That was the Austrian money and still is. I can remember selling them a carton of cigarettes for two hundred dollars in shillings. The Russian soldiers had not been paid during the war. They had been in the war from 1941 until 1945 without being paid. So they had stacks of money. We traded them GI blankets, cigarette rations, gasoline and other things. The first time we crossed the Inn River a Russian stepped out from behind a tree with a submachine gun pointed at us. Serratani and I stopped; I was driving. Through sign language we told him we had goods to trade for money. He led us to the Company. The Company was like ninety men commanded by a lieutenant. The lieutenant was the only person in the Company that had a wristwatch. We had some fountain pens which they had never seen before. We got a lot of Occupation money from them. The Lieutenant had a German sedan for his use while the rest of the men had horse drawn carts.

When the war ended I was reassigned to the 83rd Chemical and Mortar Battalion, for deployment for the invasion of Japan. I was with them for a short time until the Atomic bomb was dropped in August. I did not want to go to Japan because obviously there would be heavy casualties. I feel that the President did the right thing by using the Atomic Bomb. I did not have enough points to come home after the war right away. I was reassigned to a Signal Battalion quartered in Vienna, Austria. It took care of

telephone communications for the Commander of the American sector of Vienna. Vienna was divided into four occupation settlements, just like Berlin.

The Russians had to fight for Vienna and they had casualties but they conquered it. Johann Strauss, composer of *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* (1867), and his son Johann Strauss, Jr. were buried in a cemetery in Vienna. The Russians had buried one of their dead between the two of them. His tombstone was a red star. I think that was symbolic of the fact that the Russians had overcome the Austrian Germans.

We left after the Atomic Bomb was dropped. I was assigned to an engineer outfit after Vienna to come home. We left from LeHarve, France. The trip home only took six days and was pleasant. We landed in New York and went onto Camp Shanks. I took a train from New York to an Army Fort in El Paso, Texas. I was mustarded out on April 8, 1946.

I went to Pepperdine University in Los Angeles on the GI Bill beginning in September, 1946. I went three years to Pepperdine acquiring a BA. I then went to University of Southern California pursuing a teaching career. I received my Masters and Secondary Teaching Credential there. In 1947 my Uncle "BC" who lived in the San Fernando Valley, invited me to visit. I was currently working at Lockheed. My mother's distant aunt, Aunt Mug, had a son who worked at Lockheed and he got me a job there. They tested my eyes for an assembly line position and found that I was colorblind. They could not put me on the line but they did make me a tool clerk.

I met my wife, then Betty LaVonne Spinks, and have been married for sixty-two years. We got married in 1947. We have two sons one born in 1948 and the other in 1950. We have four grandchildren, two boys and two girls.

A Quiet Sector

Just after Christmas 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, our 3rd Battalion, 409th Infantry was in a defensive position in Lorraine, France, with the rest of the 103rd Division. I and two other wiremen, one of whom we called Pop (in his early thirties and with three children) were told to lay a telephone line along a snow covered ridge.

Using a jeep with the reel mounted in the rear we were slowly laying the wire and all was quiet. But, a German must have spotted us because a mortar shell burst near us – we hit the ground next to the jeep, pulling it out of gear on the way down. Another shell burst sent a piece of shrapnel through the jeep's hood and a piece into the back of Pop's leg.

We piled into the jeep, cut the wire and gunned it down our side of the ridge. After taking Pop to the aid station we returned to the ridge, spliced the wire and completed the job. There was no further enemy interference.

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Cracking the Siegfried Line

March 21, 1945 saw our 3rd Battalion, 409th Infantry, 103rd Division resume the attack to outflank the Siegfried line strong point of Reisdorf, Germany.

P.F.C. James A. Cerretani and I were ordered to string a telephone line from the 3rd Battalion Observation Post up the side of a mountain and through a 300 yard swath of trees - felled by the Germans - to a large Siegfried pillbox across a valley just taken by I Company.

Half way up the mountain trail German artillery and machine gun fire struck. We both dove for fox holes made by I Company the previous night.

A shell hit nearby and shook the ground causing dirt to fall on me through the half cover of limbs above the fox hole. The concussion temporarily deafened me.

After 15 - 20 minutes the shelling stopped abruptly. In that silence I heard footsteps and glanced up to see a Medic looking into the hole. Nothing was said and he moved on.

Cerretani and I crawled out of our holes - about five feet from me was the stump of a large pine tree which a shell had sheared off. We hastily followed the Medic back to the O.P.

After catching our breath, we went back up the trail, picked up the wire reel, carried it across the mountainside, through the fallen tree barrier, and up to the pillbox without further enemy fire. The next day the regiment forced the Germans to withdraw beyond Reisdorf.

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THE COLONEL

22 March 1945 Reisdorf, Germany.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 409th Infantry Regiment were attacking to out flank the Siegfried line strongpoint of Reisdorf. Moving against determined German resistance in the mountains on each side of the valley where Reisdorf was located, they had gained the high ground above the town at heavy cost.

A tank/Infantry force in the valley, shielded by a mountain spur, was ordered to move out in a frontal assault to capture the town. The lead tank rumbled around the spur and was promptly shot at by a German anti tank gun. The tank Sergeant immediately reversed course and gained the protection of the spur.

Shortly there after a jeep screeched to a stop next to the buttoned up tank. Out jumped the Regimental commander, Colonel Claudius L. Lloyd, a bandy legged W.W.I Cavalryman. Brandishing his ever present riding crop. He beat on the tank until the Sergeant opened the hatch and popped his head out. There followed a diatribe directed at the Sergeant that boiled down to "get this damn tank moving right now" The Sergeant meekly said he had been shot at - to which the crimson-faced Colonel replied, "you're supposed to get shot at - now get this **** tank moving." Buttoned up, the tank eased around the spur and low and behold, there was no incoming fire.

With several tanks of the 761st Tank Battalion the 2nd Battalion, 409th took Reisdorf against rear guard opposition.

I witnessed this while serving as a radio operator for the 3rd Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Reynolds.

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The Last Four Days

Austria
May 1 - 4, 1945

Fully motorized on tanks, tank destroyers and other vehicles, my outfit, Headquarters Co., 3rd Battalion, 409th Infantry, 103 Infantry Division was advancing rapidly through the Tyrol region of Austria on May 1, 1945. After overcoming bitter resistance by German OCS students at Scharnitz, which had held up the U.S. 10th Armored Division, the 409th Regiment rolled toward the 6th Corps objective of Innsbruck. Innsbruck is the Capital of the Tyrol and the gateway to the Brenner pass over the Alps to Italy.

We were prepared to battle for the city when, by chance, it was discovered that telephone communications between Garnish-Parettenkirchen (where Division Headquarters was situated) and Innsbruck still existed. The American command contacted the city and demanded its unconditional surrender. Civilian and Austrian Nationalist leaders accepted immediately. Not so German Army and SS Commanders who refused and continued fighting to block the advance of the 409th.

Threats of artillery and air bombardment led to further civilian Austrian attempts to surrender the city. Major Bland West was escorted by the Austrians through German lines to deal directly with the fate of the city. However, he and his interpreter were taken prisoner by the German military upon arriving at Innsbruck.

Meanwhile, "Free Austria" nationalists and some German Army units staged a successful coup which caused the SS to leave Innsbruck and fight on further east. Major West was released and assured that no further resistance would be offered.

The 409th rolled into Innsbruck at 1900 hours on May 3 to cheering crowds of civilians and armed German soldiers. Some were wearing armbands of red and white, the pre Nazi colors of the Austrian flag. The astonished G.I.s, dirty and exhausted from their travails of recent days, could only stare and accept the cheers of "Heil Amerikaner" and the bouquets thrown at them. They also accepted bottles of cognac, wine and hugs and kisses of the pretty Austrian girls, non-fraternization orders notwithstanding. No white sheets hung from the windows and an atmosphere of liberation filled the air. This greeting was in stark contrast to that previously encountered in other German and Austrian towns we had been through.

May 3 -4 saw the 3rd Bn, 409th driving east and losing one tank before meeting the XXI U.S. Corps, then later the Russian Army. The 411th Regiment went through the Brenner Pass to link up with the 88th Division, 5th Army, in Italy.

Sadly, on May 4, Norm Summerfield of Co. L, 409th and Gene Cundiff, a jeep driver, were killed by mortar fragments. These were fired by the SS from a mountaintop position to create a diversion near a pen holding German prisoners. The war ended May 8, 1945.

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