

Home...POW granted battlefield wish

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 25 November 2010 22:42 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 November 2010 22:45



On a blistering day during the summer of 1945, Dora Connelly received an unexpected phone call.

At the time, she was living with her parents and toddler daughter in the hills surrounding Snell Canyon south of Brady.

The caller was her husband Albert Connelly whom she hadn't seen or heard from for nine months.

Albert left the States in October of 1944 to fight in World War II with the 81st Combat Engineers.

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The couple, who grew up near each other southwest of Brady, had eloped two years before and married in Oberlin, KS.

Dora was 16 and Albert 23,

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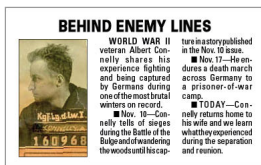
“I’d known him forever,” she said, the late-afternoon sun streaming through the window of her room at Hilltop Estates Care Center.

Albert was working for Richardson Oil Company in North Platte and on a ranch when he was drafted into the Army in October 1942 and sent to Camp Campbell in Kentucky for basic training.

From there and other places he was sent stateside, he and Dora tried to write each other letters every night.

In May of 1943, the Connelly’s first daughter Geraldine was born.

“I wasn’t there, I only got furlough once but I was pretty proud to have a girl,” he said.



Once they learned Albert would be sent overseas, Dora said she was upset.

“I had no idea where he was going or how long he would be gone,” she said.

The letters stopped once Albert landed in England and traveled to France and Germany where he fought in the famous Battle of the Bulge.

“There was enough action there, I didn’t have time,” Albert said.

In the meantime, Dora and Geraldine left North Platte and moved into Dora’s childhood home

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with her parents.

Sometime later, she received a telegram that her husband was missing in action.

“His mother cried because she thought he was dead,” Dora said. “I didn’t cry because I thought I would see him again.

“We argued about that quite a bit.”

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After trying to defend an important crossroads near St. Vith, Luxembourg, the commander of Albert’s unit ordered his men to disband and try to make their way back to Allied troops.

Albert and a handful of other soldiers were captured by the Nazis near the front line.

They and other prisoners were marched across Germany where they encountered blizzards, freezing temperatures and much snow. Many died along the way.

As the Allies moved into Poland, Albert was taken to a German prisoner-of-war-camp in March.

Dora received word that Albert was a POW after he was registered at Stalag Luft I in Barth, Germany.

During Albert’s absence, Dora often volunteered at the Canteen in North Platte.

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“There was everything to be done,” she said. “I made sandwiches, coffee and always took cookies and cake. It was always some soldier’s birthday.”

Six million servicemen and women on troop trains were met by canteen volunteers in North Platte during the war who gave them homemade goods.

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American troops reached Stalag Luft I in May, a few weeks after the camp was liberated by the Russians.

Albert was flown to Camp Lucky Strike in Le Havre, France, where he and other famished prisoners “were fattened up just like a group of pigs turned loose on a corn pile.”

During the war and captivity, Albert estimated he lost about 70 pounds.

“But I wasn’t skinny very long,” he said. “They just poured egg nog down us.”

“Like a bunch of fat rats,” Dora said.

From France, Albert and other soldiers flew to Boston and on to Leavenworth, KS, for physicals and other processing.

Albert then boarded a train for home.

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“As we traveled through the countryside and rolled past cornfields, I felt like was home,” he said. “It was a pretty good feeling.”

No one met him at the station because no one knew he was coming home.

Albert remembers going to his aunt and uncle’s house in Brady.

“They were both surprised because

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