



□ *Editor's note: Lindy Lenhart is the father of Becky Berry of Imperial.*

By Lorri Sughroue

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McCook, Neb. (AP)—It took a little while, about 64 years, but Robert “Lindy” Lenhart, 90, of McCook, has finally received a Bronze Star and other medals from his infantry service in World War II.

The medals came in the mail in early June and were the result of Lenhart and his wife, Ileen, reading an article in a publication for veterans.

They learned that with the proper documents, medals were available for World War II vets who had never received them and so in October, Ileen sent in her husband’s discharge and induction papers and waited.

A 1973 fire at the U.S. Army Reserve Personnel Center in St. Louis destroyed thousands of military records of World War II vets, including Lenhart’s.

After a flurry of verification letters, Lenhart received his medals, including a Bronze Star for combat in the Battle of the Bulge, along with the Combat Infantry Badge, medals for victory in World War II and other campaign medals.

The Bronze Star is awarded for combat heroism, acts of merit or meritorious service.

Through the years, Lenhart would talk intermittently about his war experiences, but he wouldn’t elaborate much, Ileen said. Every now and then, he would tell a new story that she hadn’t heard before, but for the most part he kept silent. And for a long time, her husband wouldn’t watch anything that contained battle scenes, she said.

At the front lines as an infantryman in the 69th Division, he saw the majority of World War II up close and personal.

After graduating from McCook High School in 1936 and later from McCook Junior College (now McCook Community College), Lenhart completed his education at Wayne State Teacher College in 1942. Then 23 years old, Lenhart said, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, figuring he was going to be drafted soon anyway.

The 69th spent nine months walking across Europe as it fought against the Nazis, hunkering down every night in whatever shelter the soldiers could find, Lenhart said, be it open fields, barns or under grapevines.

“We didn’t just fight the enemy, we fought the elements, too,” he said, the division contending with the snow, wind, rain and insects.

As they made their way across Germany, a load of C-rations would be dropped in the middle of the night somewhere in the near vicinity, he said. These consisted of canned goods along with other items, such as purifying tablets soldiers could drop in puddles so the water would be clean enough to drink. A pile of clothes would also be dropped and in the morning, the troops would hustle over to get something to eat or a pair of dry socks.

Lenhart said he always ended up with cheese from the C-rations and for years afterward, couldn't stand to eat it.

Born and raised in McCook, Lenhart spoke German growing up and in World War II that came in handy. Before he was sent overseas, he attended Queens College in New York and Michigan State College to learn the different German dialects and once in Europe, acted as a translator on a part-time basis to interview German prisoners.

Not that the prisoners were always cooperative.

"The thing that made me mad was that some of the German officers wouldn't speak to me, because I was just a sergeant," he recalled. "And I'd think, 'You sure have a lot of gall not to talk to me, in the position you're in.'"

Known as the "Fighting 69th," the division landed in England in 1944 and then shipped over to France, advancing to Belgium before pushing into Germany. Marching across Germany, they crossed the Rhine River in March 1945 and met up with the Soviet army at the Elbe River near Torgau.

Operating under less than ideal conditions and facing the enemy on a nearly daily basis, comfort was taken wherever it was offered and for Lenhart, that came in a page his mother tore from her Bible and mailed to him.

The page contains a verse of the 91st Psalm that reads, "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you."

The promise literally came true, Lenhart said, as he survived several artillery attacks, the explosions raising him off the ground and causing blood to pour out of every opening of his body.

The importance of the medals have not diminished for Lenhart, despite more than 60 years of time.

When asked if the wait was worth it, Lenhart 's eyes teared up and he shook his head, unable to speak.