

## THE WORLD WAR II COMBAT EXPERIENCE OF ROY BRUCE

Written by Bill Crocker as told by Roy's son, Ben Bruce

Roy Bruce left school at the end of younger siblings and to continue to away. He continued until about Civilian Conservation Corps. He California and settled in La Plata, himself on Uncle Sam's list of He began his life in the Army on embroiled in conflict; the Nazis and the "date which will live in infamy" was less than a year away. Roy was sent to Camp Barkeley, eleven miles southwest of Abilene, Texas, for basic training and remained there through 1942. It was at this camp that Roy joined the 45th Infantry Division that was destined to distinguish itself as the Allies moved through Sicily and Italy a few years later.



eighth grade in 1931 to help raise his work on the farm after his mother passed 1935 when he found a place in the worked in state parks in Northern New Mexico. By early 1941, he found eligible young men for military service. February 10, 1941. Europe was had swallowed up Poland and Austria;

The 45th sailed from the Hamptons for Mediterranean North Africa on June 8, 1943. The troops arrived on June 22 and began practicing amphibious landing in preparation for the invasion of Sicily. They also trained for a while in French Morocco, then sailed for Sicily. Roy remembered his first day of combat as a reconnaissance jeep driver on the beach in Sicily. The Germans kept shooting out the tires of his jeep. He would fix a tire and start to move, and another tire would be damaged. By night fall the first day, he had only advanced 100 yards. This was the beginning of an extensive period of time in combat as the 45th launched amphibious assaults in Italy at Salerno and Anzio. The 45th continued north to southern France and worked its way north through Paris.

Roy served as a recon jeep driver during the push through Italy. He gathered information ahead of the main force and served as a screen, working alone with little support. He preferred the M1917 Enfield rifle. He said it could "reach way out and touch someone," which was important for a lone jeep driver. He did not like the M1 Garand rifle.

Roy met Bill Mauldin, the iconic cartoonist and creator of the characters of Willie and Joe. Like Roy, Mauldin was a soldier assigned to the 45th. It wasn't long before his friends noticed his ability to draw cartoons. By the time the division shipped out to Sicily, Mauldin was a regular contributor to the *45th Division News* and was near Roy at the Battle of Monte Casino, southeast of Rome. As a result of this chance meeting, Roy believed that he may have been the typical "dogface" on whom either Willie or Joe was based.

Roy was caught behind enemy lines at the Battle of the Bulge. He ran his jeep down the Autobahn, breaking through a check point to get back behind Allied lines. He said he was able to do that because his jeep was put together from other damaged jeeps. This one had a General Motors body with a Ford engine. The GM body was lighter by 100 pounds and the Ford engine had 10 more horsepower. This combination made the jeep very fast. He later was asleep under that jeep when it was hit by a German 88 anti-tank artillery shell. His jeep was destroyed, but he escaped with only some hearing loss.

The 45th was on its way to liberate Munich in April 1945 when the concentration camp at Dachau was discovered. As they entered the compound, Roy and his buddies expected to find a typical POW camp and were not prepared for the inhumanity they encountered. Once the camp was liberated and a hospital unit set up to care for the prisoners, the troops continued on to Munich, liberating that city on April 30. Germany surrendered just seven days later.

The war finished in Europe, the troops prepared to join the war in the Pacific when Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed. Gratefully, the troops prepared instead to return home. At the end of their European service, Roy and the troops of the 45th had spent a total of 511 days in continuous combat from Sicily to Rome to Paris to Munich. He was released from service on September 26, 1945.

He returned to La Plata where he spent the rest of his life ranching and welding for El Paso Natural Gas. Seven cousins and brothers went to war and seven came home, most to the panhandle of Texas. He married a schoolteacher and they had three children, all of whom attended college. They were the first Bruces to do so and Roy was enormously proud of that fact.

Roy was a quiet, reserved man who rarely talked about his experiences. However, it was certain that he had experienced an incredible amount of danger and witnessed unspeakable atrocities.

He was able to ship a number of rifles and handguns back home, by-passing a standing order to destroy all weapons that were recovered during the war. There were no instructions describing how such weapons were to be destroyed, so he simply mailed them home. All the post office required was a tag with the destination. Many weapons were “destroyed” by GIs in this manner.

Roy was always quick to point out that his war experiences were only four and one-half years out of his life. His real accomplishments were pulling himself out of poverty, providing for his family, and ensuring his three kids got college degrees. He passed away August 4, 2001.