

National Archives & Records Administration

War Department Files

PFC Peter R. Cappadona

ID: 31432835

Branch of Service: U.S. Army

Hometown: Suffolk County, MA

Status: KIA



Introduction

The military career of Pfc. Peter Richard Cappadona was not long, but was certainly noteworthy. It only went from 12 July 1944 to 22 February 1945. Peter was one of the many replacement troops sent to the battlefield as were so many of the others in his company at the time. Therefore unfortunately, the other members of his division that I was in contact with did not know Peter. Additionally, in 1973 there was a fire at the National Personnel Records Center, which destroyed a large amount of military records, including his. Subsequently, there was little specific information that I could obtain specifically regarding Peter. However the information that I did use as to the time line and cause of death, I am fairly confident is accurate.

Therefore, this is not so much a “story “ as it is more a presentation of the information and facts that I have collected.

My ultimate goal was to introduce an Uncle that we second generation had heard about, but other than a photograph at Aunt Milia’s, none of us ever new. I hope that I accomplished at least some of that.

In the nine months that I worked on this project, I accumulated much more material that I could include in this report. If anyone would like to review this additional material, I would be happy to provide it.

David B. Oliva

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people and organizations for their patience and direction:

My Aunts Mary Cappadona and Amelia Sacco for the first piece of information: Peter's obituary, which gave me a starting point to work from

Jim Fahey, Military Archivist, Watson Research Center and Library. For helping me with the government paperwork and directing me to various information sources.

Harry N. Helms Jr., G/376th. 94th. Infantry Division Association. For the list of names of Co. C/302nd infantry Veterans. And for rushing the "History of the 94th Division book to me at a moments notice.

Carl F. Disimo, C/302nd, Richard W. Enterline, C/302nd, Nicholas Oresko, C/302nd, Neill M. Perrin, C/302nd and Leon Stinson, C/302nd. For providing me with information and their recollections of the Ardennes-Alsace Campaign and Saar River crossing.

My Cousin Jon Sidoti. For copies of the letters that Peter sent to his Mother, My Aunt Santa, who had saved them all these years. And for helping me with copying, collation and binding of this report.

My sister Janet, for additional help with copying.

Donald E. Mulry, F/301st. For additional information regarding the 94th Division and the Saar River crossing.

Ms Linda Jeleniewski of The 94th Regional Readiness Command, Fort Devins, MA. For access to the 94th Division museum.

My wife Janine, for her enthusiastically supporting me in this project and putting up with papers, books and folders spread all around the spare bedroom.

Military Funeral for Pfc Peter Cappadona

The funeral of Pfc Peter R. Cappadona will be held at 8 o'clock Friday morning from the home, 18 Reed st., Roxbury, followed by the celebration of high mass at St. Philip's Church, Roxbury, at 9 o'clock.

Peter was the son of Mrs. Vera Cappadona. He lost his life in the Saar region of Germany, Feb. 22, 1945, his 23d birthday. He was a graduate of Mechanic Arts High School. Inducted in August, 1944, he joined Co. C of the 302d Infantry and went overseas in January, 1945. He leaves his mother, five sisters and a brother.



PETER R. CAPPADONA

Branch of service and service number:
ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES -
31432835

Place of Entry:
MASSACHUSETTS

Dates of Service:
07 / 12 / 1944 TO 02 / 22 / 1945

Rank/Grade:
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS

Assignments and Geographical Location:
EUROPEAN THEATRE

Decorations and Awards:

PURPLE HEART; BRONZE STAR MEDAL; COMBAT INFANTRYMAN BADGE; EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN MEDAL w/1 BRONZE SERVICE STAR; GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL; WW11 VICTORY MEDAL; WW11 SERVICE LAPEL BUTTON.

Date of Death:

02 / 22 / 1945

Location of Death:

EUROPEAN AREA

HEADQUARTERS 94TH INFANTRY DIVISION
APO 94 U.S. Army

21 February 1945

AG 201.22 (21Feb45) CG

SUBJECT: Commendation.

TO : Soldiers of the 94th Inf Division & Attached Units.

1. Today marks the victorious end of a series of operations to capture the triangle of German territory between the Saar and the Moselle Rivers.

2. Your courage, endurance, and skill in fighting have made this possible.

3. I congratulate every one of you on a magnificent battlefield performance.

4. The combats in TETTINGEN-BUTZDORF, NENNIG, WIES, BERG, and later the captures of KEBLINGEN, FREUDENBURG, WEITEN, ORSHOLZ, and KOLLESLEUKEN all showed your military qualities and these fights will live long in this Division's history.

5. Your successes have had a great effect upon the War. You have practically annihilated two German divisions and have reduced the combat efficiency of a third (Panzer Division) to a small fraction of its original efficiency. You have captured 2,851 prisoners and wrested from the enemy more than 65 square miles of wealthy, productive country.

6. Your efforts are understood and appreciated by your commanders and by your country.

HARRY J. MALONY
Major General, U.S. Army
Commanding

PETER RICHARD CAPPADONA

22 FEBRUARY, 1922 – 22 FEBRUARY, 1945

94th INFANTRY DIVISION, Co. C/302nd INFANTRY

There are two coincidental ironies that were instrumental to Peter's induction and military assignment.

The first of these was:

Peter's brother Anthony (Nino) had previously volunteered for the U.S. Army in order to keep his younger brother from having to serve. Peter also at the time worked for "Hart Tool and Die" which due to them doing defense related work entitled Peter to a deferment. His employer, Mr. Hart was however required to write a "letter of deferment" for Peter. Unfortunately, this did not get done, and Peter was drafted.

Peter was drafted into the U.S. Army on 12 July 1944.

He was inducted at Fort Devens, MA. And was there at least until 25 July 1944.

He would then have gone by train to Ft. McClellan, Alabama. He was there until approximately December 30 or 31, 1944 and then went again by train to

Ft. George G. Meade, MD. He was there until 3 January 1945 and was then shipped again by train to either Camp Shanks, N.Y. or Camp Kilmer, N.J., which would have been his "POE"(Port of Embarkation).

As far as I can tell per the time line indicated by his letters and accounts from other members of the 302nd. Peter would have been outfitted with a M-1 rifle, helmet and liner, clothing etc and boarded the Queen Elizabeth which was being used as a troop carrier during the war which got underway on 8 January, 1945 and was at sea for 7 days, arriving near Glasgow, Scotland on 15 January, 1945. There he would have traveled to Southampton, England by troop train. And then by ferry boat across the English Channel to LeHavre, France. From there, He and the other troops were transported by "40 by 8" "Cattle cars"(40 men or 8 horses). Peter would have arrived at the **front lines on approximately 26 January 1945.**

The second of these ironies was:

The 94th Division had been fighting in the Brittany area of France and could have possibly remained there except for the following:

"The decision to replace the 94th Infantry Division in Brittany was decided not by an American Commander but rather by Adolf Hitler and a lone German U-boat Commander. Two separate incidents decided the fate of the 94th Infantry Division. The 90th Infantry Division was deployed in anticipation of an attack on the "Switch", but when Hitler launched his Ardennes Offensive (*The Battle of the Bulge*), the 90th broke off its attack on the "Switch" and was ordered north to help repel the breakthrough. The Division that was chosen to replace the 90th was the 66th Division "Black Panthers", except that one of the troop ships

crossing the English Channel, the **S.S. Leopoldville** which was carrying the 262nd and the 264th Infantry regiments of the 66th Division was torpedoed by Oblt. Gerhard Meyer in U-486 about six miles from Cherbourg France on Christmas Eve 1944. Of the 2,235 men aboard the ship, the 66th division lost over 800 men. This action severely shook the fighting ability of the 66th. It was decided that the 94th would be called up from the Lorient-St. Nazaire Pocket to replace the 90th Infantry division in the "Siegfried Switch".

The 66th then relieved the 94th on New Years Day 1945. The 94th then proceeded to Sierck, France on the French- German- Luxembourg border. After relieving the troopers of the 3rd Calvary the 94th moved into their defensive position south of the "Siegfried Switch" in the Saar- Moselle triangle.

The other irony of this is that Peter's brother; Nino was scheduled to be aboard the S.S. Leopoldville for that crossing, but at the last minute was held back.

The Germans always considered the Saar region as a key area in the defense of the German Reich. The Saar-Moselle triangle began at the meeting point of the Saar and Moselle rivers. It extended along a line running east to west along the Luxembourg border. The base of the triangle was 13 miles long and ran from Nennig in the west to Orscholz in the east. The Germans called this line of defense the "Orscholz Oblique Switch. The Americans dubbed it the "Siegfried Switch". The "Switch" consisted of defensive positions up to two miles in depth. Protected by dragon's teeth and anti-tank ditches. In addition to the Siegfried defenses there were pillboxes and concrete bunkers, and the entire area was located on high ground.

The battle began on 12 January 1945 when the 376th was given the order to attack and take the city of Tettingen. The German's 713th Grenadier Regiment of the 416th Infanterie Division defended this area. The 713th was a veteran regiment that had fought in Russia. The 302nd joined the battle on the 15th, as did the 11th Panzer division for the Germans. Notably, on 23 January 1945, MSgt. Nicholas Oresko, a platoon leader in Co. C, (Peters future unit) would earn a "Congressional Medal of Honor" for his bravery during the battle.

By the time Peter got to the Front, the Americans had captured the towns of Tettingen, Nennig, Berg and Wies. On 27 January the 302nd was attempting to withdraw from the town of Sinz and spent the morning of 28 January fending off a German counterattack.

Peter's first action probably started on 1 February 1945 in the Campholz Woods. This was a "clearing" operation through heavily mined areas against troops of the 11th Panzer Division, which lasted four days. They encountered several bunkers and entrenchments.

The following pages are an edited account of the Saar Moselle Triangle battle, which was a major offensive conducted by the 94th Infantry Division, as recorded by Alfred J. Dionne.

I have included only the time span from 26 January 1945 to 22 February 1945, which was the time that Peter spent at the front.

Included also is the account of the Saar River crossing as recorded in The **“History of the 94th Infantry Division in World War II”**, Lieutenant Laurence G. Byrnes

SINZ: The Lynchpin

On the morning of January 26th the attack for Sinz, Germany commenced. The 302nd, holding on to its gains in Nennig needed to be relieved of some of the pressure the Germans were inflicting on them. Taking Sinz, about one mile north of Butzdorf, would do the job. The 376th was chosen to make the main effort, with the 302nd attacking the left flank. The 301st was chosen to clear Munzingen ridge afterwards. The attack commenced during a blizzard with a smoke barrage laid on the approaches to Sinz by a platoon from the 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion. Men from the 3rd battalion of the 376th ran into trouble immediately. I Company walked right into a minefield, and many of the men were seriously wounded. The Germans had placed wooden and plastic Schu mines in the path of the GI's. Due to their construction the



mine detectors had been unable to pick them up. As soon as the first mines went off the enemy was alerted to the attack. The Germans started lobbing mortar rounds on the Battalion. The 376th's attack was stalled. The 2nd battalion of the 302nd managed to advance up to the woods before they too ran into mines. The engineers of the 319th came to the rescue and with primacord blew a path through the minefields so the attack could recommence. The GIs of the 2nd battalion 302nd fanned out through the woods and waited. 1st battalion of the 302nd meanwhile attacked towards Butsdorf to reclaim that town. Company A supported by Tank destroyers advanced into the town at a high cost. The Germans had reoccupied the pillboxes and made the GI's pay for every yard of ground. 3rd battalion 376th was withdrawn from the minefield and sent into the Monkey Wrench woods for the night. Then the CCA of the 8th Armored joined in the attack. 1st battalion, 376th and 2nd battalion, 302nd followed the tankers as they pushed towards Untersie Busch and Sinz. The Shermans engaged three Pzkw Mk IV tanks and knocked them out. The enemy was cleared up to the edge of the woods, at a cost of seven tanks. After the armor was eliminated, 1st battalion advanced through the woods. The GI's came under intense machine gun and tank shell fire and were halted. Meanwhile, 2nd battalion, 302nd continued the attack and advanced two companies into Sinz by nightfall. But the combined strength of these two companies equaled less than a full company. The two days that General Maloney was allowed to use CCA of the 8th Armored Division had expired, and they were ordered to leave. With their armor support gone, this left the men of the 94th dangerously weakened and vulnerable to armored attack from the 11th panzer. General Maloney decided under the circumstances that without armor support he had to withdraw from Sinz. The Sinz attack was costly in men and material and the 94th had to regroup and re-supply in order to proceed. It would be another week before the Americans would try to take Sinz again. From February 1-2 the division made a limited objective attack and cleared the Campholz Woods southeast of Tettingen. Once the woods were clear the 94th set it's sights on Sinz again. This time the 301st Infantry would be involved, fighting a house-to-house battle and captured Sinz on February 8th.

Seizing Sinz and the Bannholz Woods

The failed attempt to take Sinz on January 27 left the 94th's top commander stinging. General Maloney held a meeting with his staff and the regimental commanders on February 3rd to discuss how to best implement the XX Corps order to engage the enemy with a force no larger than a regiment. It was decided at the meeting that the best way to implement this policy would be a regimental assault on the town of Sinz. Two days later General Walker came to the division to review the plan. Known as Field order number 10 the 301st Infantry was assigned to attack the Sinz-Bannholz. The 376th would later attack Munzingen Ridge and the 302nd would take Oberleuken. General Walker approved the plan, with a kick off date of February 7th. The attack went off as scheduled. 2nd battalion, 301st was the first to reach the town. Company E began securing the houses as the enemy dropped mortar, tank and artillery shells on them. Aided by their own artillery support, the men from Company E continued clearing the town of the Germans, taking many prisoners. Storming house to house the men from Company E cleared all the houses in their sector. Meanwhile Company G advanced towards their objective and started clearing the northern half of Sinz. After another house-to-house battle the two companies managed to capture the town and bag 208 prisoners. At the same time Company F moved past Sinz and entered the Bannholz woods. As the company moved through the woods they stumbled into two German Panzers. The company's bazooka team went quickly to work and attacked the Panzers. After an exchange of fire one of the Panzers knocked out the Company's bazooka team with a tree burst. Without the bazooka team the company retreated from the forest. Panzergrenadiers from the 4th panzer company assisted the Panzers in driving the GIs from the forest area. The Americans retaliated later that day with Artillery fire and managed to clear the forest of the Germans. The following morning Company L cleared the remaining pillboxes immediately around the area of Sinz. Tank destroyers from the 704th TD battalion, moved forward from Sinz, came under intense tank fire from the superior guns of the Panzers. Four groups of 25 men each from second battalion were sent back into the Bannholz woods to attempt to take and hold it. The men became lost as they moved through the forest and soon only one group of about ten men remained. This group located several enemy tanks. They dug in and waited for the TD's to move up. Six M-18 "Hellcats" came up and proceeded into the woods. After a mixed battle with the Panzers from the 11th Panzer, five of the TD's were destroyed and over 20 prisoners taken by the Germans. The one remaining TD left the forest with some wounded men to bring them back to Sinz. The 301st suffered another defeat at the hands of the 11th Panzer. The capture of Bannholz woods would have to wait for another day.

Destruction of the Switch

Shoot the Works

After the 301st was repulsed in its first two attempts to take the woods at Bannholz, General Maloney realized that the Regiment was in need of a rest. General Maloney decided to once again deploy the 2nd battalion of the 376th to capture the forest. On the morning of February 10, 1945 the 2nd battalion jumped off and advanced into the woods. Soon the troops became separated and the same conditions that hampered the 301st soon plagued the men of the 376th. After an all day battle fighting the Germans and the rain the GI's pulled back out of the woods with over 45 casualties. General Maloney ordered the men to hold their positions. The next few days General Maloney, his staff, and all the Commanders of the divisional units held a series of conferences on how to identify the errors of the previous attacks, correct them and plan another offensive into the woods. During one of the meetings General Walker from XX Corps came for a visit and afterwards told General Maloney that the 94th had a new priority. Walker decided that the 94th was poised for a clear breakthrough in the area and that General Maloney's attack on Munzingen Ridge would convince General Eisenhower that the Corps was through the main enemy defenses. When General Maloney requested the 778th Tank Battalion to augment his forces General Walker replied, "All right, shoot the works." The 94th Infantry division was now released for a full assault on the German Defenses of the Siegfried Switch. In what would be known as Field Order Number 11, the 301st Infantry would assault and take Munzingen Ridge, **The 302nd would assault and seize Campholz Woods and Orscholz.** The 376th would assault and capture the Bannholz woods and guard the flank of the Division. The jump off date was set for February 19th. Artillery preparations for a ten-hour barrage were made. The units sent out patrols to scout the town and surrounding areas for the German strong points and troop concentrations. General Walker ordered the 10th Armored Division to move up and prepared to exploit the break through once it came.



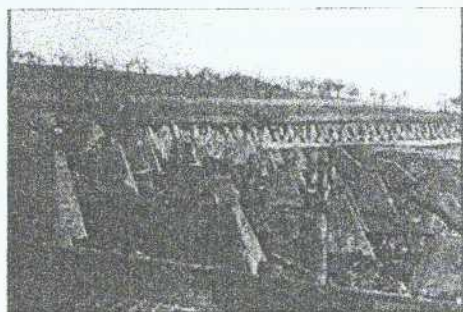
Advancing through "Dragons Teeth"

Munzingen Ridge

At 0400 on February 19th the artillery barrage hit Munzingen ridge. 3rd battalion, 301st jumped off the LD (*line of Departure*) and after encountering a minefield, moved up forward to their objective, which was secured by dawn. 1st battalion jumped off from Butsdorf.

Their objective was a portion of the ridge just south of the Das Lee Woods. As dawn came the tankers of the 778th tank battalion supported the 1st battalion as best they could maneuvering from the slope up to the base of the ridge, climbing as high as they could while shelling the enemy's positions. Company C was in the lead. Company B was just south of them. As Company C moved forward the 1st platoon ran into a minefield and heavy mortar fire.

1st. Lt. Walter Stempak was wounded and Captain Drenzek withdrew the company and circled around the minefield to the north. Then the company moved forward rapidly for fear of being caught out in the open ground. Upon reaching the ridge Captain Drenzek realized that he had moved too far to the north in order to avoid the minefield. He directed the company to swing right and head south sweeping the ridge. Soon thereafter joined with the rest of 1st battalion they cleared the rest of the ridge. Company A was assigned to mop up the bypassed positions. After some minor skirmishes the ridge was completely secured. Once C Company had reached it's objective they started to dig in. Captain Drenzek had been wounded coming up the slope and 2nd Lt. Howard Johnson assumed command of C Company. Lt. Johnson was a replacement officer who had just arrived in C Company the day before. Just in front of the company were some trenches that had not been searched. Once they reached the trenches it was soon found out that they were not unoccupied and the Germans their started firing at them. **Meanwhile, the 302nd regiment moved out. 1st and 3rd battalions moved forward in the darkness, into position.** Assigned to capture the southern end of Munzingen ridge, the troops were to launch their attack from the edge of the Campholz woods. Once the battalions jumped off from their Line of Departure they too ran into minefields and were stopped in their tracks. When dawn broke the M-1 8 "Hellcats" from the 778th moved forward from their positions in the cleared minefield and began firing on the enemy. They either destroyed the positions or pinned the Germans down until the infantry came forward.



After their slight delay in the minefields the 302nd moved up and cleared several of the pillboxes in the area. The objective was reached by noon. After securing their objective the men dug in and waited. The 376th's objective of the day was the ever-illusive Bannholz woods. The 1st battalion launched their attack at 0400. Opposition was minimal since the 11th Panzer had left the area three days earlier. The 376th moved through the forest and mopped up the little resistance that was left. 3rd battalion moved into the Geisbusch-Adenholz area and after encountering more mines and a small number of troops, cleared that forest by noon. The 5th Rangers objective was the town of Oberleuken. The 5th rangers were temporarily assigned to the 94th. Their initial mission was to relieve the 302nd infantry of their positions near the Campholz Woods. After the 94th went on the offensive the 5th Rangers asked for and were given the assignment of taking Oberleuken. Oberleuken was heavily defended by troops of the 256th Volksgrenadier Division and their defenses were well prepared. After their Initial assault the rangers had encountered an electrically controlled minefield and had several casualties. After the failure of the Rangers, all attempts to take Oberleuken were postponed. With the exception of Oberleuken all of the first days objectives had been met. At 1230 in the morning of the 20th the 94th pushed off again. The 301st secured the towns of Faha and Munzingen. The 1st Battalion, 302nd moved against Klebligen but was shifted mid battle to take Oberleuken. The rest of the regiment secured Klebligen. After an intense and costly battle the 1st battalion finally secured the Oberleuken, and captured 110 prisoners and seven 120 mm mortars. Klebligen fell to the 3rd battalion. The 1st battalion 376th entered and seized the Der Langen Woods. They then moved on towards the town of Der Langen.

Several Tank destroyers were knocked out by concealed 88's and 20mm AA fire from the Moscholz woods and the town of Der Langen. The infantry move up and captured one of the 88's in town. The other was left to the 919th field artillery, which soon took both weapons out. As a result of the days operations five pill boxes, 23 bunkers, and four enemy tanks were destroyed. And 872 prisoners taken. Munzingen ridge was now in the 94th's possession. All the hills east of the ridge were also in American hands. The area was completely secured so the 10th Armored division could now pass through to exploit the breakthrough.

Breakthrough

February 20, 1945 started off with good news General Patton phoned the XX Corps let them know that he was extremely pleased with the progress of the 94th division thus far and to pass it on. He also stated that he wanted the division to clear the balance of the defenses by the end of the day. The 10th Armored division was charged with the mission of clearing the main portion of the area between the Saar and Moselle Rivers and attempt to capture the bridges crossing the Saar.

Assisting the 10th armored would be the 376th RCT, the 94th Recon troop, and the Division HQ defense platoon. With the 376th detached to the 10th Armored the remaining two thirds of the 94th were assigned to clear the eastern portion of the triangle from Orscholz to Saarburg. The 301st Infantry was assigned to take Kollesleuken, Freudenburg, Kastel, and Stadt. The 1st Battalion, 301st was assigned to assist the 302nd infantry south of the 301st's zone. Their assignment was to take the town of Qrscholz which a month earlier had decimated the 1st battalion. The rest of the 302nd along with the 5th Rangers were assigned to take the towns of Weiten, Rodt, Taben, and Hamm. By 0800 2nd battalion, 301st advanced and captured Freudenburg. The 3rd battalion moved forward and cleared the woods leading into Kollesleuken and by 1500 had taken the town itself. The 3rd battalion, 302nd advanced from Kleblingen towards Weiten. After crossing a stream the battalion was stalled by anti-tank gunfire. 2nd platoon of L Company outflanked and silenced the weapon. Once the weapon was secured the battalion moved into and began clearing Weiten. After a pitched all-day battle the town was secured by nightfall. Meanwhile the 2nd battalion 302nd and 1st battalion 301st advanced into and captured the town of Orscholz. By the evening of February 20th the 301st and 302nd infantry regiments had secured all of their objectives. The 376th and the attached units moved on to their objectives of Kreuzweiler and Thorn. After crossing a minefield over open ground and engaging a few machine gun nests the 2nd battalion entered Kreuzweiler. By 1000 half the town had been cleared and 96 prisoners taken. While the Americans were clearing the town the Germans counterattacked with four tanks and about 100 infantry. The U.S. countered with a artillery barrage and stopped the attack. At 1335, the 10th Armored rolled into the town. After blasting the remaining German positions in Kreuzweiler the Germans surrendered and the town was completely cleared. The 94th Reconnaissance Troop and Division HQ defense platoon assembled at a crossroads near Wies and proceed north towards Thorn. The defenses of thorn were built around a Chateau, which was the largest building the town. With tank support the troops secured the town by 2200 hours. The 10th armored advanced to the Saar River but none of the bridges were secured. The Germans had managed to destroy them all. With no bridge to cross the river, the 10th and 376th fanned out and secured their respective areas. By the close of February 21st the Saar-Moselle Triangle was completely secured. All objectives had been taken. In three days the 94th had taken three times the amount of ground that had been taken in the previous four weeks of fighting. The Americans had captured 1469 prisoners, but at a high cost. The division had lost over 1200 men killed and wounded.



Saar Bridgehead - 22 February 1945

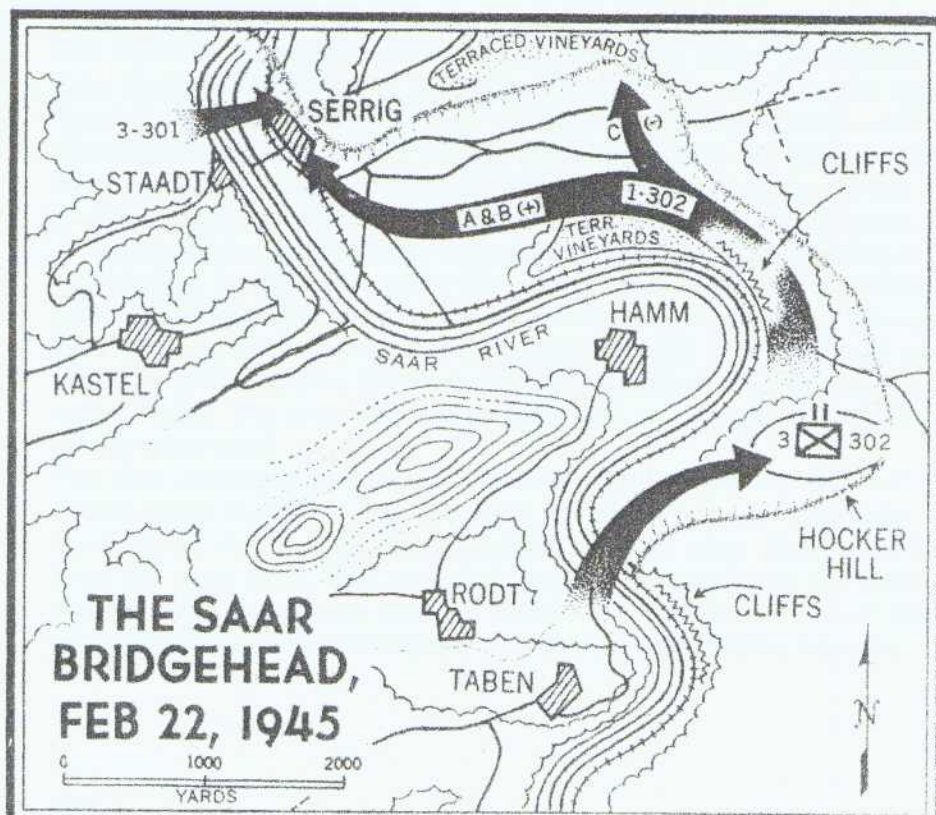


The order to cross the Saar River gave the 94th only one night to prepare for a river crossing. Once the crossing sites had been determined the supporting units had to move up into position. A river crossing is no easy chore especially when it is done on such short notice. But despite the rush the 94th was ready at dawn. **On February 22nd The Saar River was approximately 125 to 150 feet in width with an average depth of 15 feet.**

This made fording impossible. The current was strong and the banks were swollen from late winter thaws. The east bank was heavily defended by the remnants of the 416th Infantry and 256th Volksgrenadiers. The 301st infantry was to establish a bridgehead prior to crossing. The 6000-yd bridgehead was to be established from the area at Serrig-Kreuzweiler and the crossing point chosen was at Stadt. **The 302nd Infantry had chosen the area of Serrig-Hamm and the crossing point chosen was Taben. The site of Taben was not an ideal site for a crossing. However under the circumstances it was the best they could choose. The site at Taben was dominated by a 400-foot hill known as Hocker Hill.** This hill was protected by a 12-foot retaining wall, a highway and railroad. After some difficulty getting the 1,000 pound assault boats first to the crossing site and then offloaded from the trucks to the water's edge the assault was launched. The area was socked in by a thick fog. This would assist the GI's as they crossed the river virtually invisible to their enemy. Crossing the river under the cover of the fog Sgt. John F. Smith's squad from C Company and two engineers from the 319th reached the far side of the river embankment. Once across they encountered the 12-foot retaining wall but quickly found a ladder left there by the Germans. Sgt. Smith climbed the ladder and surprised two guards outside a pillbox and took them prisoner. Soon the balance of 2nd platoon, C Company was across the Saar securing the area. The Stadt crossing was not as easy as the Taben crossing. The troops from the 301st were quickly detected by the enemy and the Germans opened fire on them. However with the thick fog they were unable to see the Americans so they just shot wildly into the mist.

The Americans with the aid of their artillery crossed the river and encountered barbed wire obstacles at the water's edge with no explosives handy the GI's cut through with wire cutters and marked the area with toilet paper, which was very visible. Several boats crossed the river and then returned for more troops after several trips back and forth the GIs managed to get enough troops across during the day to establish a bridgehead. The GI's then fanned out and secured the first few houses in the town of Serrig further solidifying their beachhead. The Americans managed to get two companies across the river and they were involved in heavy street fighting. After running into heavy opposition it was decided to wait until dark to proceed any further. The crossing resumed at 1700 hrs.

However, even with the cover of darkness the noise from the GI's crossing the river and in town brought down a hail of enemy artillery and machine gun fire. Persisting through the night and by 0400 the battalion was across. The riverfront was cleared and nineteen houses were taken. With the beachhead firmly established at both locations the Americans continued to move further inland towards their objectives.



The following is an account of the Saar River crossing 22 February 1945 as recorded in the "HISTORY OF THE 94TH DIVISION IN WORLD WAR II".

THE 94TH INFANTRY DIVISION

THE BRIDGEHEAD

287

TABEN CROSSING

At 2200 hours on the night of the 21st, Major Stanion in Oberleuken received the regimental order directing the 1st Battalion to cross the Saar at 0400 hours the following morning. It was well after dark and there was no opportunity for detailed reconnaissance. Within a short period of time, the battalion commander assembled his troops, loaded them on trucks and started toward the bridge site. Company C, which had been designated to lead the crossing, arrived in Taben first and detrucked. At this time there was little enemy fire falling on the town and from the engineers it was learned that the corps boats had not yet arrived. Time passed—still the necessary river-crossing equipment did not put in an appearance. At about 0500 hours, or one hour after the designated time of crossing, the corps boats arrived at Taben. The Leading engineer vehicle was quickly unloaded and six assault boats, each of which weighed one thousand pounds, were started down the steep, twisting road to the river, manhandled by the infantrymen who were to make the assault crossing. In the river valley the fog was as thick as milk. Chemical smoke could not have provided better concealment, but it was noticed that sound traveled extremely well in the damp air. After an hour and five minutes of back-breaking work, the first boat reached the water's edge. The men who had sweated and strained to get it into position were utterly exhausted.

The time consumed in getting these first assault boats into position led Lieutenant Colonel Ellis to make a risky decision. He ordered the drivers of the unloaded boat trucks to cut their motors and coast down hill to a point about three hundred yards from the river bank. This was done and the remainder of the boats was soon at the crossing site. These craft, of wooden construction, flat-bottomed, and about twenty feet long, were each capable of accommodating twelve men plus

their personal equipment. Hence, the normal load for a single boat during the crossing operations was its crew of two engineers and ten infantrymen. Each of the occupants of a boat manned a paddle while one of the engineers steered the craft from the stern.

At the water's edge, the troops discovered it was impossible to see the far bank through the fog. From recent thaws, the river was swollen and turbulent and the rush of the stream tended to cover the little noise made by the men of Company C as they prepared to cross. Staff Sergeant John F. Smith loaded his squad into the first boat along with the engineers who were to man the craft, and at 0650 hours on Washington's Birthday, 1945, the crossing began. The seven-mile-an-hour current made paddling difficult, but the far shore was reached without incident. There, the twelve-foot retaining wall at the water's edge was encountered, but the squad was fortunate in that it found a ladder which the Germans had left in place.

Mounting the ladder, Sergeant Smith's squad gained the top of the wall where they surprised two Germans standing outside a pillbox and took them prisoner. Seven more PWs were taken from this same box without a struggle. By this time, most of the 2d Platoon had arrived and started forward to protect the crossing of the rest of the battalion. The 1st Squad of the 1st Platoon followed and began a search of the area to the left of the landing site. Fifty yards from the first pillbox, a German soldier was spotted walking around a second fortification. He was shot and the squad pushed farther north. Soon the men encountered sniper fire which halted them until they were able to outflank the opposition and push on downstream, where they encountered a third box and took its occupants prisoner. It was then decided to return to the crossing site. En route the four snipers who had been by-passed were rounded up.

Back at the crossing, the squad leader reported to Major Stanion who instructed him to move south next and eliminate any enemy in position to the right of the slender bridgehead. Two hundred and fifty yards up the river, eighteen more prisoners were captured from another pillbox. Sergeant William Wollenberg, who speaks German, took one of the prisoners with him to assist in clearing the other fortifications in the vicinity. The sergeant persuaded his prisoner to call to his comrades, telling them they were surrounded by a force of four hundred fully armed Americans. This ruse netted another forty-seven Germans. Private First Class James Stephenson was left to guard these prisoners while the rest of the squad continued up the river. Several more pillboxes were located and searched.

To reinforce the bridgehead with their HMGs, (*Heavy machine Guns*) the 1st Platoon of Company D followed the rifle platoons of the assault company. In turn, they were followed by Companies A and B each of which had a section of machine guns from the 2d Platoon of Company D attached. Enemy resistance consisted exclusively of sporadic sniper fire. **The only mishap in the operation occurred when one of the assault boats capsized and four men were drowned.**

CONCLUSION OF FINDINGS:

Since my youth, it was made known to us that my uncle Pfc. Peter R. Cappadona was killed in action in Belgium on his birthday, February 22. There was even some discrepancy over the year. Some of us thought that it was his 22nd birthday 1944 which made an uncanny equation of 2/22/22 to 2/22/44- 22 years. Later we knew that it was indeed 1945, his 23rd birthday. Other than that, very little was known of him other than he was the second son, fifth child of my Grandmother.

Over the past nine months I have collected a large quantity of information regarding Peter:

From veterans of the 94th Infantry Division that were part his unit I received information through the mail, email and by conversations over the phone. These soldiers were part of the battles up to and including the Saar River crossing of 22 February 1945.

From direct relatives I received Peter's obituary notice and copies of letters that Peter wrote to his sister from various posts in the United States prior to his being shipped overseas. Also two additional letters between Pfc. Reney Christian and Santa Cappadona.

Therefore I feel confident that my conclusions as to the events of Peter's military service and death are accurate.

As a result of the aforementioned information my conclusion is that:

Peter was killed at the Saar River crossing. Due to the confusion of the loading of boats for the assault Peter was not put on the same boats as his Company C/302, but went across in one of the other boats with Companies A, B or D/302. As told in the 94th Division book, one of these boats capsized and four soldiers were lost to drowning. Peter was one of those unfortunate soldiers.

As noted in the 94th Division book and per a phone conversation that I had with one of the soldiers at the scene at the time. There were no battle casualties crossing the Saar at the Taben crossing. He stated that they had indeed snuck up on the unsuspecting Germans.

Further corroboration of this, I believe comes in the letters between Santa Cappadona and Pfc Reney Christian on March 9, 1945 and April 25, 1945 respectively.

Peter was missing on February 19th, which is unexplained, but then again on the 22nd and still not accounted for as of March 9, 1945.

If Peter were in a boat with members of a different Company than his own he would not be known to those other soldiers. With the confusion of the capsizing and fighting that ensued once they got to the other side and up the hill, it is very likely that his fate would not have been determined until the bodies were recovered at a later date.

I sincerely hope that this is not overly painful to Peter's loved ones. I hope that maybe it can give some sense of closure to a long unknown and tragic event.

It was also my concern that Peter, who had such a short life would, as the surviving World War II veterans and his own family are passing at a far too rapid a pace, that he would as so many others fade into obscurity.

David B. Oliva
November 27, 2005

APPENDIX A

**Letters from Peter to Santa Cappadona: July 25, 1944 through
January 3, 1945**

Letter from Santa Cappadona to Pfc. Reney Christian: March 9, 1945

Letter from Pfc. Reney Christian to Santa Cappadona: April 25, 1945

July 25, 1944.

Dear Santa

Here is a little present I got at Fort Devens, but I didn't have a chance to mail it. I haven't much to write because I just wrote a long letter to Ma and you can get all the news from that.

I have a scarf here for who ever wants it but I can't mail it until I get some stamps. I am going to send it to Ma and if she don't want it, the one who gets it first can have it.

Priv. P. R. Coppadone 31472835
Co. D. 33 Bn 7th Regt. I.R.T.C.
Ft. McClellan Ala.



~~Five~~

Miss Lanta Coppadone
18 Reed St.
Boston 18, Mass.

Sunday Sept 24, 1944.



THE UNITED STATES ARMY

Dear sis.

I received your letter to day and I was glad to hear from you. I hope you are all feeling as fine as I am.

Boy this place is as dead on Sunday as it was at home. I have been sleeping and reading almost all day. I got up this morning at ten o' clock, went to church and went back to bed again. I got up for dinner and then I went to the show. I saw "Kismet" with Ronald Colman and Marlene Dietrich. It was pretty good. After the show I went down to the P.X. to get some beer but they were all sold out so I bought two prints of ice cream instead.

I have one of those markman medals ~~for~~ for you. It is too small to make a package for it so I want send it right now. If I get a chance to go to town some night I will buy you a souvenir and mail the

two of them to gether.

This training is starting to get a little tougher now. Friday we worked from five in the morning till one Saturday morning. We didn't get to bed till three Saturday and we got up at seven thirty but we had Saturday morning off till one a' clock. They put us to work though making nets for our steel helmets. It took me about three hours to make one and what a mess it was when I finished it. It only takes about fifteen minutes to make one, if you know how to make them.

Next week we have three night problems. We have one Monday night that lasts till eleven a' clock. We have another one Tuesday night that will last till four a' clock in the morning. I don't know how long the third one will last.

Well sis I guess that's about all for now. Give my love to ma and the kids and every one else.

Love
Pete.

Post. P. A. Cappadona 31432495
Co. D. 03 Bn 7th Regt. I. R. T. C.
Ft. McClellan Ala.



Free

Miss Santa Cappadona
18 Reed St.
Boston 18, Mass.

Tuesday Nov. 21, 1944.

Hello beautiful:

How's my sweet little sister?

I hope you are feeling fine as for myself I am in the best of health.

This is Tuesday morning (8:00 AM), I have been up since five thirty and they haven't put me to work yet. This is the first morning I haven't worked since I finished my training, but I am not picking.

Yesterday I was on K.P. (again) for sixteen hours (5 AM to 9 P.M.) and you used to ~~squawk~~ squawk when you used to wash a few dishes. I was on K.P. so ~~for~~ long because the new rookies arrived yesterday morning. There were about 250 of them and I washed all the dishes cups bowls and silverware that they used. (I have desk pou hands)

Well sis there isn't much to write because there isn't much to do around here. All I have been

Young is drinking beer at the P.X.,
or going to a show. I have been in
town a few nights but this town
is deader than right here in camp.

~~There~~ Well is I guess there isn't
much more to write about.

Give my love to all.

Love.

Peter

excuse the scratching. It's so early
I don't think I am awake yet.
I never wrote a letter this early
in the morning.

Port. P.R. Cappadona 314 22475
Co D. 33rd 72d Regt J. R.T.C.
Ft. Mc Clellan Ala.

Free



Mrs Loula Cappadona
14 Reed St.

Boston, Mass.

Thursday Nov. 23, 1944.

Dear sis:

I received your letter today and I was really glad to hear from you. I thought you had forgotten how to write. I haven't received a letter all week.

Well dear how did you spend Thanksgiving Day? I suppose you spent most of your time in the kitchen, the same as I did. I was on K.P. again. I wasn't exactly on K.P. I am now a K.P. "pusher". Now that the new trainees are on K.P., I have to push them around and tell them what to do and how to do it. I don't do any work but it gets kind of monotonous ~~with~~ sitting around doing nothing. I just sit around and eat all day. If I am on this job much longer I'll be as fat as a pig.

you should have seen the Thanksgiving dinner we had. It could almost compare with the turkey dinners I have had at home. We had turkey with gravy and dressing, mashed potatoes, candied sweet

potatoes peas, carrots, cranberry sauce, candy, nuts
apples, oranges, grapes, pumpkin and apple pie,
ice cream, corn, salad, celery, coffee and lemonade.
The only thing missing was a nice glass of
wine. It was the best meal I have eaten in
a long time. They also gave us a pack of
cigarettes.

I have every thing straightened out on
that allotment form ma sent me. One
of the officers filled it out and they are
sending it to some place in New Jersey
where it will be checked to see if ma
is entitled to an allotment. If it is all-
right she should get a check soon.

Well in there isn't much I can write
about because there isn't much to do around
here. I can go into town any night but
it is just as bad in town as it is in camp.
I have been going to the show almost every
night and I have seen some pretty good
pictures. I have seen, "None but the Lonely
Heart," "Thirty seconds over Tokyo" and
"The Sign of the Cross."

Well I guess that's all for now except that
I got a letter from Andy and he is some where
in Belgium. Give my love to all.
I still don't know when I am coming home. Love Peter.

Tuesday Dec. 5, 1944.

Dear sir:

I received your letter a few days ago and I was glad to hear from you.

Well beautiful how are you? I hope you are feeling as well as I am but I hope you are not as tired as I am. You should see the job I am doing now. You remember the jobs Mino and I used to do when we cleaned up the flats. Well I am doing the same thing now. They took our day room from us and made it into a dental clinic so we are making a new one. We are remodeling one of the old mess halls and we are doing a good job of it. We covered all the walls and the ceiling with plaster board, then we are going to paint it, sand the floor and fit all the windows. We are going to make it look real pretty. I would rather do this job than do K. P. If you ever mention dish washing to me when I get home I will knock your head off.

Today they took me off my job long enough to load some beer on a truck and bring it to the officers club. After I was finished carrying the beer into the club they gave me a bottle to drink.

I had some fun the night before last. I went out drinking beer at all the cadet clubs. I wasn't supposed to go there but I wore a cadet man's coat and they let me in. In order to get into the club we have to have on J.R.T.C. patch on our coat. (I am sending you one.)

Well sis I guess there is nothing more to write about. Give my love to all.

Love.

Peter.

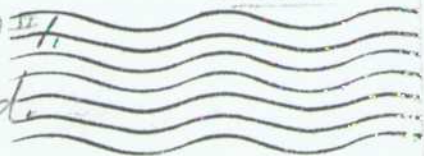
Port. P. R. Cappadona 31432435

Free

C. B. Tracy 19th Bm 5th Recd



Ft. George Md.



Miss Santa Cappadona
18 Reed St.
Boston 13, Mass

Monday Jan 1, 1945.

Dear sis:

I received your letter today and I was glad to get it. It's the first letter I've had since I got here. I received a Christmas card from Alberta. It's pretty late for Christmas cards but the reason I got it so late is because she sent it to Alabama.

Well sis did you have a happy New Year? I guess you can imagine the happy new year's eve I spent, on a train. All I

had had milk as milk.
Isn't that disgusting? That was
bad but you should have
seen the way I spent New Year's
day. I got into camp this morn-
ing at 5 o'clock. I had just enough
time to change my clothes, eat
breakfast and fix my bed and
then they took us out for some
training. I spent all morning
digging a fox hole and all the
while it was pouring. In the
afternoon I had to stand in
the fox hole with mud and
water up to my knees and
it was still pouring.

The funny part of it is I
didn't even catch cold.

Well so I guess that's all for
now. If I am still here - Saturday,
which I doubt, I will try to
get home.

I am writing this letter with
my eyes half closed so I had
better quit before I fall asleep.
So long for now.

Love,
Peter

Post. P. R. Cappadona 31432436

Btry C 19th Inf 5th Regt A.S. FRD-1

Ft. George G. Meade Md.



Free



Mrs Santa Cappadona

18 Reed St.

Boston 18, Mass.

Wednesday Jan 3, 1945.

Dear sis:

I received a letter from you that you wrote December fourth. The envelope had about a dozen different addresses. You sent it to Ft. McClellan and they sent it up here, before I even got here, so they sent it back to McClellan and from McClellan they sent it back here again. I finally have the letter, a month after you mailed.

Well sis it looks as though I ~~am~~ am shipping out of here. I will probably leave today or ~~tomorrow~~ to tomorrow morning. If I go to New

York or maybe Taunton I will try
to get home. I don't know where I
am going or if I will be able to get
home.

Well sis I guess there is nothing else
to write about. Give my love to all.

Love.

Peter.

Even though I am shipping out, you
can keep writing. I will get it at
my new station.

Santa Cappadona
18 Reed St.

VIA AIR MAIL

BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS

March 9, 1945

Dear Benny,

Before I start this letter, I'd like to tell you that I am Cappy's "sister" Santa in the name.

A few weeks ago Pete got a letter from you. Knowing that he wouldn't mind our reading it, we did before we sent it to him. You see Pete's still in the army.

In fact he's been missing in action since the 19th of February according to a gov't telegram. A second telegram said that on the 21st of the

same month he rejoined his company, but on the 22nd, the following day, he was again reported missing. I can't tell you it's no fun receiving telegrams like that. But that record one makes us feel that perhaps he has just got lost from his company. (He is in Germany.)

I hadn't planned on telling you all this, but, I thought perhaps you would like to know.

My real purpose in writing is to find out why you thought my mother had been given a discharge. Peter never said anything about it to me.

All we know is that Peter's
furlough was delayed and that
he and a half dozen other fellows
were left behind and the rest of
the fellows were shipped out.

It seems, too, that you
were the only one who thought
he had been given a discharge.
Carl Brank, who writes to
my cousin, implied once
that Peter was home.

We know nothing about
it and if you think there is
something we should know,
could you find time to tell
us?

See, I sure do wish he
had been given a discharge.
Not because he is my brother,

but because everyone else says
so, I think he is one of the
swellest kids I know. I sure
miss him and wish the
damn war were over.

I hope you don't mind
my writing. Also I hope you
don't mind our reading my
mother's mail from you.

We Cappadonas would be
grateful to you for anything
you could tell us.

Yours truly,
Santa Cappadona
18 Reed St.
Boston, Mass.

PFC Renny D. Christian
Div Hq Co. 3137 Celestine
APO 451 90 P.M.
New York N.Y.



VIA AIR MAIL

Miss Vera Cappadona

18 Reed St

Boston Mass

ISSUED BY

19033

EXAMINER

April
Germany 25 - Lys - 45

Dear Mrs Cappadona:-

I never was so surprised, as I was, when I received the clipping from my wife telling of Peter, being killed in action, he and I were very good friends while in training at Mc Chellan, he did so much for me, that I shall never forget it as long as I live, he was a very good soldier, its too bad a boy like him had to pay with his life, for such men as Hitler and his gang.

We use to talk a lot about home, he told me so much about you, that it seems I've known you for a long time, though I've never met you, when I get back I'll surely look you up. as I dont live very far from Boston, only seventy miles, and I go there often, and one time I worked there, Peter and I use to talk a lot about the city.

Just a few days ago, Al. Cadautte sent me his address, another fellow who trained with us, and I wrote to him right away you will probably get the letter in the near

future.

Al will be surprised when he hears about him. The three of us were always together. He has been in the hospital for some time, due to trench feet. We both come from New Hampshire. He was the one that corrected that rumor about Peter being discharged. For your sake I wish he had been.

Well Mrs Cappadona I hope his brother will come back to you soon. and please let me hear from you. Until then my sympathies are with you.

Sincerely

Percy Christian