

STEVE: You ever hear of the Battle of the Bulge?

IRA: Not only heard of it, I was in it.

STEVE: *(makes a hand gesture toward the box of books)* That where you got the medals?

IRA: Yes and... *(indicates legs)* this. The Bulge was the biggest battle of any war. Hitler's last big push.

STEVE: How'd it happen... your legs?

IRA: I was with the Second Armored Division. "Hell on Wheels". Part of Seventh Corps. We were sent into Saint Vith after the Germans broke through and completely surrounded the 422nd and 423rd Regiments.

STEVE: You were in tanks?

IRA: A machine-gunner. Fifty caliber.

STEVE: What happened?

IRA: We were moving into Havelange, just east of the Meuse River, when we ran into the German Second Panzer Division. Steady fighting for two days, and then these German Tigers showed up. They were these huge fifty-seven-ton tanks, and we didn't stand a chance against them. My tank took a hit from a Tiger that blew the tracks off and flipped us over. Killed everyone but me and the driver. He had one arm blown off, and was thrown over my legs.

STEVE: Jesus...

IRA: I ripped off a piece of his shirt and tied it around his shoulder. We couldn't move. My legs were riddled with shrapnel and pieces of the tank track. White, Eddie White, the driver, kept passing out, and I couldn't move him off me. We were trapped out there for the rest of the day and night. Couldn't move.

STEVE: Must have been hell.

IRA: Hell would be a good word.

STEVE: You must have been scared...

IRA: You've never been in a war...

STEVE: No.

IRA: Well, scared is not the worst. The pain... the noise. The stupidity. No, scared is not the worst.

STEVE: How'd you get out of it?

IRA: Eddie died during the night...

STEVE: *(long pause)* Eddie the driver?

IRA: Yes, Eddie the driver. From Skokie, Illinois, he was... Eddie White. An actor, he wanted to be. A young man, he was. A dead man, he was...

STEVE: I'm sorry, Ira.

IRA: Scared is not the worst. Dead - dead is the worst.

STEVE: Ira...?

IRA: Eddie died during the night and I couldn't move him off of me. The Germans kept shooting and shooting... but Eddie... Eddie, he was on top of me. So, I survived. The next day the planes came. P-38s and English Typhoons. They blasted the Tigers with rockets.

STEVE: That must have been absolute hell. How do you get through something like that?

IRA: What's gone is gone. What's done is done. You acknowledge it and move on