

# A Tale of One City and the Greyhound Soldiers

by Bruno Viani, 399-I

## Nostalgic Reunion

Graced by a sunny day in September 1999, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Henry F. Prysi at age 83, was leaving the ancient City of Esslingen on the Neckar, returning to his home in the United States. As he looked back on this dynamic city of 90,000 for the last time, he thought about his fellow officers in the “Blue Battalion” and the gallant “Greyhounds” of Task Force Olsen in the 100th Infantry Division, who captured the city intact so many years ago. But most of all in his final glimpse of this age old city, he could not forget the amazing will and spirit of the revered City Father’s of Esslingen [lawyers, doctors, businessmen], who pressed through the American battle lines on 22 April 1945 to surrender their beloved city peacefully rather than have it destroyed. He thought about the folly of NSDAP resistance to a formal peaceful surrender. In the true spirit of an aging veteran, LTC Prysi knew that he must always honor the “Greyhounds” soldiers who did not reach Esslingen, those at the—call of the bulge—who were wounded or killed fighting a tenacious German soldier intent upon keeping the son’s of America from reaching German soil—well knowing that they also brought the “Greyhound Company” into Esslingen to end the war.

Crossing over the ancient Pleinsau Bridge LTC Prysi recalled the grateful words of the proud citizens of Esslingen, who had honored the “Greyhounds” for saving their city from the ravages of war in the very last days of World War II and despite the passage in time, he could not forget the echoes of the Glockenspiel, which rang out for the first time, as the signatures were being placed on the surrender decree at high noon some 54 years before.

With his journey now ending, LTC Prysi was proud to have been one of the mightily “Greyhounds” serving under Lt. Colonel Bernard V. Lentz [deceased], Captain Alfred E. Olson [deceased], with Sergeant Graham Green [German interpreter, age 84], and Sergeant Glen P. Moser [Squad Leader, age 73], who all entered Esslingen with TF Olson during the final days of the war.

Never to be forgotten, too, was the zero status of battle casualties, for not one American soldier lost his life in the capture of Esslingen, nor did any citizen of this fair city shed their blood in its capitulation, thereby validating this astonishing tactical success as an instrument of freedom forged long ago by young American infantry soldiers during World War II in the cultured land of Goethe, Schiller and Martin Luther.

And to this peaceful end, LTC Prysi understood that it was not only the consequence of peaceful surrender that saved Esslingen—it was the vision of the German people themselves—who witnessed defeat in the eyes of their own soldiers as they retreated through their city, which is best described in the literary expressions written by Ernst Ferdinand August in 1812.

*“Mit Mann and Ross and Wagen hat sie der Herr Geschlagen”*  
“With man and Horse and Wagon were they defeated by God”

Although the rule of the NSDAP in Esslingen was at an end, in a final concession of public admission, the citizens of Esslingen would read in their local Newspaper on Hitler’s birthday 20 April 1945, the following commentary “Our Hitler . . . Our loyalty to him will be our victory and a new flourishing (Bluetzeit) beginning for our Germany and all of Europe”. None could believe that this moral prediction would one day come true as a new democratic Germany arose from the rubble of the Third Reich to become a member of NATO, the Atlantic Alliance and finally with reunification at their side make a quantum leap forward as a powerful economic nation in the European Union [EU] in the year 2000—to become our staunchest Ally.

As his plane finally lifted off from the Stuttgart Airport over looking Esslingen, in the scenic Neckar valley, his thoughts flashed back to that dramatic day in 1945, when as a young Infantry lieutenant he and the men of TF Olson were obliged to accept the surrender of this picturesque city, to formulate a capitulation decree and save it from the winds of war.

*Dateline: 22 April 1945: Esslingen a city of 60,000 was captured by two platoons of Company I, 399th Infantry Regiment. (Source U.S. 100th Infantry Division Association)*

### **A Time for Giants**

It was Sunday, the 22nd of April 1945 (1130 hours) Task Force Olson [TF] comprised of 60 soldiers from 399/I, who disarmed the German soldiers in the Punker Kaserne and moved into the city square mounted on six tanks from Company A, 781st Tank Battalion to dictate the terms of a surrender decree (1200 hours) to a delegation of city functionaires and city fathers waiting at the Rathaus (City Hall). The American Army had now arrived in full force in the magnificent Schwabian City on the banks of the Neckar River, to save a city from massive destruction.

### **National Archives, Washington, D.C.**

#### **EXTRACTS**

S-3 Journal Hq. 3rd (Blue) Battalion, 399th Infantry Regiment 22 April 1945.

0245 hours: Bn and Cp closed on ( 163191) Waeldenbronn.

0800 hours: Mayor of Esslingen came to tell us that the town is clear, ready to surrender.

0940 hours: Blue 3 lbs to orient CO I Co TF to be sent to 155187 (4 Tanks - 2 TD's, 60 men).

1250 hours: Report in from Capt Olson: City of Esslingen surrendered uncond.

Men (German Troops) plus Officers and wpms turned over to Capt Olson. French have crossed Neckar Riv. And cleared S part of the city.

### **Personnel in Attendance at the Surrender Ceremony in the City Hall in Esslingen at 1230 hours, 22 April 1945**

#### **UNITED STATES ARMY PERSONNEL**

*(Source 100th I.D. Association)*

Lt. Colonel Bernard V. Lentz, Commander, 399/3B

Captain Alfred E. Olson, Jr., Commander, 399/I

1st Lieutenant Henry F. Prys, Executive Officer, 399/I

PFC Graham C. Green, Jr., Interpreter, 399/I

S/Sergeant Glen P. Moser, Squad Leader, 399/I

A complement of 60 unidentified soldiers from 399/I

A complement of unidentified soldiers [tankers] from 781st Tank Bn/A

#### **ESSLINGEN CITY OFFICIALS AND DELEGATES**

*(Source Esslingen Archive, NSDAP—National Socialist German Workers Party)*

Oberbuergermeister (Lord Mayor) Dr. Alfred Lkaiber, NSDAP.

Buergermeister (Mayor) Friedrich Gaertner, NSDAP Gemeinderat, Architect

Stadtkaeemmerer (Treasurer) Georg Deuschle, Beamter, Civil Servant

Herr Hans-Karl Riedel, Industrialist. Dr. Emil Mackh, Wirtschaftsvertreter, Economist

Dr. Fritz Landenberger, Medical Doctor, Ludwig Strauss, Commerce

Herr Eugen Wagner, NSDAP, Bataillonsfuehrer des Volkssturms 20, Esslingen

Landrat (County Commissioner) Dr. Hans Haecker, Kreisleitung NSDAP, Jurist

### **Images in Time**

The impressions of the American fighting soldier by members of the surrender delegation on 22 April 1945, were expressed by the City Fathers as “Well equipped with heavy tanks which could maneuver at

high speeds”—“ Soldierly appearance, tall, healthy, well dressed Officers and soldiers” and—“Amazing voluntary discipline among the American soldiers whom they could not distinguish from their Officers, because in appearance they all were dressed and looked alike.” Conversely the German surrender delegation and Functionaires were viewed by certain members of TF Olson as being friendly, dignified, respectful and educated men, who were relieved that a new era embracing democracy was about to begin.

### **The Last Day**

The intrepid city of Esslingen was now secure from the hostilities of war and the men of Company I could now pause to meditate upon their survival in the serenity of Esslingen, which was more than a welcome sight to the battle weary men of TF Olson and the remaining members of the “Greyhound” Company. Their exposure to this incredible surrender event meant that they were at the dawn of a new day, when they could forget the ordeal of combat and remember their fallen comrades—witnessing in the process—the final collapse of the German war machine.

*Company I, 399th Infantry Regiment based up text extracts from a Historical Documentation titled “Twenty Seven Letters” researched for the Esslingen Archive and written by John Patrick Myers and Harold D. Simpson, members of the 94th Infantry Division, who relieved the 100th Infantry Division in Esslingen as a permanent Occupation Force in 1946.*

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