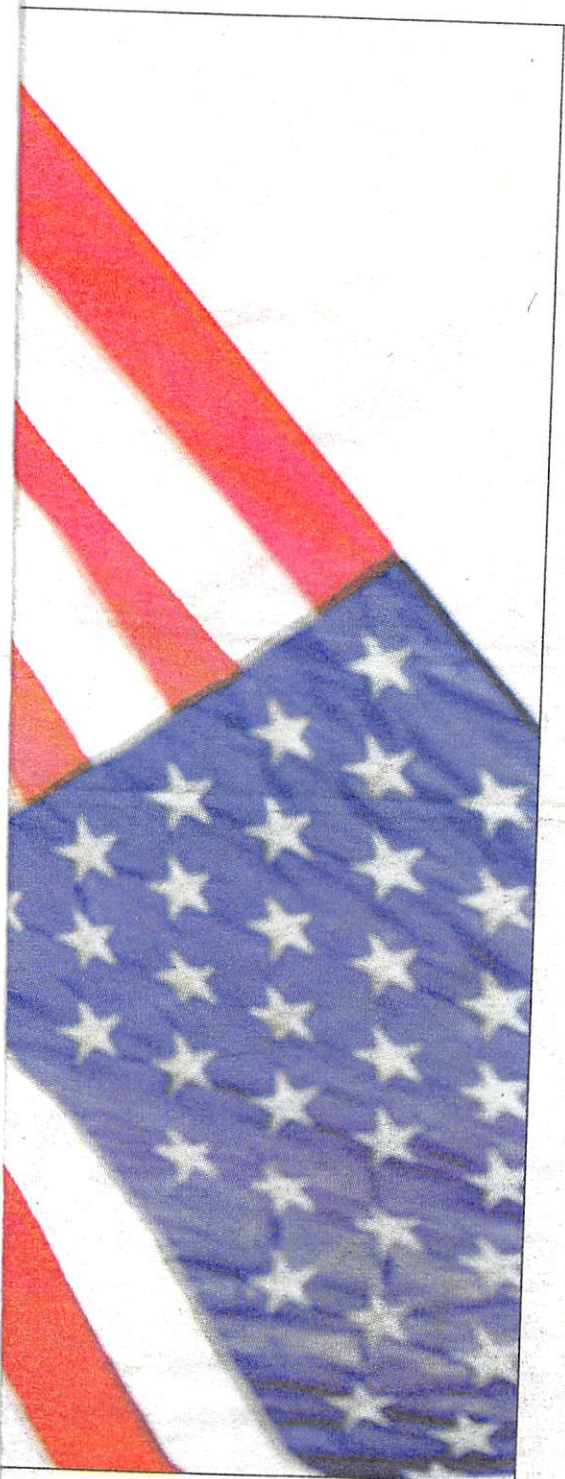


• SUNDAY, JUNE 3, 2012

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Awarded at
Camp
Robinson
1944
for fighting
69th



CURT YOUNGBLOOD/RIVER VALLEY & OZARK EDITION
Garland Gable served in the 69th Infantry Regiment during World War II and earned several medals during the war. A native of Beebe, Gable was not a churchgoer until he attended a revival in 1953 that led him to organize and build three Baptist churches in Arkansas.

Garland Gable

Conway resident recounts horrific World War II battles

BY DANIEL A. MARSH
Staff Writer

Garland Gable

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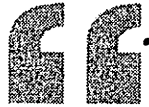
BY DANIEL A. MARSH
Staff Writer

Garland Gable recounted horror after horror from World War II with a clarity and calm that belied his 86 years. Only occasionally would he “slip a gear,” he said, referring to his difficulty remembering the events of 1945, the year he served with the famous Fighting 69th.

“I have shell shock,” he said. “I saw sergeants, majors and captains with it. It was nothing to be ashamed of — you just didn’t tell anybody.”

The Beebe native fought on a multitude of European battlefields, surviving bomb blasts, sniper attacks and German machine-gun fire, only to return home with a tendency to “jump out of my skin,” he said.

After the war, Gable returned to Beebe to resume an education interrupted first by years of work, then by the war. He later “answered the call”



They were training us for combat. It was hot, and it was tough. Some guys passed out, and you never saw them again. I was used to it.”

GARLAND GABLE

On basic training at Camp Robinson in 1944

to go into the ministry, and organized and built three Baptist churches in Arkansas. He and his wife, Martha, now reside in Conway.

“I grew up on a farm,” Gable said. “I was the oldest of seven children. My father was a sharecropper. He worked for 50 cents a day. He’d leave before I got up, and he’d come in after I went to bed. I started hauling wood when I was 12 to 14 years old to help buy groceries.

“I missed a lot of school. When it was time to fix the land for planting, I had to be there. When it was time to harvest, I had to be there. We raised what we ate. Those were Depression days.”

He remembered someone once promising his father, George, “There is a man somewhere living on bitterweed and a cracker a day waiting for your job.”

Gable said he often worked from daylight to dark.

“I had to work harder than most kids,” he said.

He first became aware of global events when he heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

“I didn’t know where Pearl Harbor was,” he said. “When I turned 14, in

SEE GABLE, PAGE 5V

GABLE

Continued from Page 4V

1940, I thought the war was a long way off and I would never fight in it.”

He registered with the armed services when he turned 18, and received his “letter from Uncle Sam” shortly after.

“The letter told me I had to go for my examination,” he said. “I went to Little Rock for it — I had never been to Little Rock. There was a rock house on Center Street off Markham — it’s still there. Twenty-five of us lined up in the basement, and we pulled off every stitch. Well, they just looked at us; they didn’t really examine us.

“Some guy told me that if they ask which branch of service you wanted, you said ‘Army’ if you wanted Navy and vice versa,” Gable said. “Well, I couldn’t swim, so I didn’t want the Navy. I asked for the Army, and I got it.”

Gable said he was ordered to report for basic training at Camp Robinson in North Little Rock.

“We lived in a rural area, down a dirt road, three miles outside Beebe,” he said. “I had to wake up at 5 a.m. to catch the bus for Camp Robinson. Well, it was stormy that morning, with lightning, and the wind was blowing. Dad told me to catch one of our horses



CURT YOUNGBLOOD/RIVER VALLEY & OZARK EDITION

After earning several medals while serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Garland Gable returned home to Beebe and raised a crop on the family farm with his father. After learning several trades, Gable wound up deciding to become a preacher.

were informed that a German submarine had followed us. It blew up one of the ships that was carrying some of the guys from Shelby.”

Gable spent Christmas 1944 in England, which that year was experiencing the coldest winter in a century, he said. Members of the regiment were called to the front lines to fight in the Ardennes Counteroffensive, or the Battle of the Bulge.

“We rode through freezing rain in a truck with no top,”

ran like a sewing machine. I took it about 300 yards down this road; then I got off it and turned it around. A German on a ridge opened up on me, and as far as I know, that motorcycle is still sitting there!”

Gable recounted a harrowing encounter with a German tank while crossing an open field outside the city of Weissenfels, Germany. The tank opened fire with a machine gun.

“I took off across that

much to finish his education. He learned several trades, and then became reacquainted with his future wife, Martha, who’d gone to the same school in Beebe.

“Some kids had all gone out to the water pump, and Martha was the last one in line,” he said. “I had a car, so I said to her, ‘How about a show?’ She said, ‘I don’t know.’”

The couple married in December 1947 and have two sons, Wesley and Jeff.

Free Fishing Weeker runs Friday-June 10

LITTLE ROCK — The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission has announced that its annual Free Fishing Weekend will begin at noon Friday and extend through midnight June 10. During the event, which is held in conjunction with National Fishing and Boating Week, a celebration coordinated by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, both residents and nonresidents may fish without fishing licenses or trout permits.

Regulations for all Arkansas waters apply, however, including

daily, slot and length limits must be observed. Kids Fishing Day at the AGFC’s hatcheries will be from 9:22 p.m. Saturday. There are similar youth fishing activities slated for other locations in the state.

To find out more, contact AGFC at (800) 364-GA or visit www.agfc.com.

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New Arrivals

ing, with lightning, and the wind was blowing. Dad told me to catch one of our horses and ride it to town, and once I got there, to turn the horse loose and it would come back home. I rode through that storm thinking I'd do what they asked of me, to the best of my ability — as long as it wasn't life-threatening — and that I'd come back."

He said he and about 35 other raw recruits got off the bus at Camp Robinson "scared to death." When he traded his civilian clothes for fatigues, he said everything fit but the shoes.

"I wore about a 10 1/2, but these were size 12-13! The sergeant told us to fall out, and I fell out in my slippers. When he asked me where my shoes were, I told him I'd jumped straight up out of them."

Gable said years of farm work toughened him for the rigors of basic training.

"They were training us for combat," he said. "It was hot, and it was tough. Some guys passed out, and you never saw them again. I was used to it."

He completed training on June 6, 1944, then was sent to Camp Shelby in Hattiesburg, Miss., for further training. The 69th Infantry Regiment, or Fighting 69th, a military unit dating back to 1849, was training there. It became Gable's unit.

Gable and the rest of the Fighting 69th shipped out for England from New York.

"When you woke up, you couldn't see anything

of the Duge.

"We rode through freezing rain in a truck with no top," Gable said. "We rode and rode. The snow was 8 inches deep. Then we had to walk a good distance. We relieved the 99th Infantry Division, and we were on the front with nothing but Germans ahead of us."

The Germans shelled the line every morning.

"They fired everything they had at us, and our orders were to answer."

He said that one morning, while manning his position in a slip trench, he heard something coming down in the trees behind him

"There was an explosion, and the concussion blew me out of the trench," Gable said. "My helmet went to the right, and I went to the left. I jumped up and got back in my hole. From there, hell started."

He recounted a battle in which a piece of shrapnel tore off the tip of his right middle finger.

"I didn't tell anybody about it until it got infected. I asked permission to go to the first-aid station, but while I was on my way there, we came under attack. I ran back to my men."

As 1945 wore on, the regiment fought its way from town to town, encountering stiff German resistance.

"The Germans would fight just long enough to kill a few American boys, then surrender," Gable said.

One morning, after fighting its way into a village, the

opened fire with a machine gun.

"I took off across that field," Gable said. "I didn't get a scratch."

He sustained such a serious concussion in the battle that he has no memory of several hours of fierce fighting.

Along the way to Leipzig, the scene of some of the bloodiest fighting, the regiment encountered death camps.

"The prisoners wanted to kill their guards," he said. "They'd been worked and then left to starve. The bodies were stacked five or six deep. Some of the survivors said they hadn't bathed in three years.

"I was 19 when I saw that. I don't know how I felt about it. I hadn't expected anything like that."

In Leipzig, Gable said, he saw the worst fighting at Napoleon's monument, a 300-foot-tall structure made of granite and concrete in which elite German officers were fortified.

"The artillery shells would bounce off the walls," Gable said.

Tanks covered with American soldiers converged on the monument, and as the soldiers were shot, they rolled off the tanks into the path of other oncoming tanks.

The 69th — and Gable — survived Leipzig to eventually meet the Russians on the banks of the Elbe River at the conclusion of World War II. When he returned to America, Gable found it diffi-

cal and have two sons, Wesley and Jeff.

Gable said he never went to church until 1953.

"I came in from the field and said, 'Let's go to the revival,'" he said. "The Lord spoke to me, and I decided to preach."

He said he was asked to be the superintendent of the church's Sunday School class.

"I'd never been to Sunday School," he said. "I didn't know what to say."

Gable's devotion to God led him to organize and build three Baptist churches, in Fort Smith, Beebe and Little Rock.

Staff writer Daniel A. Marsh can be reached at (501) 399-3688 or dmarsh@arkansasonline.com.



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Gable and the rest of the Fighting 69th shipped out for England from New York.

"When you woke up, you couldn't see anything but water," he said. "It took more than one ship to carry our regiment. We could hear depth charges going off all around us when we got nearly into Great Britain. We

which a piece of shrapnel tore off the tip of his right middle finger.

"I didn't tell anybody about it until it got infected. I asked permission to go to the first-aid station, but while I was on my way there, we came under attack. I ran back to my men."

As 1945 wore on, the regiment fought its way from town to town, encountering stiff German resistance.

"The Germans would fight just long enough to kill a few American boys, then surrender," Gable said.

One morning, after fighting its way into a village, the unit "got a little playful after things settled down," Gable said. They found several motorcycles. "All I ever rode was a bicycle, so I started up one of those motorcycles, and it

300-foot-tall structure made of granite and concrete in which elite German officers were fortified.

"The artillery shells would bounce off the walls," Gable said.

Tanks covered with American soldiers converged on the monument, and as the soldiers were shot, they rolled off the tanks into the path of other oncoming tanks.

The 69th — and Gable — survived Leipzig to eventually meet the Russians on the banks of the Elbe River at the conclusion of World War II. When he returned to America, Gable found it difficult adapting to civilian life.

"I felt different and out of place," he said.

He raised a crop with his father and tried going back to school, but he'd missed too

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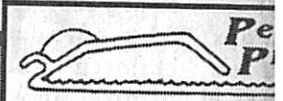
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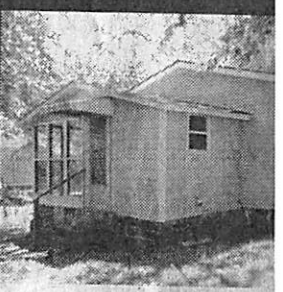


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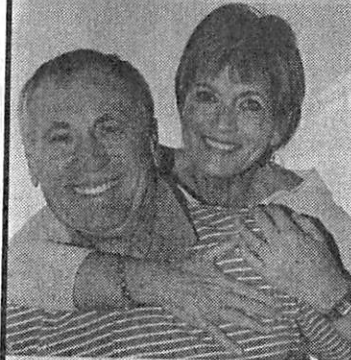
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