

Sink or Swim by Mr. Robert Schepis

On the afternoon of August 22, 1944 Robert Schepis traveled along with 6 officers and 22 enlisted men from Company C of the 167th Combat Engineering Battalion into the town of Fontenay, France. Their job was to check out the width of the Loing River. The Loing is a 142 km long river in central France, a left tributary of the Seine. Its source is in Sainte-Colombe-sur-Loing.

Robert Schepis and Walter Habowski were sent to the left side of town to serve as guards. A local Frenchman approached the Americans and offered to share some wine. But before the conversation could go any further they heard the grinding of an engine, a German car, coming straight toward them.

Habowski and the local man ducked into a nearby house. Schepis could see the German staff car boring straight for him where he stood next to the river.

Robert Schepis opened fire. He fired eight shots. The German officer jumped out of the car and Schepis' bullets hit him 3 or 4 times.

Schepis just kept firing clip after clip until German mortar fire started falling all around and one shell landed uncomfortably close to him. He was backed up against the river and unfortunately Schepis didn't know how to swim.

Robert Schepis chose the river and soon was in water up his neck. They say that necessity is the mother of invention. So, he put his gun over his neck and did the best he could. God only knows how he got to the other side, where he crawled into some high grass. The Germans were firing at him from across the river, so he decided to play dead. Robert Schepis lay there in the hot sun, trying not to move a muscle. He heard Germans talking all around him. Finally, when darkness fell he crept into the woods where he listened to German trucks going back and forth all night long in Fontenay.

It took two days for Robert Schepis to the rest of Company C. Upon arriving back in camp, he was told to report to Captain Joseph Bell. The Captain questioned him at length about the incident at Fontenay. At the end of my interview Capt. Bell said, "Schepis, you saved a lot of men by opening fire on the Germans when you did. Your gunfire served as a warning and allowed the rest of the men of Company C to get away safely." The Captain also said he was going to put Robert's name in for a Silver Star.

Mr. Schepis never received the Silver Star but says, "I just did my job and I'm glad no one got hurt."