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28th Division Quartermaster Company Commander Preserves Souvenir of March Through Europe

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J. Gleim, Museum Curator)



Photo of captured flag, signed by the members of the Company, and Division.

This German Nazi flag was collected by 28th Division Quartermaster Company Commander John C. Sees during World War II. Then a 1st Lieutenant, Sees assumed the role of Company Commander of the 28th Division Quartermaster Company in February 1944. The mission of a Quartermaster unit is to acquire, sustain and distribute supplies such as ammunition, food, clothing and fuel necessary to sustain combat operations. Quartermaster units were also responsible for burial and grave registration and managing the personal effect of soldiers who had been killed in action.

Sees landed with the company in Normandy on July 26, 1944. There, they began operations to support the rest of the 28th Division, which was already in action. They participated in the liberation of Paris, where men from the 28th marched in a celebratory parade down the Champs-Élysées. In the autumn of 1944, the division suffered excessive casualties during the Battle of Hürtgen Forest, the longest single battle fought by U.S. Army forces. During the Battle of the Bulge, the last major German offensive, the men of the 28th managed to delay encroaching enemy forces, sacrificing their lives to buy the Allies much-needed time.

As the 28th Division Quartermaster Company accompanied the rest of the division across Germany, they often set up in camps that had been recently (and hastily) vacated by German forces. Presumably, Commander Sees collected the flag which was signed by members of his unit at one of these locations.

The Nazi flag, bearing a black swastika at the center, is a powerful symbol of the German Third Reich and it hung on public buildings, was at the center of parade standards, marked on train cars, trucks and documents. It is a visual representation of the hatred, intolerance, and totalitarianism that characterized Adolf Hitler's government. As Allied troops like the 28th Division Quartermaster Company moved into German-controlled

territories, they removed these symbols and destroyed them or brought them home as souvenirs. By removing or destroying these symbols of the Third Reich, Allied Forces were symbolically destroying the power of the regime. While the sight of such a flag might be unsettling to viewers today, soldiers collecting these emblems as souvenirs during World War II were eager to bring home a reminder of their role in defeating a great evil.