



PVT. ELMER FLORIAN BLONIEN

Pvt. Elmer F. Blonien was born on April 12, 1916, to John K. Blonien and Katherine Muellenbach-Blonien. In 1930, his family moved to Wood County, Wisconsin, where his family resided in the town of Rudolph. It is known he had one brother and three sisters. He worked in his father's grocery store until he was drafted.

On April 7, 1941, Elmer was inducted into the U. S. Army. He was sent to Fort Knox, Kentucky for basic training. During the trip down to Ft. Knox, Elmer became friends with Albert Dubois. The two met while playing cards on the train. When DuBois ran out of money, Elmer gave DuBois three dollars so that he could keep playing.

At Ft. Knox, Elmer was assigned to A Company, 192nd Tank Battalion. The reason this was done was the army was attempting to fill out the rosters of the letter companies with men from the home states of each company.

In the late summer of 1941, Elmer took part in maneuvers in Louisiana. After these maneuvers, at Camp Polk, he learned his battalion was being sent overseas. He was given leave home to say his goodbyes to family and friends and then returned to Camp Polk.

Traveling west by train, Elmer arrived in San Francisco. There, he and the other soldiers were ferried to Angel Island. On the island, they received physicals and shots. They were then boarded onto a ship bound for the Philippine Islands.

Arriving in the Philippines, Elmer spent the next two weeks getting equipment ready for use, cleaning guns and loading ammunition belts.

The morning of December 8, 1941, Capt. Walter Write informed his company that Pearl Harbor had been bombed by the Japanese. The tanks were ordered to the perimeter of the airfield to prevent the Japanese from using paratroopers.

Around 12:45 in the afternoon, Elmer lived through the bombing of Clark Field. During the attack, he and the other tankers could do little since their guns were not made to use against planes. Elmer spent the next four months fighting the Japanese and on April 9, 1942, he became a Prisoner of War.

Elmer made his way to Mariveles where he started what became known as the death march. The POWs walked out of the barrio heading north toward San Fernando. The first few miles it was all uphill and many of the prisoners quickly had a hard time keeping up with their group.

At one point, the POWs had to run across an field where the Japanese had artillery

that was firing on Corregidor. At San Fernando, Elmer and the other men were packed into small wooden boxcars that were used to haul sugarcane. Each car could hold eight horses or 40 men. The Japanese packed 100 men into each car.

Albert DuBois stated that the march was harder on Elmer because he was a big man. In his opinion, Elmer's health began to fail as a result of the march.

At Capas, the POWs who were still living climbed out of the cars. The bodies of the dead fell to the car floors as the living left the cars. From Capas, the POWs walked the last ten miles to Camp O'Donnell.

Sometime during Elmer's imprisonment at Cabanatuan, he became ill with malaria, which resulted in his developing a spleen infection. According to Albert DuBois of A Company, he saw Elmer twelve hours before Elmer died. Elmer no longer had the smile on his face that he always seemed to have. His face was filled with pain.

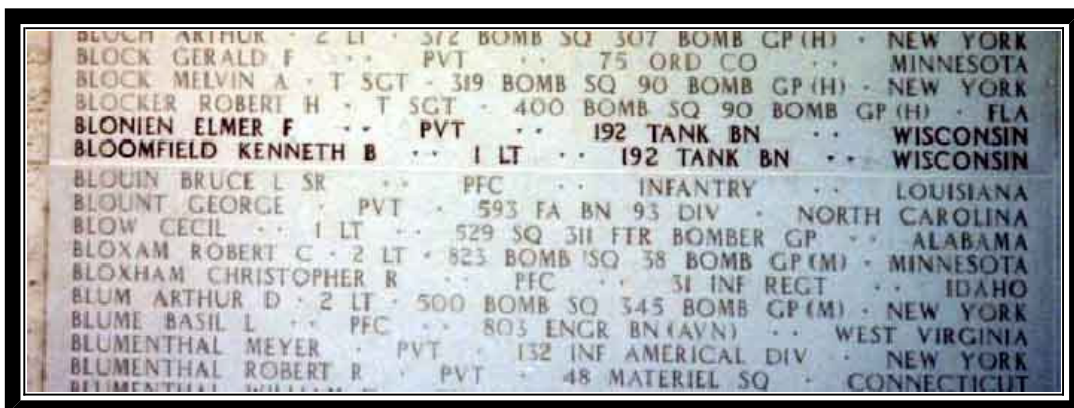
DuBois spoke to the doctor treating Elmer. The doctor looked at him and said, "*I don't know if he can live without a spleen, but he can't live with the one he has.*" The doctor removed Elmer's spleen without anesthesia, anesthetic or the proper medical equipment.

Both Dubois and Forest Knox, also of A Company, stated that Elmer was in terrible pain. According to Knox, Elmer lay on a stretcher all night after the surgery. He held onto the handles of the stretcher and twisted his hands in pain. The result was that the flesh was gone from the palms of his hands. During this time, Elmer never made a sound.

Pvt. Elmer H. Blonien died after surgery on October 20, 1942 at approximately 3:45 PM. He was buried in the camp cemetery at Cabanatuan.

After the war, the remains of Pvt. Elmer F. Blonien could not be identified. He is most likely buried at the American Military Cemetery outside Manila as an unknown. Since Elmer's final resting place is unknown, his name appears on the Tablets of the Missing at the American Military Cemetery outside Manila.

In addition, Elmer's parents had a memorial headstone placed in the town cemetery of Rudolph.



[Return to Company A](#)