My name is James Calabrese. My father Joseph, Anthony (Joey/Tony) Calabrese was a SGT. in H/S Company of the 294th Combat Engineers.

While he was stationed in Sherborne, Dorset, England he met Sherborne resident Daphne Hanney and her brothers. Her brothers were in the Dorset Regiment. The Dorsets landed on Gold Beach on D-Day. I have been honored by the Dorsets being made an honorary member of the Regiment.

Tony and Daphne married in Sherborne during the War. At war's end she moved to New York City as an English War Bride. Tony and Daphne would have 3 children, all raised in America. I am the eldest of the 3. I have been to Sherborne several times visiting my grandmother there. She showed me the 294th plaque located just outside of the Abbey.

I have a great interest in WW2 history, having visited Normandy several times. Of course my greatest interest is in the 294th Combat Engineers.

Any information regarding the Unit, H/S Company, anyone mentioned and, of course, my Dad, would be welcome.

Attached is the information I have.

The 294th Battle Book..... It's a 1'x2' large book following the unit from training to Berlin. It lists all the bridges built and the 294th Company that built them. It has photos of bridges built (not included here). I understand that a copy of the book was given to each soldier at discharge.

Memoirs from an Unidentified Member of 2nd Platoon, Company "A" 294th Engineer Combat Battalion.....A 47 page personal account with a mix of some general WW2 history.

Oral Histories

Archie Sanderson 294th Combat Engineers

Bob Salley 326th Airborne Engineers

Lyle Groundwater 90th Inf Div

I have included Salley and Groundwater because they , like the 294th,were on the Susan B. Anthony when she hit the mine.

A list of letters from my Dad to my grandmother....They track the unit as it goes from training to Berlin. Two of the letters may be of interest here. I include a copy of his handwritten letter talking about Russian troops. I also include a typed version of a particularly interesting visit he had with a Belgian Count.(I typed it because the handwritten original is difficult to read.)

Telephone Conversations with Richard Ludwiczak.... A friend of mine said that he had a conversation with a guy who was a combat engineer in WW2 and I might give him a call. I made that call and found out that Richard was in dad's unit. What a shock! Richard was a wealth of information and a great guy. I am forever in his debt.

A list of soldiers noted in Dad's photos and letters.... Anyone know them or their families? Don't remember but either Bott or Anderson was the builder of our house in N.J.

Dad's Record....The Pepsi Cola Company recorded soldiers voices and put them on a record which was then sent to the soldier's family. Not included here, but I have a copy of Dad's record on tape.

It's exciting to hear one's father's voice as a 20 year old in 1943, 4 years before I was born ,reassuring his mom, my grandmother, that he was doing fine,


NORMANDY
NORTHERN FRANCE
ARDENNES
CENTRAL GERMANY
294
BATTALION
JUNE 7, 1944 MAY 8, 1945

INTRODUCTION

Activation took place on 18 March 1943 at Camp Gordon, Georgia, when Major John J. Closner assumed command of the unit and carried out its activation.

In the later part of March 1943 the Reception Center at Fort Dix, New Jersey was busily engaged in processing newly inducted troops in to the ever expanding army. Throughout the hustle and bustle of drawing equipment, medical examinations, indoctrination and classification, troops were picked for the many units being activated by the War Department. Seven hundred and thirty-eight of these men boarded troop trains and proceeded to Camp Gordon, Georgia when they were met by a cadre of officers and enlisted men from the 337th Engineer General Service Regiment, thus completing the activation of the 294th Engineer Combat Battalion.

To many it was their first taste of Army life and they were pensive of what the future would bring.

By March 29 1943 the unit was ready to proceed with basic training. Assigned to the Second U. S. Army and attached to 1107th Engineer Combat Group, vigorous calisthenics, close order drill, and engineer training were undertaken on the sandy soil of Georgia.

BASIC TRAINING

A vigorous basic training schedule was carried out under the leadership of Major John J Closner who was later succeeded by Major Albert E McCollum. Physical conditioning was stressed and running of the obstacle course was scheduled daily, supplemented with forced marches and a mile run, with full field packs, each morning after reveille. A training program was conducted in the fundamentals of military engineering and

infantry tactics, placing emphasis on the individual soldier. Specialists schools were established to train those men who were required to do special jobs.

Our unit training program started on the 12th of July and continued through the 11th of August. Weaknesses and difficulties encountered in basic training were corrected. Our objective now was to work smoothly as a unit. We accomplished this through company problems involving the building of fixed and floating bridges, mine field laying and removing, field fortifications, combat courses and more training on the rifle and machine gun ranges.

Movement orders directing the unit to proceed to the Tennessee Maneuver Area brought about the unit's first extensive motor movement. Departing from Camp Gordon, Georgia on 12 August 1943 the unit travelled 395 miles to Lebanon, Tennessee arriving in the maneuver area on 14 August 1943. Maneuvers were not scheduled until September and work consisting of culvert construction, road and bridge construction was carried out prior to maneuvers. The unit participated in mock maneuvers, carried out over the Tennessee hills. Continuous rain gave all a good taste of real field conditions and hardened them for the strenuous tasks to come.

On 22 September 1943 Lt Col (then Major) Charles A Grennan assumed command during preparation for movement to the Desert Training Center in California. Boarding two troop trains the unit departed from the Tennessee Maneuver area and proceeded across Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico and Arizona to Yuma, Arizona railhead for the maneuver area. Having been relieved from Second U. S. Army the unit was assigned to First Headquarters Special Troops, Desert Training Center.

Pyramidal tents comprised billets for the men and gave some protection from the intense heat, 120 degrees in the shade, and the ever moving sand. Pilot Knob, located just across the California line and seven miles west of Yuma Arizona turned out to be the bivouac area.

Unit training was undertaken during the following weeks and emphasized more than ever the physical toughness and endurance required of the American soldier and his equipment. Conditions on the desert were reported to have been worse than those encountered on the desert battlefields of North Africa.

Night bridge construction will be remembered by all when training was carried out in spanning the Colorado River near the Imperial Dam with each company out to beat the others time.

The close proximity of Mexico encouraged many to cross the border and purchase a small souvenir or witness an actual bullfight.

By the first of December the unit was prepared to tackle any task at hand. Immediate departure for overseas brought about furloughs and leaves, being the first for many.

January 1944 found the unit aboard a troop train bound for an eastern port of embarkation. Last minute preparations were made and necessary supplies and equipment were drawn at the staging area, Camp Myles Standish, Massachusetts.

Departing from the Boston Port of Embarkation, aboard the U.S.S. Excelsior the unit proceeded in convoy across the Atlantic, destination England. Traveling in convoy gave an enormous picture of the might that the United States was sending across the waters.

Sherborne, Dorset, England was the final destination. Buildings and evacuated homes were procured through lend-lease from

the British and the unit settled down for a short rest prior to the unforgetable task that lay ahead.

Sherborne, a small city in Dorset County surrounded by the typical rolling terrain of the English countryside with its numerous hedgerows, lanes and thatched roofed farm houses offered a quiet and peaceful atmosphere during off duty hours. Indoctrination on British customs was given and the friendliness of the people was quickly accepted. Civilian clubs gave their whole-hearted efforts in making the unit's stay as comfortable as possible.

Black-out restrictions and the drone of enemy planes overheard constantly reminded one of the foe across the channel, and more than ever instilled in the minds of all the importance of the training to come.

Having been assigned to the First U.S. Army and attached to VII Corps, the unit was further attached to 1120th Engineer Combat Group and proceeded in the intensive preparations for the invasion.

Training was conducted in laying and marking minefields, demolitions, bridge construction and operation of engineer equipment. Sherborne Park was converted from a quiet, peaceful county park to a busy training area. Floating Bailey Bridge was constructed in the shadows of the Sir Walter Raleigh Castle ruins.

The most severe catastrophe of the unit was brought about on 20 March 1944 with the explosion of one hundred thirty-five anti-tank mines during a training problem and proved to be worse than any witnessed by the unit in eleven months of combat.

In April, Company A departed for the southern coastal region and participated in pre-invasion training in the vicinity of Slapton Sands as a part of a task force with the 82nd Airborne Division. Maneuvers were conducted resembling as nearly as possible the

actual problems that troops would be confronted with during the actual invasion of the French shore.

Vehicles were water-proofed and drivers were instructed in wading their vehicles through four feet of water with actual tests being conducted on the sandy shores of the channel, as it was likely that the first troops would debark from landing craft a considerable distance from shore in the actual invasion.

Equipment was checked and re-checked for maximum efficiency and practice loadings were conducted to include bare necessities as weight was held to a minimum for mobility.

Divided into two echelons, the advance section consisted of personnel from the line companies and skeleton staff sections and the rear echelon consited of remaining personnel of Headquarters units. The unit was separated into two commands for the first time.

Proceeding from Newport, Wales the advance section, designated as part of the Bristol Build Up in the VII Corps Task Force, boarded four ships, one for personnel, and the others for vehicles and vehicle operating personnel.

On the 5th of June 1944 the unit departed from the Bristol Bay in convoy and proceeded toward the Normandy shore. Troops were briefed aboard ship and oriented on the tremendous task that lay ahead. The issue of French francs was first made when each individual received the equivalent of four Dollars.

On the 6th of June while crossing the channel, news was announced that the big show had started with the landing of airborne troops and the invasion forces making the initial assault had successfully landed and were forcing their way inland. A grim determination was shown by all as it was for keeps — no more mock maneuvers.

INVASION

In the morning hours of 7th June the transport carrying personnel swung through the vast armada of Allied shipping and proceeded towards the prescribed rendezvous area for debarkation. Personnel were busily engaged in making last minute adjustments on their equipment for debarkation when the ship struck an underwater mine. Emergency stations were taken and all equipment was discarded. The sinking ship was abandoned by transferring personnel to adjoining Destroyers and landing craft. No casualties were suffered by the unit but precious equipment was lost.

Debarking from landing craft, personnel waded through four feet of water and proceeded toward the beach where they regrouped and moved to the first battalion bivouac area in France located southeast of St Mere Eglise.

NORMANDY CAMPAIGN

After much effort to replace lost equipment the unit immediately prepared itself for the assigned mission of giving the 4th Division close support in the drive north to capture Cherbourg, an important seaport on the northern tip of the Cotentin peninsula. Work consisted of mine sweeping, minefield neutralization, route marking, and clearing debris from MSR's. Lanes were cleared through numerous minefields and marked for safety.

Company A had been given the mission of moving south from the beachhead to the area north of Carentan and assisting the 82nd Airborne Division in holding the southern flank of the beachhead by laying extensive mine fields. Operations did not materialize and the battalion work with the 82nd Airborne Division consisted of constructing a foot bridge and Bailey Bridge across the Douve

River at Beuzeville la Bastille on 13 June 1944. This was the first Bailey Bridge constructed on the Normandy Peninsula by American forces and greatly aided the division in crossing the vast inundated area south of Caretan to secure high ground on the opposite side.

Acting in support of the 4th Infantry Division the unit worked north clearing rubble and debris from main supply routes, marking routes and minefields and clearing passage ways through the battered cities of Valognes and Montebourg.

After the fall of Cherbourg, the VII Corps turned south and concentrated forces along the main highway from St Lo to Periers for the drive inland. The unit temporarily took up training on the new TX Treadway Bridge in addition to conducting extensive reconnaissance and culvert construction. At this time the D-7 Bulldozer, most cherished piece of engineer equipment, received its coat of armor.

Prior to the break through from Normandy, the unit moved to Le Champs des Losque. This was a small village situated on the high ground approximately three thousand yards north of the static front line and the unit remained in this area eagerly awaiting the saturation bombing which was to precede the jumpoff. Due to enemy shelling from the flanks and front this place was more appropriately named "Torpedo Junction".

BREAKTHROUGH FROM NORMANDY

Mine sweeping crews were prepared to move down the main route from Tribehou towards Marigny. On the 25th July over 3000 aircraft took part in the saturation bombing of enemy positions in an area five miles wide and two miles deep just in front of the Corps sector. Acting in support of the 4th Infantry

Division and 3rd Armored Division minesweeping crews proceeded down the MSR and in some cases found themselves ahead of advancing infantry. Much work was required to remove wrecked enemy equipment and fill cratered roads caused by the saturation bombing.

The breakthrough enabled fast armored units to fan out over the rolling French farm country and brought an end to the gruesome days of hedgerow fighting.

The drive of 25th July carried the unit to Mortain, France where on 6 August it was placed in support of the U.S. 30th Infantry Division and participated in the Mortain counter-attack. Existing roads in the vicinity were under direct enemy observation and artillery fire. Therefore it became necessary to construct a by-pass leading into the town of Mortain to enable armor to reach isolated troops on the high ground surrounding the city and prevent the enemy from severing the American forces by breaking through to Coutances. Two companies were committed as infantry in support of armor during the attempted breakthrough by enemy forces.

SWEEP ACROSS FRANCE

The next two weeks carried the unit swiftly across France. At Ambrieres, France the unit constructed the first two-way Timber Trestle Bridge under an existing Bailey Bridge, across the La Varene River. Of particular significance in the operational procedure was the fact that all of the sub-structure, cross and diagonal flooring of the super-structure had to be constructed beneath the existing Bailey Bridge which at times allowed no more than 22 inches of workingspace and necessitated the working parties functioning in the prone position. The dual carriageway Bailey

was dismantled upon completion and thus construction in no way impeded the normal flow of traffic.

From Ambrieres the unit moved to Melun, France on 26 August where it received its most important bridge assignment up to this date.

Four Bailey Bridges were constructed across the Seine, each averaging 235 feet, two of which were capable of carrying a Class 70 load, and two a Class 40 load. All four bridges were constructed between the period 27 August to 2 September. The approximate weight of each bridge was 110 tons. The bridges were formally opened to traffic by the radio and screen star Dinah Shore and were appropriately named the Dinah Shore bridges.

From the Seine the unit raced swiftly across France into the battlefields of World War I, past places famed for the glorious fighting of the American troops in the 1917-1918 campaigns. Following further the rapid spearhead advances of the 3rd Armored Division, the unit advanced across northern France and crossed the Belgian border near Florennes, Belgium on 6 September. Pausing momentarily just inside the Belgian border, Company C constructed a 260 foot steel treadway bridge across the Meuse River at Dinant, Belgium. Cranking up engines again, the unit was placed in support of the 3rd Armored Division and moved across Belgium, crossing the Siegfried Line just south of Aachen on 16 September. The unit remained in the vicinity south of Aachen for the next two months constructing numerous bridges and culverts in addition to maintaining road nets throughout the Corps area. Supply problems held up further advances and necessitated the entire corps to take up a static front temporarily.

Practice loading of river crossing equipment in preparation for the imminent crossing of the Rhine River was conducted at Lake

Gilleppe in the vicinity of Limbourg, Belgium. Training was conducted by one company at a time as engineers were urgently needed for road maintenance.

Experiments were conducted on the Meuse River near Huy, Belgium in the employment of a boom to protect floating bridges from debris and floating mines.

RHINELAND

Although the Siegfried Line had been penetrated by VII Corps, enemy forces had managed to move up troops to occupy the adjacent sectors of the much Vaunted West Wall and bitterly defended the area surrounding the Hurtgen Forest.

October 19 brought about a complete change of assigned missions when the battalion was attached to the 9th Infantry Division and assigned a sector of defense in the Hurtgen Forest near Zweifall, Germany.

On the 23 October the unit was relieved from the 9th Division and attached to 3rd Armored Division. Road blocks were maintained along the 5000 yard front with numerous mines and booby traps installed between posts to deny enemy patrols from filtering between the posts. Only scattered patrol activity was encountered during the remainder of the month. The mission of the unit was to hold the above defensive position and forestall any enemy advances to regain the positions.

The battalion remained to hold its assigned sector until 9 November when it moved back to vicinity of Raeren, Germany and again took over the necessary engineer operations in the Corps sector.

For the next month and a half, bridge construction, road maintenance and demolition of the numerous pill-boxes sur-

rounding the Siegfried Line was undertaken in addition to storm boat training on the Meuse River.

Winter snow and ice presented extreme hazards andslowed down the drive to the Roer River. Advancing troops allowed work to be carried out in the Hurtgen Forest and the battalion moved back into the area previously occupied as infantry and spent many grueling days and nights constructing roads and bridges in the ice, mud and snow which was predominate in this area.

ARDENNES

As preparations were being carried out for the Roer River crossing, the enemy struck south into the Ardennes and threatened vital supply lines. The Roer River area surrounding Aachen, Zweifall and Monschau reverted to a defensive front as the entire corps shifted to the Ardennes sector south of Huy, Belgium. The battalion departed from Germany on 23 December and re-entered Belgium. Christmas Eve was spent manning numerous outposts immediately behind the division front to forestall the event of an enemy infiltration.

The ensuing month brought about an around the clock work shift as roads had to be kept clear of the ever falling snow and numerous minefields laid by our troops to forestall the enemy advance, had to be marked and removed.

New Years Eve found Company B constructing a Steel Treadway Floating bridge across the L'Ourthe River at Melreux, Belgium. The 180 foot bridge was constructed in five hours under blackout conditions and in extremely cold weather.

On 25 January 1945 the battalion returned to rear areas in the vicinity of Huy, Belgium with other units of the VII Corps for a much needed rest and recuperation. This was the first rest period

the battalion had had since its arrival on the continent 7th June. For the next eleven days personnel enjoyed the comparative luxury of their Belgian billets. Equipment and vehicles were serviced and repaired as the gruelling winter battle had permitted little time for it. The 4th of February found the unit returning to Germany, to the same sector it had left before the never to be forgotten "Battle of the Bulge".

GERMANY RE-ENTERED

Establishing a CP at Mausbach, Germany on the 4th of February, the unit once again took up extensive road maintenance, reconnaissance, mine sweeping and route marking as preparations for the Roer River crossing were being made.

Roads were in a deplorable condition after the winter snow melted and turned the routes into large mud puddles. Ton upon ton of gravel and debris was hauled to fill in the sinking roads and prepare them for the coming Corps offensive.

Destruction of the outlet gates on the Roer River Dams necessitated a delay in the river crossing as the swift-flowing waters filled the banks of the river and presented a formidable obstacle to our advance. An outpost was manned on the river for the purpose of taking readings of the rise and fall of the water level, as this information was vital to the establishment of bridgeheads and crossings.

Weather forecasts and water level readings designated 23 February as the day. Infantry units jumped-off in the early morning hours and were transported across the swollen river in assault boats by the engineers. Enemy artillery, air activity and the fast moving waters delayed bridging operations in the 8th Division sector where the unit was responsible for construction of

bridges to carry supporting weapons and supplies across to the troops on the opposite bank. It was not until the 25th that a completely assembled bridge was placed across the river. Numerous minefields presented further obstacles on the far shore and troops were working night and day to clear the bridgehead. Enemy aircraft became very active, and planes tried time and time again to knock out existing bridges.

Moving quickly across the bridges, other units of the battalion proceeded into Duren and immediately took up the task of clearing debris from main supply routes through the city.

Several days were spent in Duren, a city of complete destruction, clearing main supply routes of debris and bomb damage caused by the softening up exercise prior to the crossing of the Roer. The battalion's third largest Bailey Bridge was constructed across the Roer River at Duren, total length 230 feet.

As units fanned out across the Cologne plain toward the Rhine River, the unit continued to clear mines from roads and repair lateral routes in the Corps area.

When the Corps boundary was changed, on 10 March to facilitate handling the Remagen crossing, the battalion was placed in support of the veteran 1st Division and moved south from its direction toward Cologne to Weilerswist. Considerable maintenance of routes was carried out during the next few days and reconnaissance for possible bridge sites across the Rhine River was conducted from Cologne to Bad Godesberg.

On 18 March the battalion moved to Bad Godesberg and completed plans and assembly of materials for the construction of a heavy Ponton Bridge across the Rhine. During the night and morning of 18—19 March the battalion constructed the 1145 feet of bridge under cover of darkness and smoke screens. Construction

of the battalion's longest bridge was thus completed in sixteen hours and forty five minutes without a casualty being inflicted.

CENTRAL EUROPE

Acting in support of the 104th "Timberwolf" Division, the battalion boarded vehicles and once again raced forward across Germany as the enemy forces were falling back completely disorganized and cut to shreds by the advancing infantry and armored units.

The D-7 Bulldozers proved their worthiness when 6 were employed for 36 continuous working hours to clear supply routes through the battered city of Altenkirchen. Mile upon mile of road was swept and marked for mines as the trail of the Jacksnipe bird continued its advance across Germany.

A little novelty was added to the continuous grind of posting signs when numerous limerick signs were posted along the road resembling those of a well known shaving cream advertisement in the states. Several of these were:

"You found the first on the Normandy Shore
You'll find the last on Hitler's door".

"Hitler has been chased to the hills we have heard
By Collin's men and the Jacksnipe bird".

"You can travel this road
And have no fear
For it has been swept
By an Engineer".

Moves were made daily from Asbach to Hachenburg to Herbach to Gladenbach and thence to Korbach. A brief pause was taken at

Korbach pending the closing of the Ruhr Pocket. Although it was considered a pause, work continued on, the same as usual, in marking the many miles of roads covered from the Rhine River. Easter Sunday was spent in the city of Korbach out of range of artillery fire and offered many the opportunity of attending services.

Reverting back to Group reserve once again the battalion was allowed to advance more slowly and carry out the enormous task of marking the Corps MSR's. Numerous bridges and culverts were constructed in the following days. On April 8 a reinforced heavy Ponton Bridge was constructed across the Weser River under cover of darkness and smoke screen.

Company A was assigned the mission of providing security against any hostile action in the area surrounding Duderstadt and on 17 April materially aided in suppressing a band of armed Germans attempting to secure the town of Duderstadt, for which a commendation was received from the Security Area Commander and Corps Commander.

During the remainder of April the unit moved to the vicinity of Eisleben and took up a prescribed security area, as the Corps advance had reached the Mulde River and a static line had been established awaiting the imminent Russian-American link-up.

Mopping up was executed throughout the assigned area in order to apprehend German soldiers or civilians whose presence was dangerous. The unit took over the role of military government throughout the small towns and villages and controlled the movements of civilians.

V-E Day brought about a change in assignment for the unit as it was relieved from First U. S. Army and assigned to Ninth U. S. Army.

The last major bridge construction was carried out in building a two-way Class 70 bridge across the Saale River at Halle, Germany during the period 23 May — 28 May.

Major Arthur W Milberg assumed command in the latter part of May when Lt Col Grennan returned to the United States for possible release under the point system.

Designation as a Category IV unit, scheduled for demobilization, brought about many changes during the month of June. Personnel with low scores were transferred out of the unit and high point men eligible for discharge were transferred in. Changes occurred frequently in assignments and attachments as the unit was relieved from VII Corps and attached to XXI Corps, relieved from Ninth U. S. Army and assigned to Seventh U. S. Army. The end of June left the unit merely assigned to Seventh Army and awaiting orders for its next move.

BERLIN TASK FORCE

July brought about movement of various units from the area surrounding Eisleben, Germany as the zone was designated as the Russian Occupation Zone. On 1 July the unit was designated as part of "Berlin Task Force", departed from the open farm country and proceeded to the one time elaborate German Capitol city. Many were dubious as it looked like a long stay and maybe even permanent occupation. Nevertheless the unit arrived in Berlin on 2nd July and spent its first two days and nights bivouaced in a park in the Zehlendorf sector, lower corner of the American Occupation Zone. Buildings were obtained and the unit moved into rather lavish billets with many comforts that had been forfeited throughout eleven months in the field.

Considerable work was necessary to rehabilitate office buildings for use of American headquarters who were to rule the American sector.

The largest and most important task was the rehabilitation of the building which was to house the Allied Control Council, the judicial power over all occupied Germany. Offices of General Eisenhower, Field Marshal Montgomery, Marhall Zhukov, and General Koenig were to be located in the huge building, once the scene of many German Peoples Courts, and particularly noted as the scene of the trial of those responsible for the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life.

BRIDGES CONSTRUCTED BY UNIT ON CONTINENT

Beuzeville la Bastille, France — Double-Single Bailey Bridge across Douve River — 13 June 1944 — Company A.

Valognes, France — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 60' span — 21 June 1944 — Company C.

St Germain de Turnabout, France — Timber Trestle — 40' span — 23 June 1944 — Company A.

Ambrieres, France — Timber Trestle — Two-way — across La Varene River — 21 August 1944 — Company C.

Melun, France — Double-Triple Bailey Bridges — 240' long, 29 August 1944 — Company B.

Melun, France — Double-Double Bailey Bridge — 240' long, 1 September 1944 — Company B.

Melun, France — Double-Triple Bailey Bridge — 230' long, 2 September 1944 — Company A.

Melun, France — Double-Triple Bailey Bridge — 230' long, 2 September 1944 — Company A.

Dinant, Belgium — Steel Treadway, Floating — across the Meuse River — 7 September 1944 — Company C.

Verviers, Belgium — Double-Double Bailey Bridge — 9 September 1944 — Company C.

Freisnerath, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 16 September 1944 — Company B.

Vicht, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 23 September 1944 — Company A.

Mulartshut, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 1 October 1944 — Company B.

Hahn, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 8 October 1944 — Company B.

Rott, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge, 13 November 1944 — Company B.

Kornelimunster, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 14 November 1944 — Company C.

Walheim, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 17 November 1944 — Company A.

Schevenhutte, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 24 November 1944 — Company A.

Schevenhutte, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 26 November 1944 — Company A.

Hurtgen, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 29 November 1944 — Company B.

Schevenhutte, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 22 December 1944 — Company A.

Durbuy, Belgium — Infantry Support Bridge — 27 December 1944 — Company B.

Melreux, Belgium — Steel Treadway, Floating Bridge — across L'Ourthe River — 1 January 1945 — Company B.

Dochamps, Belgium — Timber Trestle Bridge — 22 January 1945 — Company C.

Lendersdorf, Germany — Infantry Assault Bridge — 25 February 1945 — Company B.

Krauthausen, Germany — Steel Treadway Floating Bridge — Roer River — 25 February 1945 — Company A.

Duren, Germany — Double-Double Bailey Bridge — 1 March 1945 — Company C.

Weilerswist, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 10 March 1945 — Company A.

Bleisheim, Germany — Triple-Single Bailey Bridge — 10 March 1945 — Company C.

Weilerswist, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 13 March 1945 — Company B.

Konigswinter, Germany — 1145 foot Heavy Ponton Bridge — Rhine River — 18 March 1945 — Battalion.

Orsheid, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 24 March 1945 — Company B.

Orsheid, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 26 March 1945 — Company B.

Lippoldsberg, Germany — Heavy Ponton Bridge — across Weser River — 9 April 1945 — Battalion.

Gieselwerder, Germany — Double-Single Bailey Bridge — 10 April 1945 — Company A.

Halle, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 29 May 1945 — Company B.

Nolhen, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 9 June 1945 — Company C.

Jecha, Germany — Timber Trestle Bridge — 20 June 1945 — Company C.

STATISTICS

Number of days in combat	336 days
Total miles traveled across Europe	1300 miles
Greatest advance in one day	122 miles
Vehicular Bridges built:	
Fixed	2729 Foot total (31 Bridges)
Floating	2661 feet total (7 Bridges)
Prisoners of War taken	890
Miles of Road swept for mines, approximately	6000 miles
Roads maintained approximately	6000 miles
Water output from Battalion Water Points	Approximately 10,971,550 Gals

Memoirs from an Unidentified Member of 2nd Platoon, Company "A" 294th Engineer Combat Battalion

Normandy
Northern France
Hürtgen Forest
Battle of the Bulge
1944-1945

This is about the 2d Platoon of Company A of the 294th Engineer Combat Battalion -- what it did in Normandy, in Northern France, in the Huertgen Forest, in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944-45.

This is an attempt, from the vantage point of 40 years, to portray the broad outlines of the campaigns in which this small unit played a part. This is a return to some of the places where these events unfolded.

The summaries of the military campaigns are derived from the VII Corps and Battalion histories and from some of the accounts of the campaigns written since the war. It should be borne in mind that in combat one's horizon is foreshortened and one's concerns are narrowed, hardly extending beyond the limits of one's own platoon and company; so at the time we knew very little of the larger tactical picture.

The details of the 2d Platoon's role are derived from personal recollections, notes or accounts written at the time and from photographs taken then.

The recent photographs of these places were taken when my wife and I made a pilgrimage from the Huertgen Forest back to Normandy in the summer of 1985.

In March 1943 the 294th Engineer Combat Battalion was activated at Camp Gordon, Georgia, with a cadre of officers and noncommissioned officers. A combat engineer battalion had three line companies and a headquarters company. Each company had

three platoons. Each platoon had three 12-man squads.

Troop trains from Fort Dix brought young draftees and enlisted reservists to fill the Battalion's companies, platoons and squads - drawn from college campuses, drawn from New York, Brooklyn, Jersey City, Newark and the surrounding suburbs.

From these veterans of one week A Company's 2d Platoon was formed. [1]

Bill Abbott, a tall, broad good-humored college football player, had the rare talent of being universally liked and totally respected. He subsequently became platoon sergeant. While the members of his platoon felt free to joke with him about an order, none would consider disobeying him. He received a battlefield commission in Germany and was replaced as platoon sergeant by Edwin Seppa, a somewhat older person by our standards, a carpenter as a civilian, burly and gruff.

Arthur Scalese was from the streets of Brooklyn where he must have acquired his quick wit and verbal agility. During basic training an overly-eager lieutenant asked him why he put his hands up so slowly when the lieutenant asked for volunteers to throw themselves on a barbed wire obstacle. Scalese replied "My hand was up, wasn't it? You want me to hang a red light on it?" Only he could have gotten away with that response. Scalese ultimately became squad leader of the 2d squad. I was his assistant for a time. Despite his sharp manner, which was never directed at his men, he was ideal for that position. When I

returned to the platoon in England after hospitalization for pneumonia, he regularly took over the tougher assignments himself, giving me the easier ones. After the invasion of Normandy when each squad was given a box of rations for each meal, Scalese divided and prepared the food so meticulously, he was given the name "Mama Scalese."

Walter Noll had been a Bucknell student and all through the war we followed his passionate correspondence with his one true love, still a student there, with the regrettable nickname "Snoopsie Poopsie." Noll became weapons sergeant, and in addition to singing the praises of Snoopsie Poopsie he spoke so enthusiastically about Bucknell that he persuaded Tony Russo to apply after the war.

Russo, who was my assistant squad leader when I took over the 1st squad during the Battle of the Bulge, had deep red hair and inherited a love of music from his father, who, having little money, heard operas at the Met by volunteering for spear carrier roles. Once in England the duty officer almost refused to give Russo a pass because he planned to visit a music class at the nearby Sherborne School instead of going out to look for a girl. Russo received the Bronze Star Medal in Germany for attempting to swim the flooded Roer River to get an anchor cable to the other side. There is a fine photograph of him receiving the medal from General Collins, commander of the VII Corps, Russo having grown a magnificent red chin beard for the

occasion.

Perry Reed is the only member of the platoon who did not survive the war. He had been a forestry student at the University of New Hampshire. He was a squad leader of the 2d squad before Scalese. Being kindhearted by nature, he had not forced his squad to dig foxholes at midnight at the end of a grueling training exercise in the Mojave Desert. As a result, he was broken to private and transferred to another platoon, where he was soon made squad leader again.

Herman Schneider from Pavonia Avenue in Jersey City, was the son of a candy store proprietor. He was called "Choppy", short for chopped cock, a name originally given to him because of his Jewish faith by his friend, George Liaskos, a sturdy, fast-talking New Yorker known as "the Greek."

Choppy was probably the most conscientious person in the platoon. Like most everyone else, he constantly complained, but he always wore a toothy grin as he did so. His most merciless ribbing occurred after he shared his K ration breakfast with the first German soldier who surrendered to his squad.

John Walbroel grew up in Newark in the shadows of the Pulaski Skyway, catching crabs from its foundations as it was being constructed. He came into the army missing one front tooth and was provided with a replacement which he moved up and down with his tongue in moments of crisis. Claiming an Irish

tenor and County Mayo ancestry, he was the singer of the squad, leading those in the back of his truck in A Wild Irish Rose, East Side West Side, She Wore a Tulip, and countless other songs of the same vintage. In addition, he occasionally sang a lengthy ballad of a fisherman who kept his crabs in the family piss pot to keep them overnight.

Phillip Corveno, the 1st squad truck driver, thought he was a singer but his rendition of an Italian song sounded more like a bull in its death throes. He appeared slightly mad, always having a crazed look. Because of his bulging eyes, he was known as "Frog Eyes."

Charlie Krauss, with whom I tented from the invasion of Normandy until I became squad leader of the 1st squad, had been at Muhlenberg College. He had a sharp wit, which he directed against all in authority, from national leaders to company officers and against all ideology and creeds. His father had fought in the German Army in World War I and Krauss' command of the German language was useful after we crossed the German frontier in 1944.

The only member of the cadre who greeted the arriving soldiers from Fort Dix and who remained with the platoon was soft-spoken, lanky Wilburn Holmes from Eva, Alabama. He was quite different from the more frenetic soldiers from the Metroplitan New York area.

There are others shown in this picture -- Dodge,

Carmault Jackson, the son of a minister, Keith Birdsall, McChesney, William Otto, Fred Bowne, Dominick Cippolina, Benjamin Wasserman, Al Brunke and others whose names escape me.

Some are missing from the picture and others joined the 2d Platoon during training and in combat -- Bill Finney from West Irving, Kentucky, Art Lund from Bemidji, Minnesota, Harry Burns from Rumford, Maine, Bill Betz from McKeesport, Pennsylvania, Forest Hilton from Martin's Ferry, Ohio, Dewey Searcy from Independence, Missouri, Arthur Gibeault from Middlebury, Vermont, Jim Hurst from Jackson, Mississippi, and others.

I have not mentioned the platoon leaders, the lieutenants who were in charge of this platoon. With two exceptions, they were excellent men but they came and they went with considerable frequency -- two probably because of their deficiencies, one because he was badly injured when he was crushed under the stone of a collapsing bridge abutment in Melun on the Seine River, the others because they were promoted to other positions.

However, most of the enlisted members of the 2d Platoon remained with it from the time they were assigned to it until the time when it was disbanded after the war. The balance of this account describes what they did together.

In the spring of 1943 they trained in the heat and the sand and on the muddy lakes and streams of Georgia. In the summer of 1943 they repaired farmers' fences and engaged in

maneuvers in the sparsely populated hill country of north central Tennessee. In the fall they trained in California's Mojave Desert, a place with jackrabbits and sidewinders, searing heat, sand storms and brilliant sunsets, silhouetting the rock mountains that rose from the desert floor, a place where a huge full moon illuminated the landscape at night and was reflected in the Colorado River which marked the desert's eastern border.

The Battalion sailed for Europe on January 19, 1944, and prepared for the invasion of Normandy in Sherborne, England, an ancient cathedral town. [2], [3], [4]

Training was conducted in fields beyond the town [5] and on the lake and in the meadows of a Lord Digby's estate. A final exercise was conducted on the sands along the southern coast, simulating an assault on the beaches of Normandy. A monument now marks the site of these exercises. [6]

Before departing for a tightly-guarded encampment in Wales, formal photographs of A Company [7] and of its officers and noncommissioned officers were taken. [8] This brings us to the first of the four campaigns.

NORMANDY

By the spring of 1944 troops and supplies had been assembled for the invasion of Northern France from England. In

the early hours of the morning of June 6 the invasion commenced. [9]

As you can observe from the map, the Normandy coast at the invasion site runs in two directions - east and west in the area to the south of the Cotentin Peninsula and north and south on the peninsula, with the major port of Cherbourg located in the middle of the northern end of the peninsula.

Two British divisions and one Canadian division landed along the east-west coastline at Sword, Juno and Gold Beaches -- just west of Dives, the port from which William the Conqueror launched his invasion of England in 1066. British paratroopers landed to the east of Sword Beach. The American 1st Division landed at Omaha Beach, which was also along the east-west coastline. The initial objective of the divisions along this stretch of coast was to drive inland, taking in the process the cities of Caen and Bayeux and linking up with each other and with the troops which landed at Utah Beach north of Carentan.

The VII Corps, of which the 294th Engineers was a part, landed its 4th Division on Utah Beach. The 82d Airborne Division landed in areas west of the village of Ste. Mere Eglise. The 101st Airborne Division landed in areas just west of the Utah beachhead.

Major portions of both airborne divisions missed their drop zones and both encountered unexpected difficulties in the form of vast flooded areas and fields studded with poles

designed to impale paratroopers and gliders. The VII Corps' mission was to seal off the Cotentin Peninsula and capture the port of Cherbourg. A good account of the paratroopers' struggle can be found in S. L. A. Marshall's Night Drop. There are a number of good accounts of the invasion, one of the better-known being Cornelius Ryan's The Longest Day.

At 2:30 in the morning of June 4th (D minus two) the men from the 294th line companies, each with personal weapons and a light pack, left Camp 94 in the Wales marshaling area, boarding a troop train which was to take them to Newport. At Newport they boarded a troop ship. The ship left port in the afternoon, passed anchored convoys and then dropped its own anchor. The battalion's waterproofed vehicles with heavier weapons, tools and equipment were loaded on three other vessels.

CORRECTION: THE SHIP WAS ORIGINALLY NAMED "SANTA CLARA" NOT SANTA ROSA. by J.A.C.

The troop ship was the converted Grace Lines cruise ship Santa Rosa. I do not have a picture of her, but do have a photograph of the sister ship of the Santa Rosa,[10] the Santa Paula, prepared for a pre-Pearl Harbor South American cruise and a view of the pilot going over its side, an exercise we were all to repeat on June 7. [11]

On June 5 the vessel left Bristol Bay in convoy. We were briefed that night about the invasion plans. A Company's mission was to land on Utah Beach on June 7, joining Task Force Howell. Under Plan 1 the Task Force was to drive across the Cotentin Peninsula. There A Company was to lay a large mine

field as a part of a defense against German attacks northward. Under Plan 2 the assignment was less ambitious, to lay a mine field parallel to the coast. As events transpired, Task Force Howell never materialized.

On June 6 in beautiful weather the convoy sailed along England's southwestern coast. Periodically news of the sea and air invasion was broadcast over the ship's loudspeakers.

Early in the morning of June 7 the transport moved through the great assemblage of vessels off the Normandy coast towards its debarkation point. After a predawn breakfast all troops descended into the ship's holds to secure their weapons and packs. The ship struck a mine, listed a bit and commenced to sink. The lights in the holds went out, but flashlights were available. Leaving weapons and packs behind, A Company filed up the companion ways from the bottom hold to the next hold and then up another companion way and onto the decks.

During the next few hours those on board waited their turn to scramble down the cargo nets thrown over the sides of the vessel and onto destroyers and landing craft which had come alongside. All troops were removed before the former Santa Rosa sank.

The 2d Platoon climbed from the cargo nets onto a British destroyer and a number of hours later transferred to a landing craft for transport to the beach. [12]

Several days were required to replace the weapons and

equipment.

A Company was assigned to support the 82d Airborne Division on the night of June 12-13. The 1st Platoon under Lt. Jim Watson built a footbridge and Bailey bridge across the Douve River at Beuzeville la Bastille, as the 82d Airborne crossed the river and attacked south. The width of the river was found to be 110 feet, not 60 feet as reported.

On June 13 the 2d Platoon relieved the 1st, constructing a timber trestle to support the bridge at its midpoint. That night and for several days thereafter the platoon's 2d squad guarded the bridge and maintained its approaches. Next A Company was reassigned to the 4th Division, which was pushing north to Cherbourg. Until the fall of that city on July 1, the 2d Platoon cleared rubble and debris from main supply routes marking roads and mine fields and clearing passageways through the battered cities of Montebourg and Valognes. When Cherbourg fell the company entered the city and continued its work there.

Returning to Normandy in the summer of 1985, it was not difficult to locate where these events took place. The sea itself has not changed except that then there were thousands of large and small vessels off the beaches. At Arromanches, the center of Gold Beach, the remains of the sunken ships and other components of the artificial harbor constructed by the British are still visible. Otherwise, the sea today is totally empty as

far as the eye can see in all directions.

It was low tide in 1985 when we arrived at Utah Beach. The coastline was no different in 1944. The beach was the same except that the stream of men, weapons and equipment [13] had been replaced by a few persons fishing from the shore or walking along the sand. [14], [15]

I walked to the water's edge and turned around to face the dunes. Here we look towards the dunes from the water's edge. [16] Note the stubs sticking from the sand. They are the remains of the steel obstacles designed to rip bottoms of invading landing craft.

I proceeded halfway up the beach from the water's edge [17], [18] and then came to the dunes themselves. [19] Just behind the dunes there are (i) a rusting German gun [20]; (ii) a battered landing craft at the entrance to a small museum [21]; (iii) a monument to the 1st Engineers Special Brigade which in the early morning hours of June 6 helped clear the mines and obstacles from the beach [22]; (iv) a sign naming a beach exit road after a 53d Engineer, killed clearing the beach [23]; (v) a monument to the 4th Infantry Division which made the assault on Utah Beach [24]; (vi) the Bar Le Debarquement [25], which unfortunately had no counterpart in 1944.

Beyond the dunes there still lies the marshy land we had to traverse on June 7 before reaching high ground. [26] Then there was a stream of newly landed troops moving forward

and German P.W.'s and wounded soldiers heading to the beach. Weapons and abandoned gear lay by the roadway. German and American bodies lay on the ground awaiting removal and burial.

Here is a roadside statue which has survived many wars [27] and a field beyond the marshy area much like the one in which we assembled in 1944 to collect weapons and equipment.[28] At that time there were gliders in the field which had landed their troops and equipment, some relatively unscathed, some totally destroyed.

On June 7 units from the beachhead linked up with elements of the 82d Airborne in Ste. Mere Eglise, which that night was the front line. Groups of paratroopers fought in isolated pockets to the west.

Some days later in 1944 we passed through Ste. Mere Eglise to reach Beuzeville-la-Bastille where the 82d Airborne launched its night attack across the Douve River. Ste. Mere Eglise was on the principal highway to Cherbourg, so during the period of route maintenance we had traversed it many times. Today the entire town is a monument to the invasion in general and in particular to the exploits of the 82d Airborne which liberated the town on June 6.

The church has been totally repaired. [29] On its roof there is maintained a parachute and dummy representing paratrooper John Steele [30] who descended and was entangled on the church spire during his June 6 drop.

Windows in the church are memorials to the 82d Airborne. [31], [32]

Here is how the area around the church looks today: (i) a street scene in front of the square [33]; (ii) the square [34]; (iii) Place du 6 Juin. [35]

The town has erected a very attractive museum a few hundred feet from the church. [36] Outside there are an antiaircraft gun and a Sherman tank. [37] Inside one building is a C-47, [38] the kind of airplane which dropped the paratroopers. Inside the other building is an undamaged glider and numerous models, documents, weapons and other mementos of the air drop.

One display is a summary of the 82d Airborne operations on the Cotentin Peninsula from 6 June to 8 July. Item 4 of the summary reads: "Beuzeville-La-Bastille Bridgehead.

508 Prcht. Inf. Regt. Forced a Crossing of the Douve River the night of 12-13 June and swept through Cretteville Baupte area. 307 A/B Engrs. operated the assault boats and assisted VII Corps Engineers in building a bridge over the causeway." The 294th Battalion history has two photographs of the completed Bailey bridge as it looked on June 13, 1944. [39], [40]

In 1985, as in 1944, we passed through Ste. Mere Eglise to reach Beuzeville-la-Bastille. Next one comes to Chef du Pont. [41], [42] Shortly afterwards one turns left [43] and

proceeds to a long causeway which leads to the Douve River.

Here we are at the head of the causeway looking across a great meadow. [44] The Douve River is in the background. The little town of Beuzeville-la-Bastille rises beyond the river.

Today cows graze in the meadow. In June of 1944 the Germans had dammed the Douve and the nearby Merderet River to place these meadows under deep water. What is now meadow was then a vast lake into which hundreds of paratroopers, thinking that they had a safe place to drop, descended and drowned under the weight of their heavy equipment.

At the end of the causeway is the present bridge at the site of the 1st Platoon's Bailey bridge. [45]

This picture is taken from the meadows which were under six or more feet of water in June 1944. [46] Two boys are seen fishing from the banks of the Douve. The width of the river today may be down to the 60 feet anticipated in 1944. [47] No doubt the flooding of the meadows caused its extension to 110 feet. [48] Looking back today from the bridge along the causeway is a peaceful scene. [49] In 1944 the causeway was strewn with debris. Parachutes hung from the trees and beneath the parachutes in the water beside the causeway were the bodies of paratroopers who had drowned, still in their harnesses and packs. At night water rats ran back and forth across the causeway, and during the first two nights occasional artillery bursts struck near the bridge site.

A picnic area has been constructed on the far bank where in 1944 we stood guard over the completed bridge. [50] There in 1985 we came upon two German bicyclists, a father who had been captured just behind Utah Beach in 1944, showing his 25-year-old son the places where he had been when he was a 17-year-old soldier on guard against the invasion of France.

Beuzeville-la-Bastille consists of one street which today does not seem much more prosperous than it did in 1944. [51], [52] At the head of the street is the church which has changed very little. [53]

A road is a road, and it is difficult to record photographically with any degree of drama time spent sweeping mines [54] and in road maintenance. This, of course, is what the 2d Platoon did most of the time after leaving Beuzeville-la-Bastille until after the fall of Cherbourg.

The two principal towns between Ste. Mere Eglise and Cherbourg are Montebourg and Valognes. This is how the main street of Valognes appeared in June of 1944. [55] Montebourg looked no different. Here are views today of the main streets of Montebourg [56], [57] and Valognes. [58]

The port of Cherbourg, a scene of destruction in 1944, now looks like this: (i) a street market near the harbor [59]; (ii) a street scene [60]; (iii) fishing vessels [61]; (iv) a scene of the harbor which was destroyed and obstructed in 1944 [62]; [63] (v) the breakwater at the harbor entrance. [64]

It is appropriate that the cemetery for the Americans who died in Normandy is located above Omaha Beach. The 1st Division landing there was costly, at times close to failure. Beyond the ~~[65]~~ dunes [65] [66] the shore rises steeply. [67], [68]

The attacking infantry were pinned down behind the dunes and casualties were extraordinarily heavy, both during the long period when there was no advance and when the rise was finally assaulted and taken.

Omaha Beach included Pte du Hoc, a heavily fortified area atop tall sea cliffs. [69], [70] [71] Here are examples of the fortifications. [72], [73], [74] Using ropes and grappling irons, 225 Rangers scaled the cliffs, took and held the fortified area. The casualties were heavy and the survivors remained pinned down in this spot until June 8. A monument was erected at cliff top. [75], [76]

The cemetery is a beautiful place today. At the eastern end is a monument [77], [78], [79]; to the west of the monument lie the graves. [80], [81] To the north beyond the marble crosses and Stars of David and on beyond the trees, there are the steep slopes, the dunes, the sand and the now empty sea. [82]

The Breakthrough and Pursuit to the German Border.

After the capture of Cherbourg and the clearing of the

Cotentin Peninsula, the Allied forces on the Normandy coast east of Carentan continued to advance inland, meeting heavy German opposition, and the troops in the Cotentin Peninsula faced south towards the defense line with which the German army sought to contain the invasion. [86]

Preparations were made to break through this line, which went east from St. Lo to Lessay, and to proceed on into France. On July 25, 1944, more than 3,000 aircraft took part in saturation bombing of German positions in an area five miles wide and two miles deep just in front of the VII Corps sector. During an aborted bombing on July 24 and during the bombing on July 25 many bombs fell short, killing and wounding many hundreds of American troops. Nevertheless, immediately after the July 25 bombing infantry attacked, meeting heavy resistance at first but succeeding in breaking through that day. The next day, July 26, armored divisions were committed and succeeded in breaking out of the hedgerow country into the open fields of France.

There followed the succession of events which carried the British, Canadian and American armies across northern France through Belgium and across the German border. [87] The Third Army under General Patton went into action. The German counterattack at Mortain on August 7, designed to divide the First and Third Armies at Avranches, was repulsed. The British, Canadian and American armies trapped major portions, but by no

means all of the retreating German army. The gap at Falaise permitted large numbers to escape.

The First Canadian and Second British Armies moved adjacent to the Channel to Antwerp, Brussels and the Netherlands border. The American First Army proceeded east to a line on the German border extending roughly from Aachen in the north to the southern border of Luxemburg in the south. The Third Army proceeded east on a line south of the First Army. Other units moved into Brittany. The Seventh Army invaded southern France.

During these operations the 294th Engineers' A Company played its modest role. [86] Prior to the breakthrough the Company moved into the area of Les Champs de Losque, a small village approximately 3,000 yards north of the static front line.

After the saturation bombing, the 2d Platoon, moving just behind the infantry, was responsible for sweeping for mines the shoulders of the road from Les Champs de Losque to Marigny. Marigny was entered and the roads cleared.

The company was assigned to support the 30th Infantry Division as it fought off the counterattack at Mortain. [87] Moving east towards the Seine in August, all units of the company constructed bridges and cleared roads. Between August 27 and September 2d the entire battalion constructed two sets of Bailey bridges across the Seine at Melun. Two bridges extended from the west bank to the island constituting the center of the

City. Two built by A Company extended from the island to the east bank.

From Melun the entire battalion crossed northern France, entering Belgium near Florennes, on September 6. The battalion was placed in support of the 3d Armored Division, and on September 16 crossed the German border just south of Aachen.

In 1985 we retraced the platoon's route from the point where the armies broke out of Normandy to the German border. These large areas of France and Belgium had long been free of the detritus of passing armies. The fields and villages had changed very little.

En route to the marshaling area for the July 1944 effort to break out of Normandy we passed through Tribehou. [88] The village of Tribehou is but a cluster of houses on a cross roads. Its road sign points to Les Champs de Losque, where we awaited the attack, and to Marigny, one of the original objectives of the attack. Its World War I memorial read then and reads now "1914 - 1918 - Tribehou. A ses enfants morts pour La France."

We found a number of fields just outside Les Champs de Losque similar to the field in which A Company bivouaced while waiting for the breakthrough attempt. [89] The 2d Platoon's 2d squad had been sent to dig out an opening through the hedgerows for trucks to enter. It was driven out by artillery fire on the first attempt but ultimately prepared the entrance. Here for

several weeks - mostly in the rain - the Company waited for the weather to clear to permit the saturation bombing which was to precede the attack on the German defense line.

In the summer of 1985 we found the crossroad in Les Champs de Losque from which the 2d Platoon commenced its mine sweeping operations on the road to Marigny. [90] Then infantry riflemen and mortar crews were moving forward on each side of the road. [91] There were heavy artillery bursts and small arms fire in the fields beyond the hedgerows. Occasionally wounded and crying, shell-shocked soldiers passed back along the paved area to the rear.

Today the road is empty except for an occasional passing car. The hedgerows bordering the roads are trimmed by large machines. [92] Then they were tall and unkempt,[93] concealing any view of the fields beyond. [94]

When we reached Marigny in 1944 it had been severely damaged by the bombing and by artillery fire. It was littered with destroyed tanks and trucks, many still burning, and many with the bodies of their occupants still inside or just outside, reflecting failed efforts to escape.

Today Marigny presents the quiet scene of a typical small French village. [95], [96]

We did not go to Melun in 1985. The Bailey bridges built in 1944 surely have been replaced by solid permanent structures and the central city no doubt looks much the same now

as it did that week in late August-early September 1944. [97], [98], [99]

Our 1985 automobile drive across Northern France between the Seine and the Belgium border was made at the same time of year as the push in 1944. The countryside appears to have changed very little. The fields stretch unobstructed into the distance. [100], [101] Periodically one comes to small villages. [102]

This is in the midst of an area which from 1914 to 1918 was ravished by an earlier war. Everywhere there are reminders of that war. The names of the places -- Soissons, Laon, Verdun, the Marne, the Aisne, the Somme -- the American cemeteries.

The monument at Chateau Thierry [103], [104] bears at its top the names of battles in which the Americans fought in World War I -- a few still remembered, most forgotten. An inscription on one wall [105] describes the last great German offensive mounted in May and July 1918, and the deep salients [106] these offensives created stretching from Reims to Chateau Thierry and Soissons.

Another inscription on the monument recites the role of the American divisions in the defense against these offensives and in the July 18 to August 6, 1918 counterattack which drove the German army back. Many of these divisions passed through the same countryside in 1945.

From the monument, looking south over the fields, one sees Chateau Thierry and the Marne. [107] The monument recites that "Of the 310,000 American soldiers who fought in these operations 67,000 were casualties." Many of the dead are buried in the cemetery located at Belleau, a few miles away. [108], [109]

At the foot of a rise leading to Belleau Wood is a cemetery chapel. [110], [111] On a wall inside there is an inscription: [112] "The names recorded on these walls are those of American soldiers who fought in this region and who sleep in unknown graves." There are 1060 of these names.

Each grave notes the name and rank of a soldier and the place from which the soldier came. [113], [114] 250 graves bear the inscription "Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God." [115]

Belleau Wood is behind the cemetery. [116] A monument and depressions in the forest floor are reminders of the fighting there. [117]

Nearby is the German cemetery where 4821 soldiers are buried in a common grave and 3300 are unknown. [118], [119]

The World War I American cemeteries appear today just as they appeared in 1944 when the American armies rolled by them on their way to the German border. Their guest books show that they are still visited. The World War II cemetery in Normandy had been teeming with visitors when we were there. There were

only a few visitors at Belleau cemetery. There were none at the World War I cemetery in Fere-en-Terdenois, perhaps because we arrived late in the afternoon. [120], [121]

THE HUERTGEN FOREST

After the 1944 summer pursuit through France and Belgium the Allied attack spent its force at the German border [1] The armies had run ahead of their supplies, and, in particular, a shortage of gasoline curtailed the ability of the armored divisions to continue their advance. The German forces thus had time to man their fortifications along the frontier, to regroup and to bring up new divisions. At the same time, in the highest secrecy, the German army started assembling troops and equipment for the offensive which was to strike through the Ardennes into Belgium three months later. One author describes the slow, bitter and costly campaigns on the German frontier in the fall of 1944 as follows:

"Here Allied problems multiplied because of narrowing corridors of advance, inhospitable terrain and poor campaigning weather. The Germans meanwhile gained strength from internal communications and from the Siegfried Line.

"Nobody got very far anywhere during the fall of 1944. British and Canadians, with the help of an airborne army, cleared Holland up to the Maas River and opened the Port of

Antwerp. The Ninth U.S. Army and part of the First reached the Roer River seventeen miles inside Germany while the Third Army drove from the Moselle River to the German border facing the Saar. The Seventh Army and the First French Army gained most of the west bank of the Rhine along the upper reaches of the river." MacDonald, pp. 196, 197.

From mid-September to mid-December of 1944 the most bitter and costly fighting took place in an area now called the Huertgen Forest, a wet, dark and cold, densely-wooded area 20 miles long and 10 miles wide. [2] Hemmingway described the three-month battle for these woods as: "Paschendaele with tree bursts."

As you can see from the map, the forest stretches from the Stolberg Corridor in the north to the Monschau Corridor in the south. Beyond the open countryside to the east of the forest lay the city of Duren and the Roer River, a natural barrier which had to be crossed before reaching the plains to the Rhine. The forest included two segments of Germany's West Wall with its pillboxes and dragon teeth. The forest itself was ideally suited to defense.

It was concluded in the fall of 1944 that the forest had to be taken to forestall counterattacks from its depths which would cut the line of advance.

Largely unappreciated at the time was the strategic importance of the Roer River dams which lay south of Schmidt.

In German hands they effectively prevented crossing of the Roer River because at any time they could have been opened and the resulting flooding of the Roer would have cut off American troops on its east bank. Conversely, in American hands the dams would have given the American Army the ability to isolate the German divisions west of the Roer River in the Huertgen Forest.

The First Army was responsible for taking the forest. Its VII Corps, of which the 294th Engineers was a part, first was responsible for the entire forest but later was assigned the northern portion next to the Stolberg Corridor. The V Corps was then assigned the southern portion north of Monschau. For three months each corps attacked time and again to secure objectives in the forest. The V Corps divisions moving on a narrow forest trail from Vossenach through Kommerscheid sought to capture the critical village of Schmidt which commanded the Roer River dams. One division after another was sent after this objective. One reached Schmidt but was driven back, and each in turn was chewed up and destroyed in the forest fighting.

A good description of this battle is contained in Charles B. McDonald's The Battle of the Huertgen Forest and in the Department of the Army's account of the struggle to capture Schmidt contained in a volume entitled Three Battles: Arnaville, Altuzzo and Schmidt.

By mid-December, when finally the forest had been cleared, more than 24,000 Americans had been killed, wounded

captured or were missing; 9,000 had succumbed to trench foot, respiratory diseases or combat fatigue. The German Army suffered similar losses. In the light of hindsight, the battle was badly fought. Instead of striking directly for the dams, possession of which would have resulted in control of the entire area west of the Roer River, including the forest, the Army and corps commanders time and again sent divisions and lesser units into action piecemeal to be cut down in futile attacks.

Those coming later who had an opportunity to review the history of the battle have concluded that "Those in the Huertgen Forest fought a misconceived and basically fruitless battle that could have and should have been avoided. This is the real tragedy of the Huertgen Forest." MacDonald at 205.

Despite the unceasing rain, sleet and snow, the wet, the mud and unremitting darkness of the forest, the 294th Engineers were fortunate when compared to the infantry who were sent forward to capture pillboxes, a stretch of forest, a forest village or a roadway or firebreak. Starting in mid-September when the German frontier was crossed just south of Aachen, A Company constructed bridges and culverts and maintained roads behind the lines.

In mid-September the 9th Division had been assigned the impossible task of breaking the German West Wall in the Monschau Corridor and proceeding northeast to the village of Huertgen to clear the entire Huertgen Forest. In terrible fighting the

division achieved some penetration of the forest but was unable to reach its major objectives. By mid-October it was decimated and on October 19th the 294th Engineers were attached to the 9th Division and assigned a defense sector in the forest near Zweifall.

On October 23 the battalion was relieved from the 9th Division and attached to the 3d Armored Division. Until November 9 the battalion held a series of outposts along a 5,000-yard front. [3] Each outpost was an isolated position at the end of a firebreak or trail. Each consisted of a perimeter defense, manned with machineguns and log-covered foxholes designed to provide protection from artillery tree bursts.

Concertina barbed wire and booby traps were placed in front of each position. A platoon was on outpost duty for four days and then had two days at an area in the forest behind the lines, during which it rested and sent out squads to patrol between outposts.

The purpose of this assignment is described in the Department of the Army volume Three Battles: "Because the permanent boundaries between V and VII Corps intersected the planned zone of operations, First Army on 25 October designated a temporary boundary to run just south of Kleinhau and north of Huertgen. This would keep the Schmidt operation entirely within the hands of V Corps. Between the northernmost positions of the 28th Division and the new corps boundary the defense line was

being held with a series of road blocks in the Huertgen Forest by the 294th Engineer Combat Battalion; south of the planned zone of operations the line was being held by the 4th Calvary Group." at page 252.

On November 9 we were relieved of outpost duty and, interspersed with showers and floating bridge training in Belgium, we resumed road maintenance in the forest as the infantry continued their grinding assaults. A few photographs taken at the time show members of the 2d Platoon's 2d Squad. [4], [5], [6] Pictured resting on their shovels [7] in the rear are Charlie Giglio, a former Port Authority police officer, myself and Art Scalese. In the middle are Dominick Cippollina and Louis Fidance, and in the front row John Walbroel, for whom the Army had provided a movable new front tooth, and Bill Finney from Kentucky.

Other photographs suggest the condition of the roads and the kind of work necessary to keep them passable. [8], [9], [10]

On December 13th American troops emerged into the open fields at Gey and Strass and, after three months, the Battle of the Huertgen Forest was essentially over. The way was open for the assault across the Roer River. However, on December 16th the German offensive known as the Battle of the Bulge commenced and it was not until February 4th, 1945 that the 294th Engineers were back in Germany to resume preparations for the Roer River

crossing.

In February A company's command post was established at Mausbach, just west of Schevenhutte, and once again the unit engaged in road maintenance, reconnaissance, mine sweeping and route marking. The Roer River assault crossing was scheduled for February 12. On February 10th the 78th Division reached the Schwammenauel dam, but German engineers had destroyed its sluices. As a result no major cascade of water rushed through; rather there was a gradual flow calculated to produce a long-lasting flood in the Roer Valley. This is what happened and the attack had to be delayed until February 23rd.

The 294th Battalion history describes the events in the sector of the 8th Division to which the battalion was assigned: "Infantry units jumped off in the early morning hours and were transported across the swollen river in assault boats by the engineers. Enemy artillery, air activity and the fast moving waters delayed bridging operations in the 8th Division sector where the unit was responsible for construction of bridges to carry supporting weapons and supplies across to the troops on the opposite bank. It was not until the 25th that a completely assembled bridge was placed across the river. Numerous minefields presented further obstacles on the far shore and troops were working night and day to clear the bridgehead. Enemy aircraft became very active, and planes tried time and time again to knock out existing bridges."

A Company was responsible for building a floating steel treadway bridge from Lendersdorf to Krauthausen. Here are photographs of the completed bridge [11], [12] MacDonald describes the bridge building operations as follows: "On February 23, when the Americans at last attacked, the Roer still was badly swollen so that engineers trying to throw tactical bridges across the river had to fight a savage struggle with the rampaging current. But they managed it, and in the process the Americans drew their one advantage from the whole affair of the Roer Dams. Having attacked before the Roer fully subsided, they took the Germans on the east bank by surprise." at page 199.

As the American armies approached the area in 1944, the entire civilian population of the forest area had been relocated east of the Rhine; so there are no people living there today who witnessed the 1944 - 45 fighting. The battle literally destroyed the forest with artillery bursts in the trees and fires. [13] The few villages in the forest were demolished. After the war the inhabitants returned to a desolate scene. It was a very poor part of Germany, and for many months the people fed themselves by searching the woods for abandoned American rations. Hundreds were killed or wounded by antipersonnel mines left by the troops of both sides.

The villages today are in the same places as they were then. All have been rebuilt. Some are much larger now. The entire forest was replanted after the war. Roads were widened

and paved and new roads added. Trails were constructed through the forest for use by forest workers and hikers.

In 1944-45 Simonskall was a cluster of four or five houses located just south of Huertgen and Vossenach in a valley bounded by the steep slopes created by the Kall River. Here is the oldest house built in part as a fort in 1643 during the 30 Years War by the original Simon, a Calvinist from Switzerland. [14], [15], [16] Today a few restaurants and inns have been built and the tiny village is a hiking and vacation spot for visitors largely from Duren and Cologne. [17], [18] For our trip through the forest we located a small inn in Simonskall [19]

I was concerned that I would be unable to locate the places in the forest where A Company had been active and had written our innkeeper to ask if he knew of an English-speaking hunter or forester who could serve as our guide. He secured the perfect person - Dirck Bauer, a forester. Dirck was born just after the war. His father had fought on the Russian front and was a prisoner of war returning when Dirck was five years old. The father became an officer in the new German army and is now retired.

Dirck went to forestry school and presently has charge of the Vossenach district of the forest. He, his wife and two young daughters live in a house in Vossenach at the entrance to the Kall trail, the narrow, muddy path over which in 1944 the

United States infantrymen struggled to reach Kommerscheidt and Schmidt.

His wife Ola was born several years after the war in Konigswinter, the town on the east bank of the Rhine where the 294th Engineers built a 1145-foot heavy pontoon bridge during the night and early morning of March 18-19, 1945. Ola's father, a German soldier, was captured there. When the American's approached in 1945 and when the bridge was built, her grandmother and other residents of the town hid in the caves in the Drachenfels, the tall rock pinnacle which rises over the Rhine at Konigswinter.

Dirck loves the forest. He knows every trail and every relic of the fighting there. He's a student of the battle, which has become the subject of Army lessons in tactics. Just before we met him he had guided through the forest a group of army officers from Texas who were studying the battle as a training exercise. He was a knowledgeable, delightful host to us during our 1985 trip.

The 294th Engineers' first work in Germany was near Kornelimunster, a town lying between the forest and the second line of the west wall.

Here are scenes of the town today: (i) the square [20]; (ii) another view of the square [21]; (iii) a view down the main highway. [22] While we were here in 1944, VII Army Corps troops had entered the Stolberg Corridor and had captured

the little village of Schevenhutte just inside the forest. Here is how Schevenhutte looked in 1944. [23], [24] Here is how it appears today: (i) the sign post [25]; (ii) the road at the entrance to the town [26]; (iii) the road as it reaches the church [27], [28]; (iv) the restored church. [29]

While near Kornelimunster the 2d Platoon's 2d squad, of which I was then squad leader, was assigned to rebuild and maintain the muddy approach to a treadway bridge over a small stream south of Stolberg. The bridge led from a field into the forest and was used by elements of the 3rd Armored Division in its push through the second line of the west wall and on through the Stolberg Corridor. We maintained the approach one day and night.

The following day we were relieved by Perry Reed's squad from another platoon. Perry, it may be recalled, had started with the 2d Platoon at Camp Gordon, Georgia. Shortly after Perry relieved us, an artillery burst, probably American artillery falling short, killed Perry and wounded seven of the men in his squad. As a result, the 2d Platoon's 2d squad returned to the bridge site.

Thereafter Company A commenced work in the forest itself and performed its outpost duties. The forest of that time has been replaced. The new forest presented a lovely sight in the summer of 1985. The symmetry of the postwar planting was readily apparent. [30] The road descending into Simonskall

wound through evergreen woods. [31, [32] A break in the woods at the top of the ascent shows Simonskall lying in the valley. [33] The road between Vossenach and Schmidt winds through the forest. [34], [35] The site of a 1944 German machinegun post looks down the Kall Valley. [36]

I asked Dirck to help me find the approximate site of the 294th Engineers' outposts in the forest. From maps in the official army histories I ascertained that the outposts were located on high ground east of Zweifall. [37] At the foot and east of the high ground ran a small stream, the Weisser Weh, which originated in Deadman's Moor to the south and ran parallel to, and a mile or so west of, the road running north through Vossenach and Huertgen. The road ultimately proceeded to Gey and Duren. The German line was approximately 1500 feet in front of the outpost halfway up the rise from the Weisser Weh.

There was a benchmark on my map of the Huertgen Forest in front of the southernmost outpost site. This benchmark corresponded to a benchmark on Dirck's detailed map of the forest. Dirck drove us along the trail beside the Weisser Weh to the site of the benchmark. The Weisser Weh now flows under a small stone bridge at this point. [38] A roadway runs parallel to the stream. [39] On foot we then followed a fire break west up the rise and through what would have been the German front line. [40]

This would have been the approximate southern boundary

of tne outpost area, and therefore upon reaching the top of the rise we headed north for approximately a quarter of a mile and proceeded east into what would have been part of the outpost area.

Here are shots of today's forest in the general area of the 294th outposts. [41], [42], [43] Here and there one finds rather large depressions in the earth where tanks or tank destroyers had been dug in. Frequent smaller depressions are the remains of foxholes or machine gun positions.

We followed another fire break back down across the former German lines and on to the Weisser Weh. [44], [45].

On November 9, 1944, the 294th was relieved from outpost duty. Twelve days later the 121st regiment of the 8th Infantry Division was brought into these positions with orders to attack across the Weisser Weh, up the forest slopes on the eastern side to the field which bordered the road from Vossenach to Huertgen and on into ~~Huertgen~~ Duren. It took a week of fierce fighting to cross the two-mile stretch and to take Huertgen on November 28.

Here are photographs of Vossenach [46] and Huertgen [47], [48] as they appeared after their capture. Here are photographs of the church in Huertgen and the road through Huertgen as they appear today. [49], [50], [51]

In addition to locating the forest areas where the 294th Engineers were active,we searched in the summer of 1985

for the site of the floating treadway bridge which A Company erected across the Roer River starting on February 23, 1945.

In February 1945 A Company was billeted in the battered village of Mausbach. [52], [53] The village has now been restored. In 1945 we had proceeded from there by truck to the bridge site at Lendersdorf.

Lendersdorf was easy to find in 1985. The wrecked buildings have been totally repaired. In February of 1945 we stayed in buildings on this street under continuing artillery fire waiting for the bridge site to be freed from small arms fire. [54] The street now presents a peaceful scene. [55]

A 1945 photograph of the completed bridge shows a distinctively shaped factory building on the far shore. [56] Trees along the far bank now conceal the buildings behind them, but by crossing the river and driving along the other bank we were able to locate the factory. With the factory located we were able to return to the west bank and find the spot from which the bridge was built in 1945. [57]

Then, because of the partial destruction of the dams, the Roer was a raging torrent. Now it is a smoothly-flowing rather wide stream. [58], [59], [60] It is bordered on each side by a park. A bicycle path runs along each edge. Canoes are paddled in the River. A new bridge replaces the bridge which lay in ruins in 1945 and beside which we carried on our work. [61], [62]

So today the scene of the battle is covered by a beautiful forest, broken here and there by well kept villages and dairy farms. There are occasional traces of the battle. The dragons teeth remain overgrown in some places. [63] There are a few pillboxes which were not destroyed. [64], [65], [66] A German cemetery looks north to the Kall trail in Vossenach. [67] The sisters from a nearby nunnery place flowers by a tiny memorial set in the rocks beside one of the trails. [68] The inscription reads: "Pause hiker and pray for the 68,000 fallen soldiers of the Huertgen Woods, 1944-45."

For many years factory workers and hikers found the bodies of soldiers killed in these woods. In 1976 three dead soldiers were found together in a roadside trench, two Americans and one German. [69] The German government notified the next of kin of the two Americans. One of the families erected a memorial at the site [70] which reads "32 years long missed, on 12 May 1976 were found here together in a grave.

Francis Dempfle USA

Richard Quick USA

An Unknown German Soldier"

On December 16, 1944 the Battle of the Bulge began when the German Army attacked along the then quiet front extending from the area of Monschau in the north to Luxembourg in the south. [74] The objective was to break through the American line, push west across the Meuse River at Givet, then turn north to capture Namur, Brussels and the Port of Antwerp, trapping the American, British and Canadian armies to the east.

Initially the German Army met with devastating success. On December 20, the key town of Bastogne in the south was completely encircled. By Christmas along the northern edge of the salient the Germans had reached a line extending from Malmedy to a point just south of Marche to Celles, just short of Dinant on the Meuse River.

Before Christmas units of the Third Army moved to contain the salient in the south and the First Army was withdrawn from the Huertgen Forest and adjacent areas to form a defensive line along the northern portion of the salient. The VII Corps moved into position east and west of Marche. The German offensive was brought to a halt by December 26, and an Allied counterattack began on January 3rd, 1945, which eliminated the Ardennes salient. Good accounts of the Battle of the Bulge are contained in John Toland's Battle, The Story of the Bulge, and John S. D. Eisenhower's The Bitter Woods.

On December 23, in biting cold weather, A Company

loaded into trucks and joined the winding convoys leaving the Huertgen Forest. It moved with the rest of the battalion into Belgium south of Huy along the northern shoulder of the German advance. Initially the company moved into an area between Hotten and Marche in the valley of the Ourthe River, where it was ordered to establish a series of outposts just behind the line. On Christmas Eve the 2d platoon's 2d squad was assigned to a crossroad. One of the roads led to a small bridge in which T. N. T. had been set so that the bridge could be blown up in the event of a German advance along the road. The charge was to be set off by means of an electrical current. The wire ran from caps set in the T. N. T. at the bridge to the charger near the house at the crossroads where we stood guard.

This photograph shows Dominick Cippolini on the bridge. [75] These shows Wallbroel and Phillips, behind the machine gun, [76] and Bill Betz, Charlie Giglio and Art Scalese standing and Choppie Schneider, Wallbroel and Charlie Krauss kneeling near the building where the charger was kept. [77] The squad remained at the bridge and crossroads on Christmas Day and for several days thereafter.

When the German drive had been halted the company again took over road work, plowing roads and maintaining them in support of the 3rd Armored Division's attack towards Roche and Houffalize. [78]

For a time we were billeted in houses in the small

village of Weris. My squad, at that time the 1st squad of the 2d platoon, was assigned to a tiny farmhouse consisting of a front room and a kitchen on the first floor adjoining a stable. The squad slept on the floor in the first room. When not out on the roads or sleeping we joined in the kitchen a mother, Marie Denis, her seven-year-old son Leon, and her elderly parents, Madame and Monsieur Hubert. Marie's husband and her brother were prisoners of war in Germany.

This happy interlude ended when the company moved to a town near Huy for rest and training and then returned to the Huertgen Forest to prepare for the Roer River crossing.

Present day commemoration of the Battle of the Bulge centers on the town of Bastogne. The town, destroyed during the 1944 - 45 seige, has been completely rebuilt. It is not a particularly attractive town. It teems with tourists drawn to its center where a bust of General McAuliffe [79] rests on a pedestal adjacent to a Sherman tank. [80]

Outside the town the Belgians have constructed a war museum and memorial. It lies just beyond ancient St. Peter's Church [81], first built between 634 and 722, and Porte de Treves or Triers Gate, the low gate of the medieval town built in the 14th century. It also lies just beyond a more recent symbol of western civilization, the Porte de Treves Shopping Center. [83]

The museum shows original German and American motion

pictures of the battle and has numerous mementoes and exhibits, including life-size portrayals of General McAuliffe, of German General Manteuffel, and of Generals Bradley, Eisenhower and Patton. [84]

The war memorial is an impressive structure [84], listing the divisions which fought in the battle and setting forth on its walls an account of the campaign. From the top there is a view stretching in all directions. Inscriptions at various points on the low guard wall describe the stages of the battle for Bastogne. The town lies beyond. [87]

At the base of the monument there is a crypt. [88] The inscription [89] reads "On July 16th, 1957, divine services were held in this crypt in honor of the gallant officers and men of the armed forces of the United States of America who fought in the Battle of the Bulge. 70,890 were killed, wounded or reported missing". This is more than twice the number of American casualties in the Battle of the Huertgen Forest.

In the summer of 1985 we went to Hotten and Marche, traveled the highway between the two towns and drove down a number of side roads, but we were unable to find the site of our Christmas Eve roadblock.

We went to the town of Houffalize, one of the objectives of the 3rd Armored Division when it counterattacked against the German salient. It was a snow-covered ruin when recaptured in 1945. [90] Today it is a cheerful spot. The main

street is bedecked with flags [91], [92] and children play on the German tank which sits in the center of town. [93]

We returned to Weris where the 1st squad had been billeted with the family Hubert. Two or three times after the War I had written to Marie Denis and had received replies. Her husband returned from the German prisoner of war camp and the couple then had twin boys. [94] Later they moved from Weris to Hamoir. They sent me a photograph of their son Leon as a small child before the War [95] and at the time of his first communion, [96] but by the summer of 1985 we had not corresponded for 30 years or more.

Although Weris turned out to be a larger town than I remembered, it is a small town [97] surrounding an ancient church. [98] After the war Marie Denis also sent me a prewar photograph of Leon standing in front of the doorway of the Weris house. [99] We drove up and down the few streets looking for the house, comparing each dwelling with the photograph. We were unsuccessful and inquired of a woman who was passing by whether she recognized the house in the photograph and knew of the Huberts. With no difficulty she was able to direct us to the right place, just walking distance away, around a bend we had not taken. There was no mistaking the house. [100] The path to the front door had been improved with slate slabs. The small barn adjacent to the house was in the process of being filled with hay. [101] A small field lay beyond.

We knocked on the door. There was no answer, so we walked to the field to see if there was anyone there. At that point a woman in a dressing gown leaned out of the second floor window over the front door. We went back to the house and explained why we were there. She said she would be right down.

When she came to the door she invited us in and explained that she had been sleeping after working the previous night in an old person's home.

The front room was much the same as it had been in 1945, as was the room beyond where the family had cooked and sat during the cold winter evenings, both still very small. However, the adjacent stable where the cow had been and which was used as the family toilet had been converted into two additional small rooms, one a modern kitchen and the other a dining room looking through sliding doors to a terrace, beyond which lay trees and a meadow.

This friendly woman, Juliette Hubert, turned out to be the widow of Marie's brother, the brother who along with Marie's husband had been in a German prisoner of war camp. We inquired about the family we had known. The grandmother who shared the house with us, Adele Hubert, died in 1953. The grandfather, Joseph Hubert, died in 1956. Sadly we were two years too late to see Marie, the strong person in that 1945 household. She had died two years before. Her husband still lived in Hamoir, but had just gone to a hospital.

As for Leon, the seven-year-old child of 1945, we were told that he was married, had a daughter and a grandson and was now the postmaster at Comblain Au Pont, one village away from the spot where we were staying during our visit to Belgium.

We photographed Madam Hubert in the doorway in which young Leon had stood when photographed before our 1945 stay. [102] Upon inquiry at the Post Office in Comblain Au Pont we were informed that Leon Denis was in fact postmaster in the village of Tilff about 15 miles on the road to Liege. Proceeding there we asked a young man behind the counter for Leon Denis, giving my name. At that point Leon himself dashed from his desk and coming to the public area greeted us with extraordinary volubility and enthusiasm. His features were quite similar to those in the photograph taken at the time of his first communion. [103]

He invited us to his apartment, which was above the Post Office, and there we exchanged family information and photographs and he provided us with beer. While he was back at the Post Office attending to its closing for the day, first his daughter, a beautiful dark-haired young woman, returned to the apartment, followed shortly afterward by his wife and grandson, William. [104], [105], [106]

We spent a lovely hour or so chatting about our families and lives in general. A good place to end this return to the Battle of the Bulge was with Leon, the seven-year-old boy

of 1945, and with his wife and daughter and grandson.

Time does not permit an account of the 2d Platoon's assignments which followed the crossing of the Roer in February 1945. The battalion proceeded across the Cologne plain to the Rhine, bridged the Rhine, passed the concentration camp at Nordhausen, moved on into central Germany and ultimately was ordered to Berlin as part of the occupation force. [108]

There we worked repairing the Allied Control Council Building from which Generals Zhukov, Koenig, Montgomery and Eisenhower ruled the divided City. [109], 110] When off-duty we sold cigarettes and watches to the Russian soldiers and visited such places as the ruined Reichstag Building, Templehof Airport, the Brandenburg Gate. [111], [112], [113], [114], [115]

There is a final photograph of the 2d Platoon taken in Berlin shortly before the battalion was disbanded in October 1945. [116] Many of those shown in the photograph appeared in the photograph taken at Camp Gordon when the battalion was activated. The rest were those who joined the platoon along the way. Choppie Schneider is standing next to his friend George the Greek Liaskos. Art Scalese stands on one side of the banner and I am on the other. Johnny Walbroel is posing with his army tooth in the proper position. Frog Eyes Corvino still has his slightly mad look. Charlie Krauss is no doubt thinking of some comment about the absurdity of the human situation. Perhaps Walter Noll contemplates a quick return to Snoopsie Poopsie.

Bill Abbott is not there since by that time he was a lieutenant in charge of a platoon in another company. Perry Reed lay buried in Belgium.

The campaigns in Normandy and Northern France, the Battle of the Huertgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge were over. The 2d Platoon was together for the last time.

GettyGuy

From: "Betsy Plumb" <betsy.plumb@ddaymuseum.org>
To: "GettyGuy" <gettyguy@sbcglobal.net>
Sent: Thursday, June 09, 2005 4:11 PM
Attach: Sanderson, Archie.doc; Groundwater, Lyle.doc; Salley, Bob.doc
Subject: Susan B. Anthony OH

Dear James,

Please find oral histories from the Peter Kalikow World War II Oral History Collection (which we curate) attached. I hope you will find them interesting! (Unfortunately we have no manifest from the SBA.)

Sanderson was 294th ECB
Groundwater was 90th ID, 359th IR
Salley was 326th Airborne Engineers

Thank you for visiting,
Betsy

Betsy Loren Plumb
Assistant Research Historian
The National D-Day Museum
945 Magazine Street
New Orleans, Louisiana 70130
Phone: 504.527.6012, Extension 311
E-mail: betsy.plumb@ddaymuseum.org

Archie Sanderson

1825 East Delwebb Blvd.
Suncity Center, FL 33573-6902

I was born in Elroy, Wisconsin, February 20, 1923. I married Lois Vanderyacht on September 19, 1953 and we had 3 daughters, Wendy (Jan. 9 '55), Holly (Aug. 7 '56), and Nancy (Aug. 20 '66) and I'm very proud of all 3 of my girls. My father, Carl Sanderson, was a WWI veteran, he was a sergeant in the infantry and fought in all of the major battles in France. I guess he never expected that his son would be over there 25 years later doing the same thing. Anyway, he returned to the U.S. and was discharged in April, 1919. But in September of the same year, he volunteered for the American Expeditionary force that went to Siberia to protect American interest over there. (Continues about father). While there he met and married my mother Katherine Mehilo.

I have a brother 1-1/2 years older than me who was a gunner on a bomber and flew many missions from Italy into Germany. When Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, I was a senior in Elroy High School, but I had already taken a keen interest in the war because I was sure I was going to be in it. In fact, I had a map of Europe on my bedroom wall and I plotted Germany's advances daily.

I graduated in May, 1942 and worked for a while doing construction work. I was inducted into the service on January 6, 1943 at Fort Sheridan, IL. and was sent to Camp Swift, Texas and to the 553rd Engineer Heavy Ponton Battalion. We had our physical training and learned how to build a heavy Pontin Bridge which could carry the heaviest tank across any river.

We went on maneuvers in Louisiana, building bridges there and went back to Camp Swift, Texas for a short while and went on to Yuma, Arizona which was a desert training area. We worked there for Civil Engineers who were experimenting with bridge loads. We lived in 6-man tents. About that time, everyone was supposed to get a 2 week furlough home prior to going overseas. But 1 week before I was to get mine, the 294th combat engineers, who were in our area, were short of man power and scavenged my outfit for men to fill their ranks. They had to have a full quota before going overseas. I and my friend were one of those chosen and I went to Co. A and he went to Co. C so we were sent overseas without a furlough and I was very disappointed at not being able to see my parents before going overseas.

We sailed out of Boston Harbor, January 19, 1944 on a small liberty ship that creaked and groaned all the way over. We were packed in like sardines. The water was rough and everyone got seasick. A lot of men threw up right where they were so it was a very smelly, unpleasant trip and we were glad when we arrived on January 30 at the Port of Glasgow, Scotland.

After disembarking we went by train to a small town called Sherborne, England which was more to the south of England. It was an old but very pretty town, narrow cobblestone streets and a fair number of pubs. The English liked to play darts with us

for beer and of course, they were all better than we were.

We immediately started training for the invasion. We had rigorous physical training, infantry training, building various types of bridges, baily bridges, infantry foot bridges, floating and fixed bridges.

We practiced mine detecting and laying mine fields. There was a big English estate that has opened fields where we went to train. When we laid out minefields we used real, live tank mines. We would dig them into the ground and cover them with sod so that no one could see them. Then we would use our mine detectors to locate them and dig them up. However, we always left the safety clips in them so they would not go off accidentally.

One day in April, Company C, after their training exercise, was loading their mines on a truck and something happened, no one ever found out, but the whole truckload of mines blew up. There was a mushroom cloud like an atomic explosion, killing a whole platoon of men, including my friend who went to Company C at the time I went to Company A. My company was called out to pick up the body pieces which were scattered in a 500 yard radius. There were intestines and pieces of clothes caught in tree branches. The truck was totally demolished. Some of the men found coins that the victims had in their pockets that were riddled with tiny shrapnel holes. Two medics would carry a blanket between them and we picked up the pieces of flesh and tossed them on to the blankets. So you can see that our training for the invasion turned out to be very realistic.

Sometime in the later half of May, we were shipped by truck to a staging area in Wales. The camp was huge and there were many other outfits there. There was an 8 ft. high fence all around it and it was topped by spirals of barbed wire. No enlisted men were allowed on pass or to leave camp. We knew that the big day was getting close. We slept in 6-man tents and we started to prepare by having our motor vehicles waterproofed so that they would operate under water. One of our jokes was to con somebody to go down and have their rifles waterproofed. There were some who fell for it and were razzed about it when they came back. We also had our hair cut short and some men, especially in the airborne, had their hair cut like a Mohawk Indian. We were also issued clothing, what we call fatigues that was impregnated with oil to protect our skin in case the Germans used gas. Our helmets were 2-pieced. The inner helmet was plastic and the outer was steel. We had chin straps that we never used but were buckled behind so that they would not dangle. The steel portion came off of the plastic helmet by lifting it off and we could use it for a wash basin.

Once when I was without my trench shovel, I used my helmet to scoop out a hole when under shell fire. And we could use them to sit on like a little stool. Our field pack consisted of

field rations, 3 meals. We had a mess kit that came in two parts. The lower part had a folding handle, the top half was indented in the center to form 2 compartments. When you went through the chow line, the indented part rested on the handle and you held it in place with your thumb. Inside the mess kit we had a knife, fork and spoon, and when closed the handle folded over the top half with a spring catch that kept if from coming apart. Sometimes there was no soapy water to wash out the kits so we would rub dirt or sand to clean the food out and cut the grease and then rinsed it out with water from our canteens. It worked pretty good. The mess kit fit in a separate top part of our pack that we could take out without disturbing the rest of our pack.

The rations in our pack were small k-rations and reminded me of a cracker jack box. The breakfast pack consisted of a small can of bacon and eggs combined that was semi-hard with some crackers. My mind is hazy but I believe instant coffee, a pack of sugar and a pack of powdered milk. A bar of semisweet chocolate and some sheets of toilet paper. The dinner was similar except the can was cheese. I'd forgotten what the supper was, it might have been beans or spam. The rest of the pack consisted of 2 blankets, extra socks, a raincoat, underwear, toilet articles and a shelter half. A shelter half is one half of a tent along with a pole and some tent pegs. When you camped you had to have a buddy who you slept with who furnished the other half. All of this was rolled up in a pack with the canvas shelter half to the outside to protect the inside contents from rain.

A raincoat was strapped to the top of the pack so it was easy to get off when it was raining. Along with our gas masks, M-1 rifle and ammo belt full of ammo clips, a full canteen, a trench knife which became a bayonet when you attached it to the end of our rifles, also to the outside of our back, our trench shovel was attached.

We were in top notch physical condition and we had full confidence that the invasion was going to succeed. When I look back on it now I guess ignorance is bliss because the invasion was made mostly by men who never saw combat and never killed anyone. Also, going up against seasoned German troops.

We boarded the ship at the Port of Cardoff in Wales. The name of the ship was the Susan B. Anthony. It was a converted luxury liner and so on the eve of June 5th my outfit, the 294th combat engineers, 7th corp, 1st Army, was on its way.

We were located at the bow of the ship below the water line. There was an infantry outfit located above us. After we were on our way, our company commander, Capt. Rice made it official and told us we were on our way to invade France. He also explained what our mission would be after landing, which was to climb on trucks, loaded with mines, rush across territory that was still

under enemy fire, to join up with the 82nd airborne. Lay our mine field and then dig in and fight as infantry to protect the flank from German counterattack.

One of the things I remember after Capt. Rice explained our mission, it felt exciting to know ahead of the rest of the world, what was about to happen. Also, I always liked history in school and here I was taking a live part in history making.

Our trip was a long way. If you look at a map you can see that Cardof is a long way to the French coast. The following morning, June 6, we got the news of the landing which raised our excitement. Our convoy kept sailing all that day. We were in the 2nd wave and were scheduled to land at H-hour minus 24. I had a top bunk on the ship and I remember killing time by cleaning and oiling my M-1 rifle, although it didn't really need it. One of the men was playing tunes on his harmonica and some mens were playing cards. It was like a scene you would see in a movie. I guess we felt sort of calm before the storm.

When we were near the coast of France, it was early morning. We got the order to put our packs on and get ready to disembark. I had my pack on and was reaching for my rifle when there was a loud noise. The ship shook all over and all of the lights went out and we were in pitch dark. The ship had struck a mine and started sinking. Lucky for us, it was at the stern of the ship, where it struck and not the bow where we were located. Everyone was shouting, we were scared, but there was no panic to run for the stairs. One of the thoughts in my mind was how ironic it would be to die before getting into combat after all of our hard training. Our captain calmed the men down and told us to take off our packs and prepare to abandon ship. I remember placing my rifle on my top bunk so that if I couldn't get out I had the option of dying by a bullet rather than letting the water close in on me in the pitch dark.

We made a fast but orderly exit and lined up on the deck of the ship. I saw a navy officer who had blood running down his forehead and I noticed fire coming out of the ship's smokestack. The ship started to list to one side and the captain of the ship, who was on the brigg, ordered us to move a few steps to the other side and it helped straighten it out.

I was surprised how much the back end of the ship had settled in the water. However, I felt relieved now that I was at topside and we could see the coast of France, although it was still a very long way off. We had our life belts on which went around our waist. It could be inflated by squeezing the front of it which punctured some compressed gas filled tubes, which inflated the belt. We did not receive any help from the rest of the convoy which proceeded on its way while we were dead in the water.

Finally, an English destroyer came along the side of the ship I was on and an American ship came on the other side. The

captain of the English destroyer ordered his men to bring up their mattresses and lay them on their deck for our protection, because since our ship was so much higher than their's he thought we would have to jump down. We climbed down on landing nets and walked all over their mattresses and made a mess of them. Because of the water spray, they got wet besides.

There were so many of us on that destroyer that we settled it right down to the deck line. After we got the last man on board, we sailed away and watched our ship sink. Just the bow stuck up because it was probably airlocked. After some confusion as to where to land us, we were taken to Utah Beach, where we were supposed to land anyway.

We left the destroyer and got on landing barges which took us to shore, but the operator of the barge was afraid to get too close to shore because he was afraid he might get hung up. When the ramp went down, we stepped in water up to our necks. None of us had any weapons or helmets except for our trench knives on our belts. Fortunately, by the time we landed the proceeding infantry and paratroopers had established a good beachhead and we were not under any heavy fire except for snipers. We assembled our men and made our way up the beach to higher ground. Then we could look back to the sea. I was amazed to see so many ships, and there were huge balloons flying over them with cables hanging down. They were to prevent German planes from flying low and strafing with machine gun fire. In fact, just then 3 German planes from high in the sky dove on the Armada of ships.

Our planes had extra markings which were stripes painted on their wings for better identification. These 3 German planes had copied the same markings on their wings but they didn't fool anybody and the Navy and plus the guns on the beach, shot two of them down and the third passed right over us, strafing as he went, but luckily no one was hit.

I remember the first dead German I saw. He was in full uniform with his helmet on and I was amazed at his size. He was huge and I said to myself, I hope they're not all this big. As we made our way inland, we passed wounded men who were brought down to the beaches for evacuation. Also, German prisoners who were guarded by M.P.'s. The Germans looked pretty scruffy but they all marched in step as they went.

I will never forget our first night in France. The night was cool and we were cold and hungry and we had no food. However, one good thing, since our ship was sunk our mission was aborted so we felt lucky about that. We sort of hid out in hedgerows but we had tanks all around us. That night German planes came over for bombing and everyone opened up on them, including the tanks next to us and all the Navy ships. The sky was lit up from all the tracer bullets, like fireworks. The noise was horrendous. After it was over we slept in the hedgerow ditches, all huddled together for warmth.

The next day we were able to pick up rifles and helmets from men who were wounded or killed. I missed not having a toothbrush but I was able to pick up a toilet kit from an airborne trooper who was killed in a glider crash. Later on, we were issued all new equipment. Also, we got men replacements that we didn't need. All I could think of is that they had our casualties figured out ahead of time,

The Germans had flooded large areas of land and some of our paratroopers landed in water. I remember a dead paratrooper laying in water near the edge. I felt like pulling him out on dry land, but I didn't because the water was cold and preserved him. If I had pulled him out he would have turned black in a short time. Years later I saw a photo of this same dead paratrooper in the Milwaukee Journal Newspaper commemorating the D-Day landing.

For us the sinking of the ship was a blessing. We still did not have any definite assignment and we roamed around taking in the sights of the war. I remember seeing a house that was half demolished by artillery fire and there was a little girl, about 6 or 7 yrs old, who was standing at a window, smiling at us and waved to us as we went by. There were crash gliders. The open fields there were small and the Germans had planted poles in the center of these fields so that the gliders would smash into them if they landed in them. Also the fields from years of farming had stone piled around the edges and had hedges and trees growing on top of them.

The Germans had mines planted in many of the fields but they had signs saying "Minen" on some of them to warn the French to stay out of them, but the Germans either forgot or didn't have time to take them down so it made our job a little easier to dig them up and disarm them.

I remember one of the mines that I took up, it had a trip wire and a pull-type firing device. The mine was shaped like a carton of cigarettes. The first thing you did in taking up a mine was dig around the mine and locate the holes where the firing device was screwed in. Then replace the pin with a short piece of wire before cutting the trip wire, then removing the mine.

The Germans also had tank mines called Teller mines, they would go off if either a tank went over them or a man stepped on one. They also had a personnel mine that we called the "bouncing betty". It was sort of a canister planted in the ground and when a soldier stepped on it there was a small charge that would blow it up in the air about 6 or 7 ft and then it would explode and shower little steel balls. Later on we encountered a mine called a shoe mine and if a soldier stepped on one it would blow off his foot.

The French had a lot of apple trees in their fields, and after we got organized our company pitched our tents in one of

these orchards. The 1st platoon was on the far end and then the 2nd platoon and the 3rd platoon which I was in. Anyway, there was some distance between us. We were feeling frisky, I guess and we started to lob some small green apples at the other platoon. One of our tricks was to stick an apple on a long stick and you could throw it quite a distance. Then they started to throw apples back at us. We then loaded our pockets with apples and attacked them at close range. We really had a fun battle going. I remember hitting the sergeant in the eye with one and I caught one myself. Of course, it didn't last long because the officers broke it up.

The French farmers had huge kegs of cider in their barns and we would go in and turn the spigot and fill our canteens. I tried not to drink the water because the water came from streams and although it was treated you couldn't be sure there wasn't a dead cow in the water upstream. The French also liked to dump their pots in the streams.

The French sort of stayed away from us the first couple of days and then when they were sure we were there to stay, they became very friendly and would stand along the roadside with their cider and give us a drink and we would give them cigarettes in return.

There are a lot of other events I could talk about. For instance, I had a grandstand seat when our low-flying bombers mass bombed the German lines prior to the breaking out at St. Lo, and I watched several of our bombers get direct hits from German artillery fire and go down without anyone bailing out. They were too low to bail out anyway.

We went on through many campaigns and in October I was wounded by shrapnel in the right knee while on patrol in Germany's Hurtgen Forest. They were using us as infantry at the time. I was sent to a hospital in England to recover. That too, was a sort of blessing because I missed out on the Battle of the Bulge. But they sent me back to the front, even though I still had a stiff knee, they were trying to get all of the men out of the hospital and back up to the front in time for the big spring offensive. Anyway, I got back in time for the big push to the Ruhr industrial area, the Rhine River and beyond.

When the war ended, we had the honor of being among the first troops to occupy Berlin.

corrections by cps-12/15/92

additional corrections 1-20-93/mga

SALLEY

My name is Bob Salley, I was born on June 28th, 1920 in Belvidere, Illinois, U.S.A. I am caucasian of German and Irish descent. I entered the U.S. Army bia the conscription method on March 23, 1942 in Chicago, Illinois. I then came to Camp Grant, Rockford, Illinois, and stayed about a week before we were taken to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana for our basic training.

We were all taken to a field house where we were assigned to our respective units. I went to the 307th Engineer Battalion of the 82nd Infantry Division. Then on August 15, 1942, the 82nd Infantry Division was split in two to form the nucleus for two air borne divisions.

The 307th Engineer Battalion and the 326th Engineer Battalion were activated the 15th of August, 1942 by General order number one, Headquarters 82nd, and Headquarters' 101st Airborne Divisions and hold the distinction of being the first airborne engineer battalions ever activated in the history of the United States army. At that time, I stayed with the 82nd Airborne Division. From Camp Claiborne, we moved to Fort Brag, North Carolina, until the division went overseas. In the interim period, I was transfered to the 101st airborne division and served out that rest of the war as Headquarters' and Supply Company's Supply Sergeant.

We left New York on September 5, 1943, on the S.S. Strathhaver bound for England, but didn't arrive there until October 19th of 1943 after having engine trouble and going by the way of St. Johns, Newfoundland and Halifax, Nova Scotia for repairs. The total trip being across the Atlantic took 44 days and we received the American Theatre Ribbon for being in the American Theatre of Operations for over 30 days.

We arrived in Liverpool, England and moved our permanent station at Basildon Manor near Reading, Berkshire, England, which was about forty miles west of London. The Manor had 90 rooms and was built in 1712.

We stayed and trained there until the Normandy invasion of June 6th, 1944. On May 17, 1944, Headquarters and Service Company, A and B Companies and a medical detachment left by rail at 0700 for the marshling area, Camp 94, Pont Leon Froith, Wales, to prepare for the invasion of Normandy.

We did some light training, and then on June 3rd, 1944, Headquarters and Service Company embarked for the S.S. Susna B. Anthony at 0900. We hauled anchor and sailed at 1500 hours for the rendezvous with the convoy. We rendezvoused at 2000 hours. Headquarters Company, A Company, and B Company all went sea borne to France and C Company parachuted into the Chourberg penisula at 0130 on June 6, 1944.

We who were to go by boat went that way because we took the

large engineer equipment, such as trucks and trailers that wouldn't fit in gliders or DC3's. Of course, uppermost i nour minds was what was combat going to be like. But, I think at that point, because we had never experienced it, and because we had such faith in our Lord and the cause of the mission, we were not afraid, but anxious.

Everything went well until we were about five miles from Coast of France. At 0800, the ship came in contact with two mines, and the order was given to abandon ship. I had been sitting on the floor two decks down water proofing a gas mask so that the canister wouldn't get wet in the event of me needing to wast ashore when the mines exploded. Up until that time, the ship was a living, breathing piece of machinery, bustling with activity. But, in the instant that the mines exploded, all the lightd went out and you could feel the ship slowoly settling. The explosion was heard at the rear part of the ship and I undrstand that two of the crew wer killed, but none of the troops were hurt. The captain assembled everyone on the main deck as far forward as possible, and two British vessels came along side. We went over the side by means of ropw ladders. I was standing by the forward mast when my friend from Keywest, Florida, told me that if it felt like the ship was heeling ovr, that I should climb as far up the mast as I could,reasoning that when the mast came down to the water, we would be as far away from the ship as possible, and avoid the suction when it went down. The escort vessel I got on was named "H.M.S. Frigate Narborough". All of our engineer and personal equipment was lost when the ship sank after about one and a half hours. And we eventually waded ashore with nothing more than our steel helmets and clothing. We finally found the Harbor Master and were put on an LCI for the trip to Utah Beach. LCI stands for Landing Craft Infantry. It was a large craft that held only men, and ws designed with a hinged front end that dropped down on the beach when the craft skittered up on the sand. We were put on shore at 1430, and made our way to bivouac area about one mile from the coast. The trip was extremely hazardous because of strafing by the German planes. After we reache the area, they secured some shovels for us to dig fox holes with, from the vast piles of equipment left when they evacuated the wounded back to England.

We stayed in that area until we got all of our personal equipment we needed, and then moved toa French Farmhouse toset up headquarters and service company headquarters.

Along the way inland, I saw a German pilot that was shot down by dive bombers, and although he parachuted to safety, he was so badly burned when we got to him that I'm afraid he died later. We saw a British Fighter Pilot who was on his way back to England bail out because his engine misfired, and he probably figured the plane wouldn't make it home. Many such incidents and the fact that we sw two and a half ton trucks piled high with dead

traveling back to the beaches finally made us realize that this was a much different ball game that anything we had experienced during our relatively short life span.

On June 13th, our battalion commander, Lt. Col. John C. Pappas wa killed while on almission to inspect a bridge to determine its serviceability. He, being the commander of an engineer battalion, was automatically the division engineer officer and this was a part of his responsibility. Ther were five men in the group, and three of them were killed. The Germans ambushed them when they got to the bridge. One of them was a young 20 year old, soldier named Dominic Calli, who used to come often to my supply room just to talk. He was listed as MIA, and in 1964, my wife and i found his name on the monument at the Normandy Cemetery. One night when I was Sergeant of the Guard, it wa necessary for me to go around and check the various guard posts every hour. Upon approaching a guard, you needed to identify yourself. But, even with that precaution, there was the risk that yo could be shot at. One man I checked one night wasn't where he should have been, but I found him up in a tree trying to see acroos the road. We had heard some noises in the adjoining field, and thought it could be some Germans. He wanted to shoot, but he couldn't see anything. I told him not to shoot, because C Company of our battalion was close by, and if they started shooting also, we would be in their line of fire. The next morning, when it was light enough to see, we discovered a herd of cows in that field, so eventhough emotions are high, and the adrenalin is flowing, a little caution could be and was, at that time, a valuable position to take. Earlier that day, some bombs ahd dropped on one of the areas nearby where there was a German prison compound. And the prisoners scattered in all directions, so we thought maybe what we heard was some of that . Toward the end fo the month of June, we moved up near the port city of Cherbourg to make roon for our return to England.

Near my tent was an opening in the hedgerow where the local people walked through togo to church. Upon reconditering the area, we found an American soldier who had been killed neat that opening and had been there for some time. He had a raincoat covering him, but I thought it might be well to see his dog tags and identify him. When I removed the raincoat, saw he was on his back, and where his face should have been there was only a large pocket of maggots. I didn't stay to rad his name, but I know now that his family might have appreciated it.

Many such incidents took place during those times, and we relive them every year at our division reunion.

We went back to England during the first part of July, and immediately received a ten day furlough, before training began foe the invasion of Holland named Market Garden. During my furlough, I went to Southern England and found many of my wife's aunts and uncles, her father being from England. We have visited them many

times since.

We have been back to Europe five times since the war, as have many others, and as we have a daughter who is a Captain in the army, we may be taking more time to visit places the division was and reflect on some of the other happenings that made that time a historical period in history.

To some, that period meant nothing, but to me, it was the most memorable time in my life in terms of lasting friendships made and in going from a shelterd life of peace to the ugly experience of total war.

I hope these few lines will be digested by some who will never have the need to experience a like situation.

I respectfully remanin R.G. Salley, 222 West Boone St., Belvidere, Illinois 61008.

END OF TAPE (MGA)
transcribed 10-15-93/CRI

Groundwater

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On D-Day, I was 2nd lieutenant, rifle platoon leader of the 2nd Platoon, Company G, 359th Infantry Regiment, 90th Infantry Division. This was a rifle platoon and a rifle company.

Now, I'm going to go back and start.

We were at camp in Wales. We'd been in England for four or five months, and eventually moved to a camp near Abergavenny, Wales.

One Saturday night, the camp was sealed. This was prior to D-Day. This meant that there were two strings of barbed wire around the camp. English soldiers walking guard around the exterior, American soldiers walking on the interior. We had no telephone or wireless, or radio connections with the outside at all. Any messages that were sent to us were brought by messengers who came in and had to remain in the camp. During this period, the field grade officers, which would be major and above, were briefed on the plans for D-Day.

Then one night after we'd gone to bed -- this was two or three weeks later -- we were awakened, and the next morning we found ourselves on a troop transport anchored out in the bay, off southern Wales.

Immediately the next day, the company grade officers, which I was one, were briefed on the D-Day plans. They had big tables with rubber relief maps showing the coastline on Utah Beach where we were to land. We were at anchor for, oh, it seems to me a week or more. Each day, I would be given maps, showing the positions and strength of the Germans, and this was corrected daily by airplane flights, so we knew just exactly what was going to be there in front of us.

My orders were quite simple: go to Ste. Mére Eglise, which is a little village about four miles in from the coast.

Eventually, the boat slipped anchor and headed down the English Channel. A few miles before we got to Utah Beach where we were to go off into LCVP's, I was in the stateroom with my men, and just making the final roll call before we were to disembark. We had on full field packs, extra bandoliers of ammunition, enough food for several days. And incidentally, we were all dressed in gas protected clothing, which consisted, among other things, of long underwear and socks. I really don't remember about the pants or shirt. But anyway, we had to put on the inside of our shoes and also on the outside of our shoes sort of a vaseline-like paste to protect against the gas, and dubbing that inside of -- well, they called it dubbing -- putting that inside of our shoes, why, I noticed that after I got into the hospital, my feet were just tan, like a piece of leather,

particularly on the bottoms, and I presume it was from that dubbing. Our vehicles were all waterproofed so they could run under four or five feet of water. I just called the roll, I had a rifle platoon under me. I had two scouts, a platoon sergeant, a platoon guide, two runners, and three squads of 12 men each. A squad had a bazooka and a browning automatic rifle, and I believe maybe the rest were rifle men, and that made 42 men, and then I had one other man under me, it was one of the cooks. We didn't take the kitchens in with us, and this cook had volunteered to go along, so I had 43 men.

He was at the end of the roster, and I had just called his name, we all were standing amongst our bunks which were about four high, steel cots, and quite narrow between them, and I just called the last name, and the lights went out, and a terrific road, and it was just like somebody had hit me on the bottom of the feet with a sledgehammer. Up through those bunks I went, full field pack and a carbine slung on my shoulder. Bang bang bang, just hitting each one on the way up, and I came down and I hit on my -- kind of an erect position -- but on my knees. And just as I hit, another mine went off, and back up through those things I went. So I came back down and got up, and it came over the loudspeaker: "Stay in your compartments. Don't anybody open any doors or do anything." I guess it turned out that we had hit what they figured was a counting mine, because we were following right behind another transport, right square behind it, and it had gone by all right, but they thought that after so many vessels went over, this mine came to the surface, and then we hit it.

The boat I was on, called the Susan B. Anthony was a former Grace liner.

So, anyway, we stayed there for quite a little while, it seemed like, in the dark. Finally I could hear sounds outside, so I went over to our compartment door -- we were right over the main deck and I opened up that door a little crack, and stuck my head out. And there, I could see what looked like a big ocean-going tug, and slung over the side of it was a piece of plywood, and it said "wrecker" on it, and on board was a man with a cardboard megaphone, and I heard him say, "What is your condition?" And then I heard the answer from our boat: "We have four feet of water in the engine room and we're on fire." Then the wrecker said, "Well, you look like you're in pretty good shape for now, we'll keep an eye on you." Off he went, and it was something like four hours afterwards that they decided to take all of us off. And of course there were just hundreds, and I suppose thousands of boats in the area, and so they just were all directed to come and tie up alongside of us. One boat would be alongside, and another boat would be alongside of that one, and out to about four boats wide on each side. The enlisted men would just jump off. Our deck, instead of being 30 up in the

air, was maybe six feet, so we could go right into these smaller boats, and it really made it kind of a mess because it was up to the individual whether he stopped on the first boat or whether he went to the second or the third or the fourth, so that kind of scrambled us.

My compartment was the last one to get off on the port side, and I ended up in an LCT, which was tied right to our rail, and he backed off a little ways, and just stopped, and they had made us our packs and everything off and we just left the boat, all the men with nothing but a bandolier of ammunition slung over their neck and down their waist, and their weapons. And so the Captain says, "We can go back and get some of those packs." They were just on the deck where we were getting off. So, back we went. Two sailors jumped aboard, and they just had maybe thrown four or five packs off when the boat actually started to go, and the captain of the LCT threw her in reverse, and those men jumped in the water. They fished them out.

Back we went, and I suppose we went off 50 or more yards, and just stopped and watched. Then I could really see for the first time the condition of the Susan B. Anthony. The whole center third of the boat was a solid mass of flames that must have been going, 100 feet in the air, maybe more. Just unbelievable. And the boat was at anchor, and as we watched, the stern kind of went down and the bow rose up, quite a little ways into the air, and then it just slid down backwards into the water, and finally the last time I saw it, just the peak of the bow was still sticking up, had a little bubble of air in it, and I suppose it stuck up six feet or so above the water.

So then it turned out that the captain of the LCT had a mission, as I did. His mission was to go to Omaha Beach and unload those tanks. And that's what he was going to do. And Omaha Beach was separated from Utah, where I was to go, by a big wide river, and I think it was only six or eight miles apart, as I remember, with that big river there. So we went to Omaha Beach, and he came up and anchored between a big boat -- it looked to me like a cruiser, he called it a monitor -- anchored between that and a destroyer, and the monitor was firing broadsides at the shore. I had field glasses and could sit and watch the battle there on Omaha Beach. It was just like watching it on TV: these little toy soldiers would get up, and it was quite an experience.

Finally about dusk -- and the LCT couldn't land, because the beach wasn't secured, so we just remained there at anchor all day, and we were kind of glad to be there, as a matter of fact, instead of out there getting shot at.

Along about dusk an LCVP came by and he said, "Is there anything I can do for you?" The captain said, "Yeah, these men want to go to Utah Beach." The guy said, "Jump in." There was I think two men running it, it might have been three, running the

little boat.

We got in and started out. It was just getting dark, and all of a sudden, right in front of us, they saw a big mine, the kind that have those arms sticking out, I guess they're lead arms with glass bottles of acid in them, round, a mine about three feet in diameter, and they threw that boat over on a fast turn and just barely missed that mine. So then the captain posted this other man up in the front to watch for them. Gosh, we saw just -- one, and then another, and after four or five, somebody finally realized that up in front of us were two boats, going along parallel, and between them, they were towing -- a cable running back to a mine cable cutter, and they were going along and cutting these mines loose, and we were coming right where the mines were going up. And by the time we saw that, why, it was just about clear dark, so we went on to Utah Beach.

As we got there, a plane was being shot at and I guess was shooting back we saw his tracer bullets -- it looked just like somebody dumping hot coals out of a bucket.

The beach was secured. We went up the road I would judge several blocks or half a mile, and there was a colonel there, who was in charge of putting us up for the night, and what he had was a field, just a plain hay field, and it had brush around the edges, and he said, "Alright, come on, I'll show you where to bed down." I was the only officer, and I forget really how many men were with me, maybe 20, it wasn't over that -- and only one or two of them were my men. So this man, in the dark, started taking us around, around and around, and after about a loop and a half, there was a sergeant with him, and the sergeant realized that the colonel couldn't make that decision. So the sergeant says, "You guys stay right there." So we pulled over there and laid down. And this colonel apparently had just lost his nerve completely in combat, and so they'd given him this little job, and he couldn't even handle that.

We heard a few shots that night. Every once in awhile you'd hear some rifle shots. Kind of kept us a little bit uneasy.

The next day, we were not put into action, because we -- I guess, didn't have anything. We didn't have our gas masks or mess gear or blankets -- we only had, shells in a gun. During that time, somehow one of my men found a parachute, and so I cut off a piece of silk for a little blanket. I found I was unable to keep more than one layer over me at any time because you just move and it'd slip down.

For, our first movement, they moved us up to the front, and they told us that E-Company, which would -- or I think it was D-Company that was a weapons company -- was pinned down in an apple orchard, and we were to relieve them. You know, not relieve them, but to drive the Germans off because they were pinned down by machine gun fire and the Germans were lobbing mortars in on them. So we went up so far, and the captain said, "Well, now you

wait right here until further orders." We were along a kind of hedgerow there on our left, and on our right was an open hay field, it looked like, maybe 10 acres or so. And it was warm and sunny, and so we all laid down to be as low as possible because mortar shells were coming into this little field. I had one hit I don't suppose, 30 feet from me.

So, we lay there, and nothing happened. The next thing I knew, somebody was shaking my shoulder, and he says, "Lieutenant, lieutenant, wake up!" My first taste of fire, and I'd just gone sound asleep.

For the next few weeks, the 90th Infantry had a general who, for some reason, he'd work up attack orders, and get them all worked up by his staff and put them in his pocket, and he couldn't some way bring himself to issue the orders, so that we'd received an order to attack at 8:00, and we might not get the order until five minutes after eight, and so there was no prior reconnaissance or anything. We'd just jump right in. I always went in with two scouts out in front, and the Germans didn't seem to shoot at them. Next would be a BAR man, which I'd rotate amongst the three squads, and then two steps back and two steps off to the side of the BAR man was me, and we'd go into attack that way all the time, and it seems like we just about went until somebody had enough fire that we had to quit. We just weren't really very effective. We hadn't learned much how to fight, but that was the first days.

The Germans had very good artillery observation, and they had those 88's, which was an artillery piece that was real flat shooting, and it would just go zip-bang, like that, while a mortar shell, you'd be standing up and you'd hear a mortar coming, and have plenty of time to lay down before it hit, and you could be just a few feet away from one of them, if you're down flat, it wouldn't hurt you any. But the first time, we were under fire from a machine gun that was shooting kind of through the hedgerow. We were behind the hedgerow, and he was just clipping over a group of trees. It wasn't really a hedgerow, it was pretty low. But he was shooting there, and my men were all just down flat on the ground, counting the grass. The machine gun would traverse back and forth, it was going to be safe for a little while until he came back, so I'd stand up and try to get the men to sit up and start shooting their weapons. I did that two or three times, walked back and forth, and all of a sudden, one of those darn 88's shot at me, and he hit in the tree right above my head, and the concussion just drove me right down onto my knees, just like a sledgehammer. And I had two more times where they actually I'm sure shot at me with those 88's.

We had some interesting things. Of course -- well, one day, we had a jeep driver, with a .50 caliber on his jeep, and a little German observation plane came over, so he thought he'd be a hero and shoot it down. So that night, the German planes came

and just pounded our little company something awful, for what just seemed like hours. They'd go by strafing and bombing, and I suppose they thought we were maybe an artillery outfit or something, because we'd shot at them. During those days, the American Air Force flew the cover in the daytime, and we'd have nothing but American planes over us, and at night the British flew air cover, and we'd have nothing but German planes over us, and they'd drop flares, and nobody seemed to bother them at all at night.

Finally on June 14, we pulled into a little field. This was hedgerow country, and there were pastures, and in between these little squares of pasture, there'd be a raised area of dirt with brush growing on it, and we'd pulled in there and stopped -- I guess it must have been the whole company -- and Lieutenant Bristo, who had I think had the 3rd Platoon, and I had walked out in the center of the field, and sat down out in the grass, and our men were laid along the hedgerow, just waiting. You learn real quick in the Army that every time you get a chance to lay down, you just go to sleep. That's something I think the infantry men seem to learn. But anyway, Bristo and I were sitting out in the middle, talking, and all of a sudden an 88 shell came in. I don't know exactly what happened to Bristo, but I was told afterwards by some of my men, that I was blown about six feet into the air. When I came down, I was lying on my face, and I looked around, and there was an arm laying there right in front of my head. I thought Bristo's arm had been shot off.

So they were still pouring those artillery shells into that field, so I thought, well, I'd better get back to the hedgerow, I began to push myself backwards towards the hedgerow on my face, just on my stomach, and gave one push, and that darn hand came with me. I thought, "My God, it's my arm, it must just be hanging by a shred." So that was such a shock to me that I went blind right then and there and never saw another thing the rest of the day, I guess, just as though I couldn't see. I had been shot, among other things, through the windpipe, and I could hold my hand out in front of my face and feel blood squirt out of it there. I could hear Bristo. The only thing he ever said, every once in a while he'd say, "Groundwater," and I couldn't answer him because my throat had been shot, and I couldn't see him.

After I lay there for awhile, I heard soldiers firing rifles, and they were bolt action rifles. None of our men had bolt action rifles, so I knew it must be the Germans. So I sat up, and I had a hand grenade with a handle stuck through my belt, and I took that hand grenade and started to pull the pin, and then I though, "Holy smokes, I might throw this right on top of one of my own men." I could tell where the soldier was, all right, from the sound, but it might be one of our men there. So I dropped the hand grenade and laid back down. And that was the only thing I remembered until I think it was four hours later

they brought stretchers in. In the meantime, Bristo had died. He was shot in the face, I guess.

They took me out. They came in from the side. The Germans broke right through our lines at that particular point when stretcher bearers came in from the side and took a bunch of us out. I never knew how many.

I could tell it was a gravel road. I could hear people walking when they laid the stretchers down. I heard them come down the line. Somebody would say, "Give this man a blood transfusion," and "Give that man one," and when they came to me, the voice said, "He's too far gone." I guess I'd been laying there without moving for four hours, and I knew I couldn't talk, and I had my hands folded, and my fingers interlocked on my chest, and when I heard that, and I began to wiggle my fingers, and one of them saw that, and they gave me a blood transfusion.

The next thing that happened, there came this voice that I recognized, it was my good friend, Chaplain Kerns, a Catholic chaplain. I was not Catholic, but he and I were real good friends. He said, "Hello, Groundwater." And of course, I just laid there. And I heard a little noise and I thought he left, and then after a period of time, I could hear gravel again, and he said, "I've just said a little prayer over you, Groundwater." Well, I didn't think too much about it at the time. He left. Afterwards someone told me, he probably gave me the final rites of the church.

Anyway, a week after that, I had finally reached Wales -- we went right back to Abergavenny, Wales, where there was a station hospital. I was for a couple of weeks was just kind of hovering between life and death, and shot in the lungs, and once, the first time, I started to die, and it was just as real an experience to me as if I had lit a cigarette. You know, if you light a cigarette, you know you've done it. I knew I was dying. And just before I finally went over the edge, I started to loosen my bowels, which I guess is one of the last things you do, and suddenly the recollection of that prayer came back to me, and it was just like turning on a light in a dark room, and I returned back to life. That happened about three times all together. Twice more. And so I feel I owe my life to that man who himself was killed a month or two later.

I was five months in the hospital. That kind of finishes up my escapades, as far as I can remember them at this time.

Some of the things that I remembered, one of them was just after a few days there, a couple three days, there was a couple of us that sat down to eat our C-rations together, C-rations are two little cans. One was meat or beans or something, and the other was crackers and toilet paper and coffee powder and a little piece of candy. I'd been eating away, and suddenly, I looked over, and there I suppose fifteen feet in front of me, there was a dead German laying there, and he'd been hit by some

kind of an artillery shell, so one arm was off, and there was this big bloody shoulder looking towards us, and we had grown so used to death, nobody really paid any attention to it, that he was laying there. We learned to tell just by the smell whether it was a dead German or a dead American. Probably the worst odor was that of the dead horses. That was a eye opener, how many horses the Germans used. They had big slit trenches for horses to go down into.

Let's see, what else might be interesting . . . that's really about all I can think of at this time.

One of the things that impressed me about as much as anything the only thing I can call it was love -- that we had for each other. We'd all been indoctrinated where we all thought that infantry men were just head and shoulders above any common person such as a truck driver and a million times better than a civilian. But these men, we actually had times when men saved my life, and other times when I saved theirs. And golly, you just -- well, as I say, it was just like a stronger love than what you feel for a woman.

On about the second day I was there, I'd started to cross a pretty good sized field, and I got right out in the middle of it and somebody cut loose at me with a machine gun, and I had my men behind me. There wasn't any cover to -- it was just bare, except there were little ruts of where a wagon or something had gone across, and so I sailed down into that rut, which was maybe two or three inches deep. We had been issued -- in the morning, we'd always get issued those C-rations, and I'd put them just at the side, along each of my side under my shirt, so I had two on my left side and two on the right side. When I dove into that ditch, those two cans, or four cans, slid around to the front to where I was laying on them. Holy smokes, I thought, that was going to be the end of me. I was up on a pinnacle, it seemed like, because of those darn cans. I could just pretty near put my hand out and touch where those machine gun bullets were striking, but he some way couldn't depress down low enough to hit me. He didn't get any of us. Eventually, after a half an hour or so, we'd get up and take off back, and finally we got back out of there.

But after that, I didn't carry any of those cans with me. I'd get in the morning, I'd put some biscuits and candy in my pocket and the toilet paper and not eat the rest of it at all.

Oh yes, I'm just kind of jerky here thinking of different things, but in training, we were always taught to never carry a cartridge in the chamber of the weapon, and also have the safety on, and all that. But when we were there in Normandy, everybody had a bullet in the chamber of their rifle, and we normally had the safety off, unless we were just sitting around camp not doing anything. We had that thing ready to just pull the trigger and she'd shoot. I did have one of my sergeants shoot himself in the

wrist accidentally, but that was the only accident we had with them.

Another thing, the BAR's came equipped with bipeds almost near the barrel, and that's about the first thing that the men wanted to do, and I let them, was to take those bipeds off and throw them away. When we pulled back a little ways, there'd be a pile of weapons. If you didn't like the rifle you had, you threw it down and took a new one. Cigarettes were there too. I don't know whether they gave us a pack or two packs, or whatever it was. We'd all been given on the boat, we'd been given invasion money which was French bills, but a different kind that's never been used before, and we were all given the same amount of bills so we knew how much we had. When I finally was in the hospital able to sit up and take notice of what was going on, I still had my wallet, and in it was that invasion money, and some of it was covered with blood, and I had quite a bit more than I started out with. I never really solved the mystery to that.

After I was shot, I was taken to a field hospital, tent, where they put a tag on me that said, "For immediate air evacuation to England." I laid on a cot, and I stayed there about three days. That darn tent leaked, and it was raining.

Eventually, they took me on a boat, and I guess they were going to do an operation on my throat where my windpipe was ripped open, but by the time I got over there, they thought it was too late and they never did do that.

But, I got onto this boat, and I had all my clothes cut off of me when I went into field hospital, so I was just naked as a jaybird. I got on the boat, and I had a stretcher on deck I was laying in. I had to spit all the time, spit blood every few minutes, so I was given another one of those little plastic paper cups, and it seemed like just in a little bit, I'd filled that cup up and I looked around and didn't see anybody, and didn't know, how to call somebody to help me. Finally, I thought, well, hell with it, I'm not going to swallow this blood and get any sicker than what I am, so I spit a big gob out on the deck, and boy, about 30 seconds, here came this big bosun's mate, or whatever he was, big sailor, so I expressed my sorrow that I had to do that, but I just had to spit. So he got me something to spit in, and he said, "My gosh, don't you have anything on?" I said, "No." So he went and got me a pair of long underwear. That was real nice.

One morning, we were called to go into attack. That was one of those times when we weren't given any time at all. We should have attacked before we got the order. And along with the order for me to attack, they said, "Here's a replacement for one of your men that got shot." So I had my sergeants there with me, and I said, "OK, Sergeant Smith, you take this man." So he did. I never thought another thing about it. I think that was about the day before I got shot. After I got into the hospital, I'd

been there for a week or so, one day here came somebody in the hospital pajamas, and he walked in -- we were in an officer's ward -- he walked down one side and up the other, and he came to me, stopped, and this look of joy, and he said, "You're my lieutenant!" I said, "If you say so." It turned out he was that replacement, and he had been just brought up, he was just fresh over from the States. He'd been brought right in and the sergeant had put him somewhere where he'd got shot right off the bat. He never found out what the name of the organization was that he was in. So that's why it was necessary for him to find me, so he could fill out his records for what company he was in when he got shot!

One thing that I did that I've never told anybody about that was in the Army, at least when I was in the Army I was real quiet about because I thought I'd probably get court martialled if I did, but right after D-Day, we were disengaged for a little while, and we came onto one of those parachute bags that they dropped with all kinds of stuff for the paratroopers, so against the advice of my sergeant who was with me, I thought I'd look through that -- he thought it was going to be booby trapped, but it wasn't -- and look through it and see what was of use, because we didn't have gas masks, and I'd seen one case where stretcher bearers wearing gas masks were carrying these men into a field hospital, and we thought, gee whiz, maybe the Germans had accidentally put a gas shell in one of their artillery pieces or something, because I'm sure there was gas there. So we were looking through to see what we could find, and the only thing I saw that looked good was a very pistol, and I took it and a couple of rounds of green flares. At that time, a green blanket spread out or a green flare or anything green like that meant stop. Like if you see a plane coming, you spread out a green blanket: don't drop bombs on me, I'm a friend. I didn't think I was wrong about the men I had two: I had two runners. One runner stayed with me so if I wanted to send a message back to company headquarters, and my other runner stayed at company headquarter in case the captain wanted to send me a message. So I gave my pistol to the runner that stayed with me to carry. And one day, we hadn't been in any action. We'd gone through an area that hadn't been able to be cleared before, but apparently enough people tried at it, so when we got there, the Germans had backed off, we just walked through to where we were supposed to stop. We were kind of left flank in the Army, I think, at that time. So a runner came up from the company commander, and he said, "Well, just stay here on this line until 3:00, and then we're going to go back and we'll be in a defense position around regimental headquarters. We'll be resupplied with ammunition." I thought, well, this is a pretty good chance to have some fun, then. We were along this hedgerow, and then out, oh, probably 150 yards in front of us was a stone house with a gable with a

peaked roof, and up in the peak was a window, and we'd been getting accurate artillery fire in on us, so we thought maybe that's where the observers were, up in that house. I lined all my men up, gave them detailed instructions of what I wanted. They were to watch me and I'd point at them, and as soon as I'd point at them, they were to shoot. So, we all just really started in on that house. A bazooka put a shell into it, a BAR -- he could fire right in that window. Some of the riflemen would rake the sides of the roof. So we extended about half our ammunition, doing it, having a good time. We did see somebody run away from the building, so we figured well, maybe we had chased somebody out, or maybe killed one of them. Shortly after that, why here came a barrage of artillery fire, about -- I don't know whether it was four or six artillery pieces firing -- just in a line, right across in front of us, but sideways to us. We saw the shells burst, and a little bit later, why another line, they moved closer to us. Then, about the third time, and closer yet, I guess at that time, I sent the runner into company headquarters and said, "Who's observing that artillery?" The answer came back, "We don't know who's observing it." It was just working right back towards my men and I. And I suppose we'd sent them off with that firing.

(end of side one/beginning of side two)

I told my runner to take the very pistol out and get ready to shoot when I tell you. And finally, one fusillade came along, just a little ways away from us, about far enough that I thought once more they'd be right on top of us, and the runner's standing there holding that gun up in the air, because he was scared too. I waited and waited, and just kind of timing how far apart each shots were. And finally just before they went, I said, "You'd better shoot," and I said, "Shoot." And he shot, and that little thing went way up, and there was I think two green stars that just hung up in the sky, and when those went off, the firing stopped. There wasn't a shot fired from the German side. There wasn't a shot fired from the American side for probably ten or fifteen minutes, and I was really worried. I thought, "My God, I'm going to get court martialled for this; I've stopped the whole war." So, finally, I guess the war started back in again, and I never told anybody that I was the one that fired that. In fact, nobody ever asked me. And I always thought if they ever found out about that, I'd sure be court martialled. In the first place, I wasn't supposed to have that very pistol, and in the second place, I don't think I was supposed to stop the war. But I did find out afterwards, or I guess that evening, that last burst of shells that they fired had -- well, I guess I knew at the time -- it hit one of my men in the butt. So we were all saying, "Well, you lucky son of a gun, that's a million dollar wound. You get to get out of this action." They took him back to the rear, and it was kind of a joke getting shot that way, but

he died that night, and then it wasn't so funny.

My father was a lawyer, and served as government appeal agent for the Grace Harbor County draft board, back in the early days of March 1941. But him being appeal agent didn't help me a darn bit. I was the first person from Elma, Washington, to be drafted into the Army, the 18th of March, 1941. After six weeks, I was promoted to corporal, but the rules were I still had to draw my recruit's pay until I had four months in. That pay was $21 a month, and believe me, after they've taken out your insurance and your laundry and your government savings bond, and if you smoked cigarettes, $21 was an awful little bit to get along on. I've seen lots of times when men would walk away from the pay table with their $21 in their hand, and just flip a coin, so one would get $42 and the other wouldn't have anything for a month, on the basis that $21 wasn't hardly anything anyway.

I was enlisted for about two years or so until I went to Ft. Benning. Eventually discharged as captain of infantry after almost five years. I got out as quick as I could. It was a wonderful experience. I can honestly say as I look back on it, I wouldn't have missed it for anything in the world. War is the greatest show that mortals ever put on. They don't spare any money, or anything else, to have this great spectacle, and if you are able to observe it and come away, well, you're a lucky person.

This is Lyle Groundwater, 791 W. Desert Ridge Dr., Green Valley, Arizona 85614.

I've just been listening to this tape, and there's one sort of correction I'd like to make and a few things to add. One of them was that when we were privates, they took out $6.60 a month for government insurance, and then you had your laundry, so that you had somewhere over $10 taken right off the top of that $21 that you never got, so when those soldiers walked away from the pay table, they'd usually have less than $10 to run them for the month, and I know myself, I survived on that $21 for the four months. My father kept asking should he send me money, and I'd say no, and then after four months and I started getting corporal's pay, it was $54 a month, and I said, "Yes Dad, send me some money, I can't get by on $54." But I just thought I'd tough it out on the $21.

Then I wanted to say that when I was shot, which was on June 14, eight days after D-Day, every officer of the six in my company had been wounded or killed by that time. Some of them were pretty slight. One day my company commander Captain Talbott was walking up to see me across one of those open fields, and a shot rang out, I knew he was coming, and I was standing at my place just waiting for him, and a sniper's shot rang out. We had lots of snipers in trees all during those early days, and they'd shoot once in awhile and hardly ever hit anything. We'd never pay much attention to them. Occasionally we'd have a paratrooper

come through, and several times we've had them say, "Are there any snipers around? I'd like to go after them." But to me it seemed like it was suicide to walk up to a tree where one of those guys was concealed in the brush because you know he's going to get the first shot.

But anyway, the captain was coming across the field, and the shot rang out, and I saw his pants leg just jerk, and he immediately stopped and stood there for a minute, and then he came on, and he was limping a little bit. I said, "My God, did you get shot?" He said, "It's nothing." He had actually had a bullet wound in the calf of his leg, and he was such a tough little hombre that he wouldn't let the aid men look at him until we were disengaged that evening. Then I heard afterwards that he was wounded a second time, after I left the outfit. He had a scalp wound and had blood all over his face, and again, he wouldn't let the aid men come near him until evening, and I guess finally the third time he was in the hospital. He ended up major general in the Army. He stayed in.

Let's see, I've got . . . oh, I know. I wanted to say that I suppose on the average, there'd be twice a day that we'd go into an attack formation, and each time, I would rotate the three -- I had three BAR men and then three of them that were ammunition assistant BAR men, or ammunition carriers, or really rifle men, so that made six altogether. And those eight days I was there, I had five of those six men that were shot, and each one of them was within maybe six or eight feet from me at the time they got shot, and it was just a situation that we all knew we were going to get shot, and the question was, just when, and how badly. We all dreaded the thoughts of losing an arm or a leg or being blinded or something like that. But my feelings I'd know somebody would be shooting in just a few minutes. I never really think I felt fear, but to me, I felt a reluctance to do this, to walk out into the open like that, and to me it seemed -- the nearest I could tell of an example would be like if there was a lake of just liquid manure about three feet deep, and you were told to walk out into that. Well, you'd just hate like hell to do it. It wasn't that you'd be afraid to, but you just hated to do it, and that's what I felt about going out into that situation and getting shot at. I just hated like the dickens to do it.

When I rejoined my outfit after almost five months in the hospital, it was just a day or two before the Battle of the Bulge, and so I joined them, and the captain said, "Well, you can have all of the returning people from the hospital to build out your platoon." I didn't have anybody to start out with.

So the next morning -- well, and I should say that when I got back, there were only two men left out of my 43. One was that cook was still there, and the other was my platoon guide, who was the man that normally is the end of the procession when

the platoons lined up. Anyway, the next morning I got up early and it was still dark, and I walked down to the cook tent, and there was a gas light inside so you could kind of see shadows on the wall, and I heard this voice talking, and it was that cook, and he was telling somebody, "Well, you want to stay away from that new lieutenant. He's not afraid of bullets." And so I didn't go in then. I didn't want to embarrass him. But I thought that was about the highest compliment that anybody ever paid to me.

So I think maybe this is the end of the saga.

end of tape:tvh Corrections EM 3/8/93

LIST OF SOME OF THE LETTERS SENT BY MY FATHER TO MY GRANDMOTHER IN NEW YORK CITY

Mar 12, 1943 ... Arrived Fort Dix, N.J.
Mar 28, 1943 ... Arrived Camp Gordon, Ga. I'm part of the 294th Combat Engineers.
Apr 20, 1943 ... Telling his mom, my grandmother that she's getting the Pepsi record. (The Pepsi Company was recording soldiers and sending the record to the soldiers family. I have my dad's recording. How strange it is to hear your father's voice, as a 20 year old, telling his mom that everything is alright.)
May, 3, 1943 ... Got 2 month's pay. A total of $51.
May 10, 1943 ... Promoted to Private First Class, got a $4 per month raise.
Jun 25,1943 ... Just got back from bivouac
Jul 14,1943 .... Made Corporal
Oct 11, 1943 ... Letter from Camp Forrest, Tenn
Nov 7,1943 ... Letter from Camp Croft, S. C.
Dec 8,1943 ... Desert Training Center

Jan 9,1944 ... We're in New England, shipping out.
Aug 16, 1944 ... Told his mom, (my grandmother) about Daphne, from Sherborne (my mom). "Mom, sorry about falling in love with an English girl"
Sep 21, 1944 ... The Belgian count letter ..... COPY ATTACHED
Dec 12, 1944 ... In Belgium

Jan 19,1945 ... Mom, made application to marry Daphne
Feb 22,1945 ... From Sherborne, Dorset, England ... Wish you were here, getting married to Daphne tomorrow
Jun 21, 1945 ... In a few days moving to the American Army of Occupation Zone so the Russians can come here and take over.
Jul 5, 1945... Letter about the Russians .... COPY ATTACHED
May 2, 1945 .... Hitler is dead, Germans in Italy surrender, all Berlin is captured.
Dec 10, 1945 ... Arrived Tidworth Separation Center, England. Rumor, we sail for the US Dec 13, 1945.

Berlin, Germany
July 5, 1945

Dear Mom,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am in the very best of health the same I hope to hear from you. Well a great deal has happened since I last wrote to you. I might as well start in at the beginning. On July 1, our Battalion was named to go to Berlin on the Berlin Detachment. To do Engineer work and get things ready for other troops and the big Council meeting they are going to have here. We left Oberroblingen 7 o'clock the morning of July 2. We took all our cars with us. I drove my Capt and Lieutenant in our jeep all the way to Berlin. It was a lousy ride because all it has been doing since we left that other town is rain. It was a very profitable ride for me and alot of the other fellows as you'll learn as you read this letter. You see we had to pass through a lot of territory that is in Russian hands and consequently we came in contact with alot of Russian soldiers. These Russians had not been paid for 3 years and were just paid when we met them. They don't know what money means

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I guess because they were willing to buy any thing and pay any thing for it. For instance they give $200.00 for a wristwatch, $5.00 for a bar of chocolate, $10 for a pack of cigarettes, $20 for film, $5 for a bar of soap and a lot of other stuff. An opportunity such as that only comes once in a life time so naturally poor little me wasn't going to let it go by with out doing any thing about it. I made a few hundred dollars on the deal which I'll send to you as soon as I can get some money orders made. So you see it was a very profitable trip- Don't you think so?

We have an excellent set up here in Berlin. We live just like civilians in private homes. I think that we will be here for a couple of months. We are living on the outskirts of the city. As yet I have not seen the heart of the city but you can bet that I will by the time I leave here.

That's all the news for now Love to all from Daphne and my self.

Your loving son
Joey

P.S. My new APO is A.P.O. 758

"Somewhere In Germany"
Sept. 21, 1944

Dear Mom,

I have an opportunity to write so I am going to tell you about an incident that happened to me while we were bivouac(k)ed near a "Big Chateau" in Belgium. One evening as we boys were talking about certain incidents that have happened in our lives. I heard someone call my name. It was another soldier looking for me. He came over to me and told me to report to Commanding Officer. I couldn't imagine what the Commanding Officer wanted with me. So I immediately reported to him. While going to the Commanding Officer I noticed he was talking to a woman. When I got to the Commanding Officer he introduced me to the woman. She turned out to be an Irish maid who looked over the son of the Count who owned the Chateau. She had asked our Commanding Officer if he would be so kind as to let one of his men who spoke French go along with the Count on a deer hunt – so naturally I was selected. Well I went along with the maid to the Chateau where she introduced me to the Count. Well you can imagine how I felt. Me meeting a real Count. The Count was a tall good looking fellow about 26 years old. A very nice fellow. He had two other men with him. One was a Major and the other was the Count's body-guard. After the introductions were over we started on our deer hunt. We walked for quite a distance – when we got to the woods where the deer were supposed to be it was quite dark so we had to give up the deer hunt and return to the Chateau. The Count invited (us) in to the Chateau. It was a beautiful place. Big tapestries and oil paintings were hanging on the walls. I really can't describe the beauty of the place. He took me to a room on the second floor and introduced me to his wife who spoke a little English. The room was a large room with all modern furnishings. He had a big desk, a combination radio and phonograph and other things I'll tell you about when I get home. I told him that had I known this was going to happen I would have cleaned up for the occasion. But he told me it was nothing after all I was a soldier in the field and couldn't help it. He made me sit in a fine easy chair and we started talking about the U.S. he told me he was a relative through marriage of the Vanderbilts and that he would like to see Santa Barbara, Miami Beach, Chicago, New York and that after the war he was going to the U.S. to visit his relatives who lived there. As we were talking his servants were preparing a meal for us. The time was about 10:30 at night. The meal was ready and he took me into the dining room. This too was a beautiful room. He had a large dining table with a light that came up through the table it was beautiful. On the table were dishes of different sizes and about 15 eating utensils by each plate. Also about three different glasses. One was for champagne. The champagne was delicious. He had hidden it from the Germans. Well we finally had a meal. They didn't have to force me to eat either. I told them it was the first meal I had had at a table so fine as this in a long time. And that I was afraid I had forgotten my table manners. But he just laughed. See I certainly had a grand time. I don't have space to tell you about the meal but you can bet your life it was a big and good one. Well we

finished the meal and we went into the other room where I sat down again. He took out a big box of cigars and offered me one. The cigar had a gold band around it and by smelling it I could tell it was expensive. You could just picture me sitting in a comfortable easy chair with a big cigar in my mouth, talking to a Count and his wife. And soft low music coming from the radio. Well I finally finished the cigar and he took me on a tour of his house, it was really beautiful. I'll tell you all about it when I get home, because it would take too long to write all about it now. Well I left the place a 2:00AM in the morning. He wanted me to sleep in one of the guest bedrooms. But I thanked him and told him I couldn't because my outfit would think I got lost. I told him I would see him the next day. But as luck won't hold out I didn't see him again because we moved away the next day. Send this letter to Angelo. I want him to read it. I am having alot of fun. Love to all. Kiss Peter for me. Your loving son,

Joey

James Calabrese

From: James Calabrese
Sent: Monday, April 11, 2016 5:07 PM
To: jamesc@abbott-interfast.com

Telephone Conversations with Richard Ludwiczak on Mar 29, 2006 and Dec 13, 2009 .....by James A. Calabrese

I'm Richard Ludwiczak. I'm 85 years old. On Mar 29, 1942 I was 18 years old. I lived in Jersey City at the time. There were a lot of guys from N.J. in the 294th Combat Engineers. Within 1 and ¼ blocks from me 3 guys went into the 294th. The Unit had about 950 men. We had Companies "A", "B", "C" and "HQ". I was in "A". During training we were assigned to 1st Army, 7th Corps, 1120 combat Group.

We were trained at Fort Dix, Camp Gordon, Ga., went to Tennessee for maneuvers, the got sent for desert training. After training we were sent to camp Miles Standish where we boarded a ship and sailed to Glasgow, Scotland. From Glasgow we were sent to Sherborne, Dorset, in England.

One day in Sherborne, I was sitting in my Quonset hut writing a letter when I heard a "boom". Someone came in asking who could drive a truck, I could not but I went with everyone to the parade ground any way. There I saw a hole 5 ' deep, 10-20' long and 10'wide. I saw just the metal frame of a 2 and a ½ ton truck. They had us looking for v-mail, dog tags or any other identification which could help identify who had been killed. I saw body parts. Everyone knew that the 29 men were from Company "C". Those who were injured were sent to the 228 th Evacuation Hospital in Sherborne.

There were 2 different stories as to how it happened. Story 1. An Officer wanted to make it realistic so he had the Company pull the safety pins then lay 72 mines. One of the men did not put the pin back in at the end of the exercise and a mine exploded. Story 2. The truck drove over a live mine. There is a plaque in Sherborne for those men in the 294th, also one on Pershing Field in Jersey City, N.J.

We were sent for embarkation and boarded the Susan B. Anthony on June 4, 1944. We were on the ship on June 5 and 6 and on June 7 we ' went in". Our job was to lay 72 mine on the beach to stop tanks from coming down. There was about a 1,000 infantrymen on the ship. I was in the hold when they announced that we were going to hit the beach. We were going single file up the stairs. I put my foot on the first step when boom, I heard an explosion, we were hit. We were told to inflate our belts and abandon our equipment. A British destroyer came up on our left and an American destroyer on our right. A P-38 flew over us giving us "cover". They put a net over the bridge and I started for the Brit destroyer over the net. It was ok when the ships were far apart but not when they would come close together. A British sailor dragged me over the top. (When I got on the British destroyer I noticed that it was built in Boston Harbor. It was from the American sale of destroyers to the British.)

We transferred off the destroyer and 50 of us got onto a LCI. We left the LCI and through chest deep water we walked to Utah Beach. They dropped us on the extreme right, 1 and ¼ miles off of where we were supposed to have been dropped We had lost all our equipment so they told us to take some from the dead G.I.s on the beach. We had nothing, no helmets, no weapons. There were no pill boxes on the beach. The beach was cleared but 2 Me-109s strafed us, no one was hit. My Company, "A" was "point" on Utah. On our second day we were attached to the 82nd Airborne, maybe the 101st, we were laying mines and anti-tank mines. I went through Ste Mer Eglise.

One time I was in a fox hole at the front, we were filling in for the infantry All I had were C and K rations but really I wanted hot food when suddenly we got hit with 30 caliber machine gun fire. We were on one side of the road when Germans appeared on the other side. The Germans then left.

We were building a bridge at Melun France, over the Seine River, some 20-30 miles south of Paris, when one of two arches collapsed. Six guys "went down". We built a Bailey Bridge. Sgt. Dante Juliania, he spoke French, named it "Diana Shore". (Juliania died just recently).

I was on a truck during the Ruhr crossing when we were hit with rocket fire. I got off the truck and ran into a factory and dove under a railroad box car.

At another time I was on a 2 and ½ ton truck with a 50 caliber machine gun and captured 2 Polish prisoners when a German plane flew up. I was firing my machine gun when it jammed. The plane started dropping bombs so I dove under the truck.

In the vicinity of Germany we saw Marlene Dietrich perform.

We were near the Bulge. We had to pull back, the retreat was so bad. We were all mixed up, everyone was together. The Germans had Tiger tanks. It was so dark in that forest, even in the day. The trees blocked out the light. We were in the front line for a month, holding near St. Vith. I was in a 6'x6'x6' fox hole with a 50 caliber machine gun. I jumped into a hole and twisted my knee so they sent me to a hospital near Malmedy then to the 228 Evacuation Hospital in Sherborne.

We built a pontoon bridge over the Rhine River. We did it on Mar. 24,1945. The bridge was 1,500' long.

I was discharged at Ft. Meyers, Va.

The 294th got 5 Battle Stars.

We've had a number of reunions, the first one was in Union City, N.J. in 1947.

I remember a number of guys

Gene Swauk and Drusavich, I think they were cooks. James Hand, Dick Debevoise, Capt. Richard Rice, became a Colonel, is writing a book, but it's not done, Raymond Little. There are 2 books about the 294th, one is 20 pages long, the other is a big book (1'x2').

James Calabrese

Subject: SOLDIERS FROM THE 294th COMBAT ENGINEERS NOTED IN DAD'S LETTERS AND PHOTOS

Bill Staranka Arthur James John Bott T/4 William "Chubby" McChesney Joe Bruno Bob "Swede" Anderson
"Red" McNulty Milton Prissant ____Getz Ted Kuntz Ken_____ John Stiefel
James Wihelmy ____Pona Joe Galdi ____Altoonian Cptn T.K. Webster Lt Donahoe