

Bob Stotzer's WWII War Stories

In early April 1943, after 6 months of training at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, we finally received orders to move. We all received new equipment and we had a new



commander General-Major General Robert Macon who replaced Major General Milburn (sp) who left to command the XXI Corp. Rumors flew wildly as we didn't know whether we were going to the Pacific or Europe. We learned a new word- P.O.M.- Preparation for overseas movement. We finally boarded trains for the coast. I wondered how I could carry all my equipment in my duffle bag and my new rifle, but somehow I did.

It took us about 3 days to go to Camp Shanks NY- just outside of NY City. I remember reading on the train- the only book I had was a book of Shakespeare, so I read one of his plays, Hamlet I think.

When we finally arrived at Camp Shanks I remember we had to march quite a ways from the train to our barracks it was uphill and it was really tough carrying your duffle bag with everything you owned and a rifle. However, I was in good shape I weighed just 148 pounds, all muscle!!

We were only at Camp Shanks for 2 days, half the company got pass to NY City for the first night and the other half the second night. My best buddy at the time got a pass the first night. He called Lady and said if she wanted to see me to get right on a train and get to N.Y. Lady further didn't have any cash so I think he borrowed some from the butcher and Lady got on the train and left for N.Y. Chic had made a reservation for us at the Hotel Dixie (now Hotel Carter) right on Times Square. I have read later that it was a Mafia owned hotel and I think Lady got propositioned when she arrived.



I didn't get off until later on that afternoon and finally arrived at the Hotel between 5:30 and 6:00 by bus. I found Lady and we went to dinner. I had to borrow money to get



into town.

We had a great night. I didn't know where to go so I read the paper and found out that Duke Ellington was playing at a place called the Paradise Restaurant so that's where we went and had a great meal and good music. I have read later that this was a great hang out for all the Mafia members and was owned by Lucky Luciano.

Later we went to the Hotel Edison and heard the Boyd Rayburn band - one of the greatest jazz bands I have ever heard. I was a little surprised they served us drinks as we looked so young, but I suppose my being in Uniform had something to do with it.

I had to be back in Camp by 6:00 AM so it was a short night and a sad goodbye. I hated to leave, but I had no choice, so at 4:30 AM I left and found the bus back to Camp.

The next day, April 6, 1944, we sailed from N.Y. harbor. The division was divided up on 3 ships in case one sunk the whole division was not lost. I was really lucky to sail on an American Ship- the George Washington which was a large ocean liner. The rest of the division sailed on an English ship and a Canadian Ship. I was really lucky to get on the American Ship as it was a very large liner, and the food wasn't bad. If I had got on the British ship, I probably would have starved as they served mostly fish and fish head soup every day.

We boarded the ship carrying all our equipment going up the gangplank. When boarding the ship, we had to say "Stotzer, Robert H. Ser # 35343895". I was surprised at the number of men that didn't have a middle name. They had to give their last name and then say NMI (No middle initial) and then their last name.

I was also lucky in getting on the first deck (the deck just below the top deck). The bunks were stacked 6 high with about 18 inches between bunks. I got a bunk second from the bottom which was ideal.

We sailed in mid afternoon, out past the Statue of Liberty. We were all given booklets after we sailed on the customs, money etc of England.

The next morning we were called at 6:00 AM and had life saving drills. I was surprised to see that we were in a large convoy. There must have been fifty to sixty ships with destroyers all around us darting in and out and a large battleship. I heard later it was the battleship Texas, after the lifeboat drill we went to breakfast. It was like a cafeteria, but you ate standing up at tables about four and a half feet high.

Every morning we had calisthenics on deck until one day, one of the fellows about went overboard as the ship rolled. After that, we had calisthenics only on days where it was fairly calm.

We had to field strip and oil our rifles every day due to the salty seawater. I had done it so many times I could strip it blindfolded in several minutes. We reoiled them and put them back together.

For some reason I was put on guard duty. I had to sit in the ship Captain's Cabin and guard our code machine called ABBA which was in his safe. I would be on 2 hours and then off 4 hours every other day. All I did was sit in front of the safe with my rifle and it was very boring.

We had meetings every day on tactics etc., and then some free time in which we either just shot the breeze or played poker or shot craps.

It was fairly rough, but most of us didn't get seasick after the first day or two. However, there was a very Jewish fellow in a bunk just across from me who couldn't get out of his bunk the entire way over. The only thing he ate was matza bread which is unleavened bread whose loaves look like large crackers. That was the only thing he ate the entire way over.

As far as you could see were ships as it was a very large convoy. One day a destroyer came along side of our ship. They shot a line across to our ship and generally rigged up with pulleys etc. and sent a large bag over to the other ship, then an officer came over for a while, and a little later went back on the destroyer. When the lines came down, I couldn't believe how fast the destroyer took off.

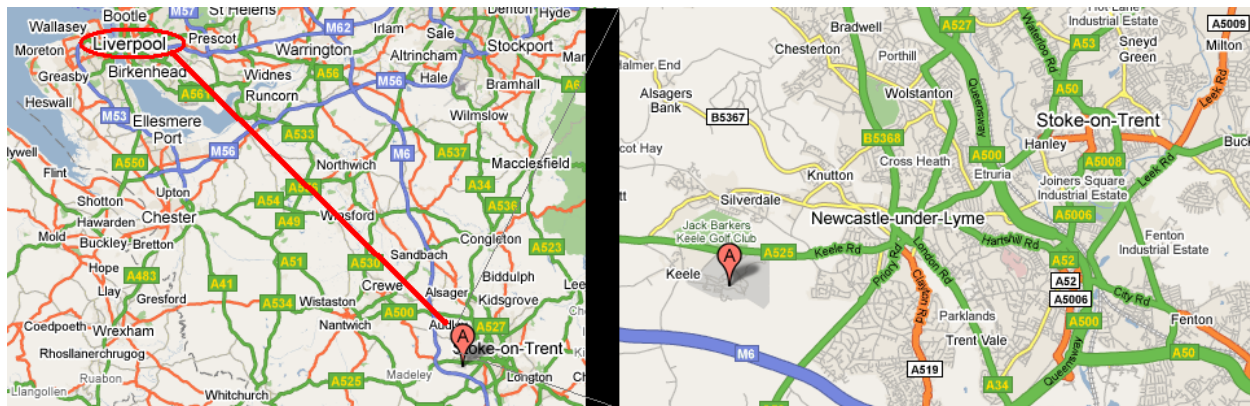
We also had Calisthenics every day until one day it was pretty rough and one fellow almost went over board. I really think he pretended but at least that stopped the calisthenics and we only had them on calm days.

There were also boxing matches on the deck, I didn't partake.

We had one battleship in the convoy, the “Texas”. It was an uneventful crossing, as we had no casualties. The destroyers were running around the convoy all the time and we zigged and zagged all the way over.

We finally landed in Liverpool where trains were waiting to take us to our camp. It was late afternoon when we landed. As I was still guarding the “ABBA” Code machine I had to ride in on one of the freight cars.

It was a several hour train ride, so we didn’t arrive at our destination until after dark. We debarked from the train at a fairly large town called Stoke on Trent. 8x8 trucks (“large trucks”) were waiting to take us to our camp. We had no idea where we were going. We went through another town, “Newcastle under Lyme”, which was right next to Stoke on Trent. Just like Elmira and Burlington. About 2 miles outside of this town we pulled into a large estate. As it was dark we had no idea where we were. However, our trucks pulled up to a long row of quansit huts and we were assigned one. Message center men in one hut, Radio in another, line men in another, HQ in another etc. It didn’t take us long to plop down on cots and get to sleep.



The next morning we were called at 6:00 AM and had to fall out in formation- line-up in platoons and take roll call.



We found out that we were on a large estate called “Keele Hall” (Now a University). There was a very large manor house where the division headquarters was located and dozens of quanset huts on the grounds. The estate was about the size of Archbold with a brick wall all around it.

The first morning after breakfast, we were told where we were and also that we were restricted to the camp for a few days and what our orders would be.

In the large manor house was division HQ. The General’s office G1-G2-G3-G4,



Message Center. Then the drivers in Message Center were issued jeeps. Mine was S-16. It was marked on the front bumper, 83div Sig – S16. As I was a corporal, I was the driver and I was assigned an assistant driver. My first assistant driver was a Brooklyn kid, Jimmy Peco. He was kind of a real dead end kid, but we got along well. The next thing I had to turn in my M-1 rifle and was issued a Thompson Machine Sub-Machine gun. As I had practiced with this in the states, I was familiar with it and could field strip it and put it back together blindfolded in a matter of minutes.

As our pay was due we had to stand in line and receive it. We were paid in a special printed script so we could spend it in England. I didn't get very much as I sent most of it home to Lady.

We were then taken around the estate and stationed in different places: the manor house, the PX, the dinning hall, etc. We were all issued a carton of Cigarettes. I remember my first carton was "Kentucky Winners"- Never heard of them before or since.

We were then divided up. The message center drivers were all taken to the manor house where the message center was already set up. The ABBA machine was in a separate room and only certain people could get in. Bob Cleveland was the main ABBA operator. After the war, he was a musician he had a band in NY that played at all the Mets and Jets games. He was a good friend.

The division (which consisted of about 10,000 men) was spread all over the midlands in Staffordshire (Haddy Hall, Stoke on Tern, Market Drayton, Wrex hom etc). All the regimental HQs were based in large estates spaced in about a 25 mile radius of Keele. My job was to report to message center every morning and pick up messages and deliver them to the various regimental HQs. It was quite easy driving on the left-hand side of the road, as there really wasn't any traffic. We were given a map of the area which was marked where the different HQs were. We drove on such small roads it would be hard to pass. On the back road to White Church, we found a little Pub out ion the country and would pull the jeep in the rear and always stop and have a couple of beers. We always drank Bass Ale.

Just across the road from the estate of Reck Hall was the small town of Keele which was smaller than Burlington, but it did have a pub. We were restricted to the camp for the first week, but about the second night we were there, a few of the braver guys went over the brick wall to the little pub at the village of Reck.

About a week after we were there, we were given liberty to go into New Castle. There was a main gate into the estate and trucks would gather there and drive us the 2 miles into New Castle. They would park in the main square of the town and we were on our own until 11:15 when the trucks left. If you missed the truck, you had to walk back and it was all up hill- I only missed it once.

At first we went to the British version of the USO where they had tea and cookies. However that was too tame. The guys in message center found a pub, "the Rose", which was 5-6 blocks from the center of town and we always gathered there, drank beer, played darts and skittles. About 10:45, the owner of the pub would ring a bell and call out "last call" as all the pubs had to close at 11:00. We would always have one more and then have to hurry to catch the truck going back. When we arrived at Keele Hall, we had to all check in with the O.D.- officer on duty. If you were late, you were restricted to camp for a week. We usually got into town several times a week.

A little later, we were given passes to the town of White Church which was larger. We only got there several times as there were a lot of colored troops that went there. Many of the colored troops had white English girl friends. They told the English girls they were American Indians. Many times you would see a white girl and a colored soldier walking hand-in-hand and this really disturbed the white soldiers, especially the ones from the south. I remember one town we had to hold Ondie Dickerson from S. Carolina from attacking a colored soldier. Consequently White Church was declared "off limits" to white soldiers and the only time I got there after was when I had to go there to deliver messages to one of the regiments.

Also, White Church was where I had my first taste of British "chips" in a fish and chips place. Of course, I only got the chips. They would take a newspaper and make a cone out of it and put the chips (French fries) in the cone and then douse them with vinegar. The vinegar added quite a good taste to them. All the time we were in England, our troops were training. Much of the training was done in the moors which were really desolate.

One thing we all learned to do was to waterproof our vehicles. This was done by using a substance like putty which was packed around all the spark plugs and the carburetor and then having a piece of pipe you attached to the exhaust pipe, it was L shaped, fastened onto the exhaust and the long end stuck in the air- above the head of the driver. Then we would have to drive through a pond with just your head sticking out of the water and the entire jeep submerged. It was a funny feeling but if you did it right it worked. A lot of the guys didn't do it right, and their jeeps stopped in the middle of the

pond. Fortunately I did it twice and it worked both times. This was to ensure you could drive off road landing craft in fairly deepwater.

One day we all had to assemble and march about 20 miles. We didn't know what was going on but we came to a grassy area shaped like an arena with a stage at the bottom and a big American flag as background. We all sat on the ground and soon found out what was going on, General Patton was going to give us a speech, and what a speech it was. I think he used every cuss word in the dictionary describing the Germans. One phrase I remember- "Get the fuckers don't kick them in the nuts before you stick your bayonet up their ass."

One day I got sick. I could not swallow for some reason so I went on sick call. They finally sent me to the hospital that evening. A young Lieutenant diagnosed me as having a spinal meningitis and put me in the meningitis ward, as it is very contagious. I was only in there for 15-20 minutes when a Major came in and examined me along with the Lieutenant. He told them to get me out of there right now and really chewed the Lieutenant out for putting me in there as he said I didn't have meningitis. I was in the hospital for about a week and never did find out what was the matter with me.

I must say a word about the Keele Hall Manor. It was huge. It had a very large entry hall. The dining room was also very large with about 20 French Doors looking out on a veranda and in back of the veranda was a small lake surrounded by hundreds of



rhododendron plants which were all in bloom. There was a large greenhouse attached to the manor and then behind that there were statues. The message center office was in

a second floor bedroom. The Generals office was on the first floor. I met him many



times and he was always very cordial. His name was Major General Robert Macon and he was a veteran of the North African Campaign. He was a VMI graduate and died a few years ago at the age of 101. The huge kitchen was at the west end of the house and under it was a basement. We found a secret tunnel that went underground for several hundred yards and came out in a rather _____ (on page 12) place, so many times we used this when going to the message center office.

Being a jeep driver messenger, I got to see a lot of the country, mostly be back roads. The roads were so narrow it was sometimes hard to meet and pass an oncoming car, sometimes we had to back up and find a spot were a car could pass.

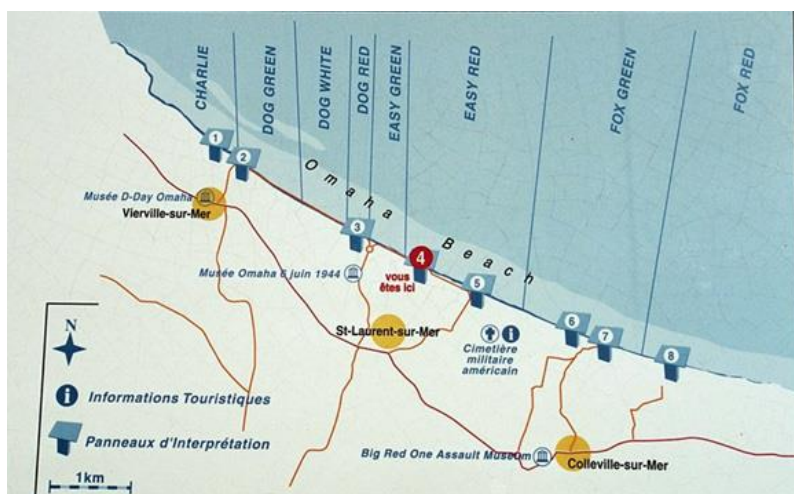
We continued training right up to June 6, 1944, D-Day. I remember the morning of D-Day. We saw all these bombers going overhead. I had seen bombers before, but not in such large numbers. About 10:30 AM we were called to fall in front of our quonset huts. We were then read a memo by General Eisenhower stating that the invasion had begun that morning.

It wasn't long before we were told to start packing our gear and get ready to move out on a moments notice.

A few days later we left Keele Hall in a convoy and headed south. I remember going by Stone Henge and I didn't know what it was. It took us all day until we arrived in South Hampton. I have never seen so many vehicles of all kinds. All our jeeps, including my old #S-16 had to line up and have a big I-bar welded on the front bumper, it was about 5 feet tall and shaped like an inverted L. We found out generally what this was because there were rumors that the Germans were stringing piano wire across roads,

and as we usually drove with the windshields down with a canvas cover on them so as not to reflect light so airplanes could not spot us so easily. The wire would take the heads off the driver and the assistant driver. The T-bar was welded on to cut the wire.

We finally loaded on a transport in the evening. Our vehicles were loaded into the holds of the ship and we were all left on the deck to fend for ourselves. We sailed that night and tried to sleep on the deck. It was quite a rough ride as a storm had come up, but somehow we managed to get a little sleep. When the sun came up we were off the



coast of Omaha Beach. We were needed badly on shore, but due to the storm we couldn't land. The sight that morning was one I will never forget. It was almost unbelievable. Hundreds and hundreds of ships were all around us. Ships of every kind and description. We were

several miles off the Normandy coast. The battle ships were further out, but there were destroyers going back and forth and all kinds of transports, mine sweepers, P.T. Boats and many other. Bang Balloons were flying all over the place. We could see fires on the shore and hear all kinds of gunfire. There was nothing we could do except clean our weapons, play cards or shoot the bull. We were given C-rations to eat (a feast by the way we ate for the next whole month.) C-rations were a little larger than a box of Cracker Jacks. They consisted of a tin of ham and cheese or pork, several hard biscuits, a piece of hard chocolate and a packet of lemon powder. It wasn't very good. Our fighter planes were overhead all the time. Every night several German planes would fly over and drop parachute flares and take pictures. Once in a while a plane would zoom over and drop a few bombs, but they never hit anything. At night, you could really see the battle going on shore with all the flashes from the cannons. Every once in a while, we would see a dead body floating by.

The storm finally ended and we were going ashore. An LST pulled along side and I saw my jeep loaded. We had to scramble down the side of the ship on rope netting. It was a little scary as the LST was bobbing up and down and when we got near the bottom of the rope net you had to turn your Jeep into the barge. We all made it o.k. The barge held four jeeps and about 5 men. We headed for the shore, and when we hit the shore the ramp went down and we drove off into about 3 feet of water. We had water guarded all of our jeeps. We drove off and my jeep stalled. I couldn't believe it. I tried starting it and after about the 3rd time it started up and I drove onto Omaha Beach.



Omaha looked like mass confusion. I couldn't believe all the material piled up. The medical tanks with the wounded and the knocked out and buried tanks. However, the M.P.s guarded us across the beach and up the hills marked with tape (these were the areas cleared of mines) and we headed for the front. The first night we stayed in a meadow. We pulled into the meadow at dusk and didn't notice that in the adjoining meadow was an anti-aircraft battery. Sometime in the night, the battery opened up firing at a plane. We sure didn't know what was going on and it scared the hell out of us as we didn't have any foxholes. I crawled under my jeep. It finally let up.

I was lucky enough to pull guard duty the first night from 12 to 4 at the entrance to the meadow. A foxhole had been dug there and Jim Pico and I had the 12-4 shift. It was quite scary. Tom and I didn't shoot anything but the guys at the rear of the meadow shot 3 cows. When you are on guard duty and hear anything, you call "Halt-give the pass word." The password and counter password changed everyday and believe me you had better know what it was when they got the correct password you gave them the counter

password. For instance the password may be “Apple” and the counter password “Dumpling”.

The next morning we moved out to relieve the 101st airborne division and our



division HQ was at Carentan, France, a town about the size of Archbold in the 1940's. The infantry regiments didn't relieve them until that night under cover of darkness.

Our Headquarters were set up along the Dauve River. The First thing we did was dig foxholes, and then set up a message center where our Sergeant Commander Lt. Cal had his HQ. Cal Rhyne. Our Seg Company Commander earned the name “Sand Bag” Rhyne. He made some of the group dig about a 10'x10' hole about 5' deep and then put sand bags all around it and then a tent on top.

The first day I dug mine about 2 feet deep, but the next day I dug it deeper, as the Germans had all the coordinates on Carentan and could fire at any place they wanted to. I learned that the Germans were very methodical. They would fire everyday at the same time starting at 8:00 AM for about 15 minutes, then at Noon, 4:00 PM and 8:00 PM.

The first time under shellfire was very scary and that is why I dug my foxhole deeper. I also learned at the above times, you better get in our foxhole a couple minutes before those times.

We also learned that first day the difference in sound between incoming and outgoing artillery. At first we jumped in our foxholes when our artillery which was behind us fired. They fired over our heads and it sounded like a freight train going through the air. The incoming shells would whistle and then hit. It took about a day before you could tell the difference.

There was a bridge across the river a few hundred yards from our HQ and the Germans had that zeroed in. They would knock it out every day and we would rebuild it every day. I saw a full Col. get decapitated there one day.

There was a Cathedral in Carentan with a very tall spire and there was a German sniper in the spire. Every now and then a bullet would come zinging through our headquarters and everyone would take rifles and shoot at the spire but could never get him. Finally after 2 days of this, the general got a tank and knocked the spire down, that was the last of the sniper.

As a jeep driver I had to deliver messages to the different regiments and some time to Corp. HQ for our 83rd Regiment rear echelon HQ which was located about 3 miles North of Carentan while the 3 infantry regiments were located West of Carentan. Going to the different regiments, it was all hedgerows. We were given a new map every day, but it was still hard to find the regimental HQs many times. The fields inside the hedgerows were filled with dead cattle all lying on their backs with their feet in the air. We saw hundreds of dead cattle and after a short time they began to rot and smell. We would also see a number of dead Germans, usually lying in a ditch by the hedgerows. After several days, the bodies would turn absolutely black. I remember one dead German and I thought he was a Jap. He was bloated to twice his size and had turned yellow with squinty eyes.

Going to our rear echelon HQ to the north, the land was all together different. The Germans had opened a dam and there were not many hedgerows, but the fields were all flooded. It looked like a huge lake. In all the flooded fields there were many, many poles the size of a telephone pole and pounded on the top. These were to keep gliders and paratroops from landing. There were quite a few gliders in the water. Onetime, Jim Peco and I waded out to one that wasn't too far off the road. The glider was intact but all we found were several flack jackets that we took and wore for several days. A flack jacket was like a vest with strips of metal all down the front. After a few days we threw them away as they were heavy.

The rear echelon was located in an orchard and there were smashed up gliders all over the place. I think I would have rather parachuted than rode a glider down, because the only one I saw that wasn't all smashed up was the one we waded out to. The rest flew into trees, hedgerows etc and were all smashed up. There were at least 10 of them in this area.

The way we slept was every soldier had a "Shelter Half. This is a half of a tent. You would find a buddy and as he also had a shelter half you would button the two halves together and this made a pup tent. Many times, I just slept under my jeep right next to my foxhole.

The nights were particularly scary. With all the guns going off and many parachute flares that lit up the sky like daylight, you could hear the fighting going on several miles west of Carentan. You soon learned to distinguish between our machine gun fire and the Germans'. The German machine gun had a much faster rate of fire than ours.

At that time we were in General Omar Bradley's 1st Army and our Corp. Commander was "Lighting Joe" Collins. Our first attack was on July 4th and led by Col. "Buck Shot" Cralid's 329nd regiment as spear point. There was a terrific artillery barrage before the attack. In a whole day of fighting, I think we gained about 15 yards through the hedgerows and we lost 75 yards back that night. I saw something in Carentan I had never seen and didn't know what it was. It was a very small tank about 4 feet long and 18 inches high. We found out later it was called a "Goliath" and was a tank filled with explosives that was driven and exploded by remote control.

My job was to deliver messages to the different regiments and sometimes back to Crop HQ. We were given maps every day with the markings of where the regimental HQ's were, but they moved so often that many times the maps were inaccurate and several times, we drove behind the German lines.

In a division there are 3 regiments and each regiment has 3 battalions and the battalions have 6 Companies. Our regiments were the 329th, 330, 331 etc. The 331st was getting beat up pretty bad so they fired the Colonel and replaced him with Col. Robert York who was really something else. He ended up after the war as a Lt. General!!! I read an article on him which said he was the greatest fighting man of WWII. One of my best friends was his radio operator Chick Standt.

We were still eating C-rations which were terrible. This one day, 3 of us bought some horsemeat and we found some onions and potatoes and snuck off and cooked it over a fire in our mess kits. It was one of the best meals I have ever had.

When we would go to a regimental HQ, sometimes on the way back to our HQ, we would find where the Germans had dug a series of trenches behind the hedgerows. There

was all kinds of Armament laying around, but most of the time we were afraid to pick it up as we were warned that Germans always booby trapped many things.

Also we would stop by a blown up farmhouse. They all had a shed with big barrels filled with Cider, Wine or Calvados (which is like Cognac). We had a 3 gal water can on our jeep and would empty it and fill it with Calvados which mixed with the lemon powder in our C-rations made quite a drink. A few of our men in the Company never drew a sober breath. We would also occasionally find bottles of Champagne.

One night I was called to message center about 9:30 and told I was to take a package of messages to Corp. HQ. We always carried the messages in a large leather bag that was laced around the top and padlocked. I was told that I would only have to go about ½ way, as I would be met by a messenger from Company. I was shown on the map where to meet him so Jim Peco and I started out we had to go in kind of an arc (Picture of the fighting which needed to be avoided. Jim and I arrived at the meeting place around 11:20 but there wasn't anyone from company there. It was really an eerie place to meet, as it was on very high ground right next to 3-4 bombed out huge grain silos. It was also on such high ground that we could see all of the fighting going on as well as hear it. The machine guns on both sides were really making a racket as well as all the individual rifles. You could see all the tracer bullets going each way from the machine guns and hear the mortars exploding. Jim and I shut off the jeep and sat and waited for the Corp messenger to arrive. Unknown to us right behind us several 100 yards was a battery of "Long Toms". This is a huge cannon, I think about 175 millimeters which is about the largest artillery we had. The barrel is about 15 feet long. All at once while we were sitting in our jeep in the scary place, the entire battery opened up. Jim and I about jumped out of our skins and dove under the jeep until we realized that it was our artillery. They fired for about 5 minutes and it was deafening and the shells going over our heads sounded like a freight train. About that time, a lot of parachute flares went up over the battlefield and lit up the place like daytime. We wanted to get out of there because artillery fire often brought return fire. The Corp. driver finally showed up and we got the hell out of there.

One night about 10:00PM the MO Col. came rushing into message center and said the Germans had broken our lines which was about 2 miles out of Carentan and were

heading directly for us. Our Col., "Sand Bag" Rhyne who hardly ever left the safety of the sand bagged message center about went nuts. We had foxholes all around our perimeter. Jim Peco and I were assigned to one with a 30 Caliber machine gun. We were all excited. Jim and I found our foxhole with the machinegun and we took several bottles of Champagne along. We continued to drink the champagne and by midnight we were both pretty well looped and really didn't care if the Germans came or not. Alcohol really makes you brazen. In fact we hoped they would come. By about 2:00 AM we were told the Germans had been stopped. Thus we went back to our own foxhole but just like clockwork, we were shelled at 4:00 AM and 8:00 AM.

Many times we had trouble finding regimental HQ, because they continually moved. I remember one time we couldn't find it and kept going away. We went down a big hill on a gravel road until we saw soldiers lying in a ditch. They yelled at us to get that god dammed jeep out of there. We had gone past regiment and were down at the front line. We turned the jeep around right away, but the Germans saw us as we tore back up the hill and kept firing at us with mortars, but they kept exploding behind us. We finally made it up the hill ok, but still kept going like hell and came around a curve pretty fast and ran General Macon's jeep into a ditch. He was going to the front. In fact he was always going to the front with a rifle to get in the thick of things. In fact Corp. HQ finally had to order him to stay in the rear. We helped his jeep out of the ditch and no one was hurt- he kept going his way and we kept going to the rear. I ran into him the next day and he wondered what the hell we were doing in a jeep that close to the front. I told him we had gotten lost and all he said was be a little more careful. He was a great General- a real G.I.'s general.

We finally received orders to move out of Carentan, France and move about 1.5-2 miles west. We packed up and moved into an orchard and set up HQ. I spent about 3 hours digging a good, deep foxhole several hundred yards from our message center. About 7:00 PM, I was notified that I was on night duty at message center, which ticked me off because it wasn't my turn to have night duty. Thus I moved my jeep- old # S-16- to the message center tent. As it was rather late in the evening, I didn't have time to dig a foxhole and the one I dug was quite far away. I also didn't have a tent so I tried to sleep on the ground. About 10:30 we got under the worst artillery barrage we had ever been

in. The Germans had that orchard zeroed in and I didn't have a foxhole. I remember I jumped into a foxhole on top of a major and his foxhole wasn't too deep. The shelling went on for about 20 minutes and really hit close as it threw dirt all over me. It was really scary. We had a couple of guys wounded, but no one got killed. Usually when the Germans retreat, they zero in on all kinds of places, this orchard was one of them.

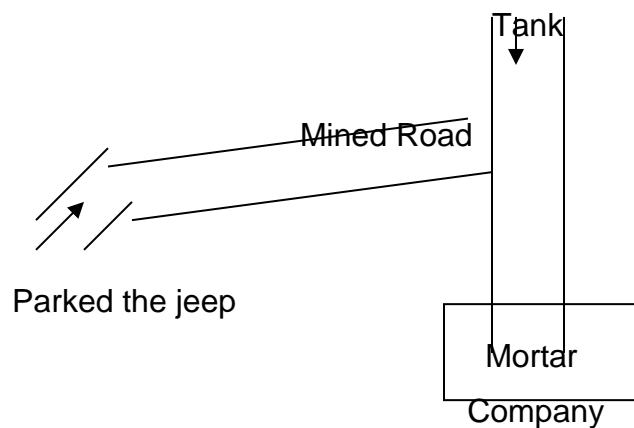
The next morning we moved back to Carentan. What was interesting was that the place where we had had our message center tent set up had received a direct artillery hit. It was a good thing we had moved out, because a number of guys would have been killed.

We stayed in Carentan about 1 day and then moved west to another orchard. I remember several things about that area. First, all the shells going overhead and by that time we could tell the difference between incoming and outgoing. Second, we had a 50 Caliber machine gun set up on a tripod which was about shoulder high. In the evening German planes had started to come over and we all raced to the machine gun and whoever got there first got to shoot at the planes. I made it several times and got to shoot it, but of course we never hit anything. Third, I got a new assistant driver, Jim "Hose Nose" Brennan". Jimmy Pico had caught a chicken and was going to roast it. One of the officers saw him with the chicken and was going to have him court marshaled for looting. They never did Court Marshal him, but they did demote him to the motor pool.

Several nights later, Brennan and I were called to message center tent and General Macon was there. He told us that we had a message to deliver to the 331st HQ and it was imperative that we get it there. The 331st was due to attack that morning at 8:00AM, but the General had just receive information from the FFI (Free French Forces) that the place they were to attack was over a heavily mined field which they didn't know about. No one seemed to know where the 331st was. We knew the approximate region it was in, but that was all. They couldn't raise them on the radio, so Jim and I were sent out.

Thus Jim and I set out to find them, as it was just getting dark. The first thing we found was one of our units in a field surrounded by hedgerows. We stopped there at the entrance to the field and were challenged by the guards. The unit turned out to be the 83rd Reconnaissance Company. They had a half truck at the gate and all the machine

guns pointed at us. We went in and talked to the C.O. of the company and asked him if he knew where the 331st HQ was. He wasn't sure, but he pointed us down a road and said he thought they were somewhere down that road. We followed the road for a ways until we came to a stretch that was all marked off with white tape on both sides of the road. That meant that the road was mined and hadn't been cleared. Thus, we left the jeep there and started out on foot. After a ½ mile, we ran into a mortar company from the 331st. They were dug in and facing a road coming the other way. About that time, some artillery shells started coming in on their position.



Editor's Notes (Matt Blackwelder):

Unfortunately, this is where Bob Stotzer's 26+ pages of hand written notes ended. I remember Bob telling me about capturing a German tank at one point, but I was much younger at the time and I do not remember the details. From his drawing it appears an enemy tank was approaching their position, but alas, I do not have the rest of the story.

* Photos added by Andy Stotzer.