

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: Not given

Attached is a copy of the notes of Edwin H. Brandenburger (1919-2007), deceased, a former Army CPL in the 101st Airborne, Headquarters Division, for your Records.

From Mark Brandenburger, Son

My Personal Notes E. Brandenburger

Invasion Record

June 2, 1944

Our little group of 24 enlisted men and four officers left Crownhill Camp, Plymouth England, at 17:00 on the 2nd of June 1944. After a one-hour march with full field pack, we reached the loading docks, boarded a landing barge and were taken out to an LST Craft. This small boat certainly was crowded, as there was also a Company of Medics aboard. At about 23:30, we proceeded out to sea in quite a large convoy of the same type boats as our own small craft. The boat commander ordered an issue of three blankets to each man. Jarboe and I decided to chance the weather and sleep on the open deck. Fortunately, it remained cool, clear and calm, the sea as smooth as glass.

June 3, 1944

At about 06:00, we arrived at an unknown harbor and more ships were added to our group. We have reason to believe that this harbor was Kingsbridge. While the convoy was reforming, we stayed at anchor for about a day and a half, had our first taste of the new (to us) 5-in-1 rations and found that they contained a fairly well-balanced meal. There were a couple of war correspondents aboard, and they were taking pictures of everything and everybody. I guess we are certain to have our pictures in at least one of the papers.

June 4, 1944

Slept very late today which was unusual because of all the commotion aboard ship. A Catholic mass was said at 10:30, and then the usual routine of trying to keep from getting bored. A few of the barrage balloons broke loose, and they would go only so high and then burst in a cloud of smoke. The morale of the gang is even better than was expected.

June 5, 1944

At 16:00 on the 5th of June, we proceeded out of our little harbor, formed a large convoy with plenty of escorting battlewagons and, at last, headed toward Europe to defeat or VICTORY. We aboard knew that

was it. I had a job trying to sleep that night, as it got plenty cold, the sea very rough and the weather foggy. Plenty of the fellows got seasick as Hell.

June 6, 1944

We sighted land at 08:00 on the morning of D-Day, and everything that happened from then on was a grand, glorious and deadly sight. At first, we lay about three miles off shore, and then as we moved closer we could see where one force had attacked earlier and a smoke screen was still being laid down. The big battle wagons were giving the shore installations a terrible pounding, and when their guns would go off, it would shake our boat. At about 10:00 they decided to send us in, so we moved to within about one mile of shore and there waited for the small landing barges to come and transport us to the beach. Three barges arrived at about 19:30, and we were to leave in the last one. It was about this time that one LCT 500 yards to our right struck a floating mine or was hit by a shell, because it blew up in a big gush of smoke and flame. It seemed to lift right out of the water and then the stern half just disappeared from sight. Seconds later, you could hear the cries of the wounded that had been thrown into the water by the force of the blast. It was one of the many sights which I was soon to see over and over again. At about this time, the Germans opened up on our part of the beach with their mobile 88mm guns, of which a few were still in action. We were almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way toward the beach and then two trucks on the beach were hit, blew up in a cloud of smoke and flame and began to burn furiously.

It was perhaps seconds before our craft grated to a stop on the sandy beach when the Germans cut loose with their second salvo. The first shell landed approximately 30 yards to our port side, hitting the small landing barge to our right, and as I learned later, killed several medics. The second shell burst only 10 yards away, this throwing plenty of water in our boat and sending hot deadly shrapnel across our bow. One piece of this fell in our boat grazing the wrist of PFC John Witherich, causing a slight burn.

Well, it was at 11:05 that the gate was lowered and we stepped off into more than 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet of water and touched the sacred and bloody ground of Europe that not even Hitler and his mighty armies could hold. It was at this moment that all Hell seemed to break loose, because once again, the Germans lay down a barrage of 88mm fire. It was only by the grace of God that all of us remained unharmed, though we did seem to bury ourselves in the sand.

The scenes that met the eye here pointed out quite clearly the terrific battle that had been waged for this narrow strip of beach. The awful price in men and material that was paid and what the folks back home think is all glory. Our small group moved inland about 200 yards and remained in this locality for nearly four hours while minefields were being cleared to our front. The barrage along the beach was being kept up continuously; now and then a sudden explosion, followed by a column of smoke and flame, would mark the destruction of another American truck, tank or boat.

At about 15:00, we proceeded inland under the command of Lt. Col Parkinson with high hopes of locating our Division CP before darkness fell. In those first few hours, we saw our share of WAR; our first

POW cages with the Nazis looking like beaten dogs or worse; our first German dead some sprawled in the most gruesome positions possible with gaping holes in their bodies, other laying by the roadside as if asleep and at rest with the world; our first field hospital with their huge red crosses, which seem to be disregarded in this war; the endless number of American wounded and dead. Because of the heavy resistance and constant menace from sniper fire, we covered only about four miles, or half the distance to our CP, by 20:00 on the 6th of June, 1944. Just before sundown, our column halted to a rest about ¼ mile from St. Marie du Mont. Lt. Merli, second in command, decided to make a reconnaissance of the nearby town before entering it, so he and two enlisted men (M/Sgt. B. Bradley and Pvt. Lynch) moved ahead of our column. The rest of us just sat by the edge of the road and waited. It was several hours later when they returned, herding two German prisoners ahead of them. These two had been taken on the edge of town, one being a typical Nazi of about 30 years old, the other claimed to be a Polish refugee having been forced into the Army of the Third Reich. This one was interrogated by Pvt. Pfeil, the only member of the outfit able to speak German. From what we learned from this prisoner, we formed the opinion that the town was still in the hands of the enemy and that it would be wise to stay put for the night. Here at the crossroads, we spent our first night in France.

I suppose that this was the most miserable night I have ever spent in my life. We were wet through-and-through from our shoulder-deep plunge in the ocean earlier that day. Now it was necessary to place a constant guard over our two prisoners, so we broke the guard down into two-hour shifts and two men on guard. The night passed almost uneventfully with none of us getting any sleep. At about 04:00, a small group of 82nd Paratroopers came down the road from St. Marie du Mont and claimed that they had been ambushed a short distance on the other side of town. This certainly proved that the town had at least several Germans left in it. Damn, the night sure was cold and miserable.

June 7 1944.

The very first thing we did on the morning of the 7th was to turn our two prisoners over to the 4th Division M.P.s. After having our breakfast, which consisted of a D-ration bar, we proceeded on toward the Division CP.

We were about ¼ mile from the town when we were stopped by an American patrol and cautioned not to enter the town as there was still street fighting going on, and told that a couple German tanks were known to be in the town. Well, that meant another delay until about five of our big Sherman tank came up the road from the beach and moved on into the town. In the meantime, a large force of C-47 cargo planes towing gliders came roaring in over the channel at only a few hundred feet. Some of the gliders cut loose quite close to us and landed in a nearby field. There were a couple that smashed up on landing, and though it looked pretty bad to us, no one was seriously injured in the crashes. Gosh, those fellows sure were glad to be met by friendly troops, and we were glad to see them. One of the CG 4As smashed through a group of trees, shearing off both wings, but no one was injured. By this time, the tank outfit had done a pretty good job of cleaning out the town. It was rumored that more than 75 snipers were cleared out of the place. I knew there were a few, because I saw a couple, but they were quite dead.

The way was now cleared, so once again we headed toward the CP. At about 14:00, we saw our first air battle. It seemed kind of unfair because there were three P-51s chasing an FW-190 all over the sky. The last we saw of the Jerry, he was headed due west going like a bat out of Hell and trailing smoke. I often wondered if he made it back to the father land? After what seemed ages and ages, our exhausted and hungry group located the CP at Hiesville, France, arriving there at about 20:30 the 7th of June. We contacted the glider echelon under the command of Maj. James T. Nelson and were greeted by our buddies in the company, thus learning of the casualties we had suffered on our first combat operation.

From that day on, we were bombed and strafed almost every night for the next week or so, and we all developed a healthy case of nerves. I know now for sure that we can no longer be called the 4F outfit of the Division. I wonder where, what and when our next job will be and what the future holds in store for us.

OUR CASUALTIES

Headquarters Company

1st Sgt Cleyar – Captured
Tec 5 Alexander – Killed
Pvt. Henry – Killed
Pvt. Claypool – Missing in Action
Pfc Charlton – Wounded
Division Headquarters
Tec 4 Hill – Died of wounds
Tec 4 Towner – Wounded
Tec 4 Stephens , Jules – Wounded
Tec 5 Gamble – Captured
Tec 5 Furman – Captured

Military Police Patoon

Sgt Paris – Killed
Pvt Konter – Killed
Pvt. Brown – Killed
Pvt. Smith, W. – Died of Injuries
Pvt. Molinari – Wounded
Pvt Borling – Wounded
Pvt. Parks – Wounded
Pvt Cantrell – Wounded
Pvt. Weinholt – Wounded
Let Lt Beson – Injured in Glider

This our report and part played in the Invasion of Normandy on the 6 June 1944.
