

## War Era Story Project 2012

Submitted by: Jerry Mogan

Current home town: Grove City, Ohio

Age: Not given

This letter that follows was written by my older brother, John H. Mogan, to his newly married bride, Barbara Haswell, after their wedding in Little Rock, Arkansas. She had returned home to Circleville, Ohio. John was 18 and his bride was 17. I am four years junior to John, so I did my part at home collecting tin foil and milkweed pods for life jackets, etc.

My oldest brother, Wayne Patrick Mogan, was a member of the Ohio National Guard when the war came, so he was in for the entire span of the war. He served at Rockhurst College in Kansas City, MO. Where he met and married Bonnie Belle Keifer. Later on, he was sent to the China, Burma and India Theaters, where he served until the end of the war. He also spent some time at Eagle Pass, TX, Camp Shelby, Mississippi, and other sites I can't recall.

I, Jerry Mogan, served in 1951 and '52 in Germany with the 521st Q. M. petroleum supply co., part of V corps, 7th Army. We set up gas pumps all over southern Germany to supply troops on maneuvers.

My younger brother, Joseph E. Mogan, served in Korea around 1955-6. I don't know much about his service. He was a member of the 1st Cavalry.

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### Letter from John H. Mogan to His New Bride

We left camp Rucker the week after you when home and it took us almost three days by troop train to get to New York, where we went to Camp Shanks. I was able to go to the City only on a 12-hour pass. While we were there, we were alerted for sailing November 26, and from that time on, we were not able to send out any mail or communications of any sort. We had plenty of dry runs and everything, as usual, and then on November 30, at about 10:00pm we left Shanks. We walked about three or four miles, and boy were those packs heavy. We took a train to the ferry docks and got the 42nd street ferry to the pier. By the time we got to the pier, it was about 1:30am and my pack straps were just about cutting my shoulder off. We stood there in formation – a whole Division Artillery at one time. After standing there for a while, I sat down on the pier and leaned back on my pack; it was a lot more comfortable that way. It was a pretty quiet bunch that night. I do not think that many of the guys were scared, but everyone was doing some pretty serious wondering and thinking. Things like “I wonder when I'll set foot on American soil again” and such stuff. I was thinking about you, and that, though my lot was not a happy one at that moment, I had something wonderful to look forward to, whereas a lot of the fellows were not so lucky. Some of the fellows had planned to be married the next day, before we were alerted, and didn't make it. I'm afraid that is what would have happened to us if you had come up. That would have been too great a disappointment if you had come there and I couldn't see you.

Now where was I? Oh, Yes, leaning on my pack. Well, there was a Red Cross Clubmobile there, and they walked through the ranks and passed out doughnuts and coffee, and there was sugar in the coffee. Nothing in the world makes me madder than to have someone put sugar in my coffee. They use to do that when we were on “D” series, and I would cuss every cook in the kitchen. So I ate my doughnut without coffee. We were lined up in shipping order, and about that time they started boarding. They yelled “Mogan,” and like a good soldier, I answered “John H.,” and started bravely up the gang plank. By this time, that pack had me down to my knees. Oh, one thing I forgot: while we were standing there, they took Mitchell. Remember him? The guy with the broken ankle, with his whole leg in a cast? They took him aboard in a wheelchair, with his rifle across his knees, and that brought quite a roar from the crowd. It was funny – all the time, I’m carrying everything I own. Painful, isn’t it?

So we go up the stairs and we go down stairs, and I am tempted to sit down and scoot a step at a time on the down grade, but I know that Horse-face Harry and Louie the lip are behind me and they won’t stand for anything like that, so I goes on like I am happy as a lark, and is it my fault if I groan every step or two? (Just call me “Demon.”) My group ended up in compartment D 5, port, and I look around and think, “Well, this is where we eat,” for it had mess tables in it. They had other ideas. A lieutenant gets a post between the men and himself, so no one can hit him with anything, and says “well men, this will be your new home for a while.” After calling for the medics, and carrying out those with weak hearts, who never lived thru the shock, we were told to make ourselves “comfy.” The compartment did not have as much space as your grandmothers’ kitchen, dining room and living room combined, and there were 136 – one hundred and thirty six – of us put here to eat, sleep and live. We slept in hammocks, those of us who were fortunate. The rest slept on the floor, on the tables, and under them. We got under way a little before daylight on December 1. I wanted to go on deck, but each time I tried, they would run me below, so I finally found a scupper with an open duct above it, and peeked out. Then I stuck my whole head out. The wind snatched my hat off, but I didn’t even notice. We were steaming out of New York harbor, and I could almost reach out and touch the statue of Liberty. She looked awfully pretty to me that morning. I watched until I couldn’t see her anymore, and then went back to my hole and felt like a lost soul.

It was a miserable trip for me. It was an English ship – “H. M. S. Britannic,” third largest ship in the English fleet. They fed us the worst slop I have ever eaten. Oh, how I grew to hate them, for that reason alone. We heard later that the boat had been sunk, and everyone said “good.” One day, an American destroyer escort pulled alongside and played popular music for us over a public address system. It was beautiful way out there. They had a hell of a sense of humor, though. The first song they played was “Don’t fence me in” by Bing, and the guys just about died. Everyone on deck rushed to that side, and the shift of weight caused us to list so that the skipper ordered half of the men to the other side of the deck.

The trip was uneventful, except for two submarine scares, when we dropped a lot of depth charges. Our ship was a big one, and it didn’t roll much, so not many were sea sick.

We landed in England, at Southampton, on December 13, at about 10 o’clock p.m., where we boarded a train and rode until 3:30 a.m. They wouldn’t let us take off our packs, and we were pretty uncomfortable. We got off at a little town named Blandford. You may be able to locate it on a map, I

don't know. We stayed in a small camp near there until December 23. While we were there, I went to Liverpool for our trucks and some other port for our equipment. I was driving a 6x6, with two trailers loaded on it and pulling a howitzer. There were 10 trucks in our convoy, and we came right through the center of cities that way. What close ones we had, because their streets are very narrow. We went through Bristol, Liverpool, Bath and other large towns. We were on the road for three days and nights, and you should see the fog that sets in after dark there.

It was a well-known fact that we hadn't long to stay there, so we were going to have our Christmas dinner on the 24th. It was really going to be a feed. There were enough turkeys to feed an Army. The cooks had them all plucked, dressed, stuffed and in the oven, when they said we were leaving in two hours. Blooey! There went our Christmas dinner. That was the afternoon of the 23rd. We left there at about 5 o'clock p.m., and went to Weymouth, where we boarded L. S. T's for France. My jeep was the first aboard. Ain't cha' proud of me? It was about 2 or 3 a.m. then. I chained down my jeep and started looking for a place to sleep. So I found one, and slept until noon of the 24th, then I got up to eat. Those LST's are really bad for a guy who gets seasick, for the channel was rough, and those things bob like a cork. I would have never believed that a boat could roll so much and still float. I am lucky, for it didn't bother me at all, except I would get out of patience chasing my mess kit back and forth across the table, but 9 out of 10 guys were sick as dogs, including the sailors. A pack of subs must have been following us, for after dark they struck, and they took their toll. Once again I was lucky, and my boat wasn't touched, but the division lost 700 men and 80 officers that night. Now you can understand "Christmas spirit." That is a lot of men to lose before you even see combat. Was tough on a lot of people. We docked at Cherbourg late at night, and laid there till Christmas day. We unloaded at about noon, and had a nice Juicy K ration Christmas dinner. Good deal, HAH?

We preceded across France to Rennes, where we stayed a couple of days in pup tents, and then went up to the Lorient – St. Nasirre sector. We were destined for the "Bulge," but that loss of men stopped us. You know most of the story since then. We fired an awful lot, and I guess we killed plenty of Germans. I know we sure wrecked that place. Our 155 Bn. really did something unusual. It was said to be the first time to happen in the ETO. They pulled up one gun and sunk a large ship trying to leave the harbor; they sunk quite a few smaller ones – coast wise steamers, and barges.