

Dear Chad:

This account starts in the early morning of June 16, 1944, a patrol Capt. Smith sent out was fired upon as it tried to re-enter our lines. Two lessons I have learned (1) When Tanks enter a field of Infantry expect artillery. (2) If you go on patrol before you leave make sure the ones in your sector know about it.

We left the high ground to make sure the north side of the Canal was clear of Germans and to establish a ~~position~~ ^{position}, we could defend until we built up supplies to continue the attack. We were losing many things

As we approached the Canal there was a little decision to turn right or left but it carried with it the result of life or death. Capt. Smith was kneeling behind a hedge row and signalling us to move up one at a time to jump a low place in the hedge row and run across an open place with no cover. When I crossed I could not see the man who had crossed before me and the trail forked left and right. I could not stay in the open so I decided to go left. That was the right decision because machine gun fire across the Canal ^{started} ~~was~~ chewing up the other trail.

When we got to the road we found the Bridge blown. There was a damaged German Tank on the edge of the road on our side of the Canal. We checked to make sure no Germans were hiding in it.

We were under fire from a building across the road on our side of the Canal. My platoon was given the job of clearing it out. Our platoon Sgt. (1st Sgt. Davis) assigned the 1st Squad to put heavy fire on the front

of the building, my third squad was to cross the road and get the back on the left side while the 2nd squad was to make a frontal assault and enter the bldg. There was a farm gate which I and three or four of my squad had gone through when I heard an explosion and turned intine to see my second in command falling in the gateway where he had stepped on a mine. We called for medical but kept going as we were supposed to do under these circumstances. The Germans were gone before we got to the back of the building. When I got back Sgt. Heltom had been evacuated with his left foot blown off at the ankle. He was over for him. I have visited him at his home in Bell Buckle Tenn, since the war. He is now in a VA nursing home.

Cpl. Housechild was now my second-in-command. I had a close call as we crawled up a ditch in the road side. I spotted the prongs of an E-mine. I had one hand on each side of it and was ready to pull my body forward. I decided to abandon the ditch and seek rifle fire in the open field.

We were assigned positions along the canal and started digging in. I Company had been in reserve that day but they were to relieve us after dark so we could spend the night back in our position on top of the Hill. We had given I Company our foxholes and were preparing to leave at 10:30 p.m. when the Germans had a spasm of aggression. Under a heavy concentration of German artillery fire a company from the 38th Pz Grenadier Regiment made a raid

across the canal. Even the K Company had been relieved it is difficult to withdraw under fire. The confusion was terrible for this was our 1st night counter attack. We had called upon our artillery for a barrage in close support. We got it within 75 yards of our line and corrected it to 25 yards. This gave us a chance to get out and by mid night we were back in the position we had used the night before. Later we received word of a pending air raid and ordered to move out into open fields. a few planes came over and dropped flares which lit up the area like day light but no bombs were dropped. Our instructions were to freeze while the flares were burning, no movement to attract attention. This is hard on your nerves!

our activities for the next 3 weeks are summarized as "vigorous patrolling and active defense" but that likes a lot telling what happened. Instead of a day by day account I will try to list only things I think you will be interested in. We lost a lot of men in that 3 week period.

We had to stop the attack until we could stockpile ammunition, food, medical supplies, batteries, telephone wire, etc. The 117th Regiment which was on our left flank wanted boats for the river crossing. My regiment wanted bridges (foot) which had to be built by our combat engineers.

June 18 & 19 we had a storm ~~that~~ that was worse than the one right after D-Day. The port of Cherbourg was finally captured June 26 but the Germans wrecked the port installations and it was 21 days later that our ships could unload in the harbor. By now,

It could handle 15,000 Tons of supplies per day, moved 38,000 Tons first 3 weeks. of course we were landing more troops daily and the supply could not keep up the demand. The storm of June 1st had scattered the 2 giant concrete caissons constructed in England and towed across the Channel to provide an artificial Harbor for off loading ships were now useless at Omaha Beach. Some of our supplies in that waiting period had to be air lifted in by planes taking casualties out.

To set the stage for our next attack I went to write a little about the planning stage. a rifle company like I was in gets its orders from Battalion level which is the lowest unit to have a staff for planning.

3rd Battalion was made up of a Hdq. Company and rifle companies I, K, L plus M Co. which was a weapons company used to support us with water cooled machine guns and heavy mortars.

our Bn. Commander was Lt. Col. Paul McCollum during the time I was with K Co. He is the one who wanted me to be one of his officers. He was killed in Oct. on the bridge from Holland to Germany in the Siegfried line.

The Bn. staff includes an Intelligence office who depends upon the 3 rifle companies to supply him with patrol leaders to gather information. I was one of the ones selected from K Co. along with S/Sgt. Dickman, Sgt. Albert and our executive officer Lt. Carl Harnden. only the patrol leaders attended a briefing session where we were told what to look for and how to report. we were

sent out by Bn. and defriaged by Bn. after we returned before ~~the~~ back to company command, which was necessary to keep K Co. patrols from being in same sector as a patrol from I Co. or L Co. at the same time.

Bn. was controlled by 120th Hq. which has a staff for planning. 120th is controlled by 30th Div. Hq. which coordinates all 3 of its Battalions. It in turn is controlled by 30th Div. Hq. and its staff which is controlled by a Corps Hq. at the time of the invasion we were in the V Corps under Lt. General Berow who reported to 4th Army General Omar Bradley 1st Army Deputy Under Gen. Eisenhower who received instructions from Chief of Staff Gen. Marshall and the President of the U.S.

Planning is very detailed at the top level. The plan for the invasion of France was code named "overlord" I never saw it but have heard that it had more pages than the novel "Gone with the Wind"

I hope I haven't lost you because I'm ready to return to the level I worked at. Since taking a patrol back of enemy lines was very dangerous, we were compensated by being relieved of the ever day duty on the back of the Canal. My second in command did this for me while I stayed on the high ground in the comparative safety of the Co, C.P.

~~Battalion~~ Bn. wanted to know what units of the German Army we were up against. The best way to accomplish this was the most difficult (to bring back a live prisoner) if we got one and couldn't get back with him alive to ~~take~~ bring back his papers.

We were to locate enemy strong points especially artillery positions, command posts, ammunition storage, mined areas and terrain features.

Daylight reconnaissance was impossible because of the vast open spaces in the farm fields. The Germans knew the French hated them and had ordered them to leave their homes between the Town of St. Jean de - Daye and the canal. We were told that any who refused to leave were killed. This was at a time of year that the nights were at their shortest. In some cases three or four hours had to be spent crossing watery front lines, leaving only a hour or so for investigation of enemy positions.

On the night of June 19th our Co. executive officer, Staff Sgt. Lester Dickson and Pfc. Willy Schoen went behind the enemy lines to a depth of two miles and remained there for thirty six hours watching enemy movements, checking emplacements and installations. Pfc. Schoen was in my opinion a poor soldier but he could speak and understand German talking. S/Sgt. Dickson in our training for patrols carried his knife in his teeth when approaching his men. I couldn't do that. I used a knife strapped to my right boot where I could reach it as I crawled. I never did get close enough to use it. The advantage of the knife was it was quiet. I tried to get around this by using a German Bergrufen (Machine Pistol) so they wouldn't know it was an American who fired. Bm. Spadout and made me get rid of it. They said I could be killed as a spy.

about 2 days after Lt. Harnden rode his patrol I had a long talk with him, He told me my worst time would be getting thru the defenses along the Canal going & coming. If I could get by it and get into the town it would be easy to get a prisoner the ~~was~~ ^{said} the problem was getting back with him. They killed a couple and got their papers. He told me not to let Bn. know but it was not worth the risk bringing back a live prisoner. He said the worst part of his patrol was our own artillery on the town while they were in it.

My first assignment by Bn. did not involve going behind the lines. I was given a stop watch, a blanket, a pen flashlight and a map of the sector we were to attack ~~we were to attack~~ in divided into 4 sectors. I was to take one man with me to operate the stop watch. We were interested only in artillery fire. I was to mark the time I ~~saw~~ ^{saw} a flash in the sector it came from 5 for single or B for battery or more than one, while my partner started the stop watch at the flash and ended it with the explosion in our lines. It was exciting, we were in open ground near the crest of the hill ~~far~~ ^{far} out where I could see all around. It was an exciting night. I could not keep up with all the firing but I'm sure I got enough to locate the approximate position of their artillery which I would be assigned to go over and check out in a few days.

June 21, 1944 Sgt. Sam Albert took a

a 3 man patrol across and got back with good information and no losses. After debriefing he returned to his foxhole near the Co. CP where he was killed by a direct artillery hit on his foxhole. I think this incident more than any other helped me with my mental conditioning which is necessary for patrolling. Some of us were going to be killed regardless of what we did. Some of us would survive. The important thing was to try to complete your mission.

July 4, 1944 Sn. assigned me a 3 man patrol back of the lines. We could not cross before dark but I wanted to move down to the Canal near the bridge early. We had to wait in the low ground north of the Canal waiting for medical and Red Cross to bring out some of our wounded and dead under a flag of truce. They forced it then but not at Mountain where they picked the white Helmeints with red crosses for targets. I found out that Sgt. Hansen, Sgt. Howland, Cpl Bunker had been killed by snipers and Sgt. Kelly wounded.

Out of the 3 men promoted in Basic Training Sgt. Kelly was killed in our first battle, now Sgt. Kelley was wounded. I was the sole survivor. This caused me to do some sober thinking.

After the flag of truce ended, I left my men in place while I went down the line to inform our troops that we crossing at the bridge area and might have to come back

anywhere along the line, I wanted covery few but I wanted it high. We pushed some bridge timbers across the concrete pier so we would not have to wade across and waited until dark,

as soon as got to the other side we could hear Germans on the road in front of us. We crawled close enough to watch them. They were placing anti-tank mines in the road and foot mines on the east ditch by the road. They were traveling back and forth on the west side so we decided it was not mined. We went back to where we had crossed and went down the sides of the canal looking for a place to penetrate their line. Our pattern of operation was by signals (no talking) one man would move slow and merge with the shadows or whatever cover he could find. When he stopped the next man would leap frog him the same way. I had just emerged from a shell crater and was moving when I noticed a German helmeted figure behind a few gate. I believe he had spotted Medeiros who had stopped in front of me then he spotted me moving towards him. He opened up with a machine pistol but must have fired between us. I fired almost as soon as he did but with more success. I put 4 rounds into him. By that time Drinosarica who was behind me was in the water or well on Medeiros. (These men were of Polish origin which I had picked for their ability to talk to Blocker) Our orders were to abort the patrol and return to our lines if we were discovered.

When I got in the water I had to ~~calm~~ calm them down. They were thrashing around which would give suspicion away. Both of them had lost their rifles in the canal. We moved very slowly about 20 yards back the way we had come. The water depth ranged from waist high to chest high with drag offs over your head. The banks on both sides were clear about 12-15' back and then the hedgerow full of trees & bushes.

The worst part was coming out of the water, drifting enough to make the bank slick. If it had not been dark they could have shot us before we crossed the hedgerow. Our troops defending the Canal knew what was taking place and kept a heavy fire over our heads.

We still had to walk about a mile to K.C. CP where I dropped my patrol. I still had to walk about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to Bn. CP and be debriefed. I was wet, tired, and anxious to get it over.

I was debriefed by a Major Adams. It was all business. No change to exchange friendly information. Everything went well until he asked for the papers from the dead Germans. I risked incarceration by saying Major, Sir could I tell you about a lesson I learned on the Tenn. maneuvers. He told me to go ahead. I related spotting an enemy anti-Tank gun and moving my squad to capture it when suddenly I was flanked on both sides and told to drop our guns. One of the observers a Col called it a capture but said he would like to talk to the Sgt. before he was taken to the POW pen.

He complimented me for the way I moved my men but said it was doomed to fail. He went on to say if you don't learn my other lesson on these problems, Remember

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The enemy will never place a machine gun, anti-tank gun etc, without infantry to protect it. Take out the infantry before you try for the anti-tank gun.

I told Major Adams that I knew that the machine gunner I took out was not there alone. My patrol instructions were to abort the mission if we discovered back of the lines. He agreed and said they were glad to get what information I had and to get my patrol back.

One day while we still in the covered area, a Lt. Tuttle from 30th Div. Hdq. called on Capt. Smith and got permission to talk with me. I was in trouble about the letter from Tibby that I had tried burn that rainy night when I was helping guard Div. CP. He said if ~~it~~ fallen into enemy hands they could write to Tibby with news that I was captured or injured. I knew I was wrong and told him I was ready to accept my punishment. He told me he had ~~recommended~~ ^{recommended} that I be reduced in grade but Capt. Smith would not agree because he needed me. He said the lecture from him would close the deal that he wanted to get some pictures. one of them was published in our Division History. (Two copies enclosed).

In closing I want to tell you that, that I take no pride in these things I wrote about. I was a soldier serving my country at great personal risk & ~~at~~ sacrifice.

Your Grandfather - John

Will start next time with the attack across the Carol July 7, 1944

Jan. 23, 2008