

Dear Chad:

The last installment of my experiences in WWII got us in place for the jump off for operation "Cobra" which was destined to become known as the Normandy Break out - The most decisive battle of our war in Western Europe!

From the ~~rubble~~^{scattered} rubble heap of St. Lo, there was a road that ran 20 miles to Rennes. General Omar Bradley picked this area thinking our bombers could fly parallel to this road without danger of mistaking our front line. This was not to be!

The air preparation was a key feature of the assault plan. A rectangular area $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles wide and one and a half miles deep was selected for carpet bombing. The air plan - the heaviest ever used in direct support of ground troops called for two and a half hours of bombing - first by 350 fighter bombers hitting the enemy front lines facing us, then by 1500 Heavy Bombers assigned a target area 2,500 yards deep and 6,000 yards wide followed by another 350 dive bombers on the enemy front lines, and finally as our assault troops moved forward, by 45 minutes by bombing by 396 medium bombers hitting the rear portion of the target area assigned to the heavy bombers. General Bradley was particularly anxious that this rear area of the enemy be well hit because it appeared to be full of emplacements, probably artillery positions.

Three Infantry Divisions were selected to be the assault troops - the 9th, 30th, and 1st Divisions. To go through the hole we punched a motorized

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motorized
Infantry, and 2nd and 3rd armored Divisions would close
them the hole we made. The code word for this phase
would be "Bob Cat". I helped pass this word down the
line when we reached the designated place on the way
on July 26th but a lot took place before that happened.

at this time General Eisenhower was still at his
HQ in England. The attack was timed for July 21, 1944
jump. on July 20 he flew over to consult with General
Bradley. An overcast soaked in the beachhead and weather
forecast more rain. When General Eisenhower got back
to England and consulted with the weather people he
called about midnight and postponed it to await more
favorable weather.

The assault plan for the 3 Infantry Divisions assigned
to make the break out, placed the 30th Division ~~planned~~
~~to~~ on the East and we were given a second mission,
~~that~~ of fanning out to the South West along the West bank
of the Vie River or for or 12 miles miles from
our line of departure. This would put us across from
Tessy-sur-Vie where I was wounded on July 28th
but there's a lot before that happened.

The 30th Division was charged with protecting
the entire left flank of the breakout - a task of
particular importance because the strongest
enemy counterattack was expected to come from ^{British} ~~that~~
the German 15th Army in the Colmar area where
the German had thought the invasion would take place.

The 30th Division plan called for two
regiments abreast, my regiment the 120th Infantry

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would be on the right along the axis of the main highway to St. Miles. The 119th Regiment would be on the left with Haberman the first of objective, The 117th Regiment would be in reserve.

During the cover of darkness the night of July 23rd-24th we moved back off our lines 1200 yards to give us an extra margin of safety. Capt. Smith was selecting the places where we would relocate when he was wounded by a mortar shell ~~at~~ Lt. Carl Haender who took his place used a very simple plan for the move. Instead of scheduling it on a time basis, we were to hold our men in place until he sent a runner to move us a platoon at a time. I was the acting platoon leader for the 3rd platoon, K Co, 120th Infantry of the 30th Division.

We were still under strength. We were in the first army which had lost 1,000 men in the slow-day battle for St. Lo. 30th Division had lost 40% of its total strength. Front line rifle platoon like I was in had lost 75% of its men. I have many letters from Capt. Smith. In one mailed me April 25, 1995 he remarked how he could only account for 25 men left at the time he was wounded July 23, 1944 of the 212 men he took ashore in June 44 on Omaha Beach. I was one of the survivors at that time. I would receive my first wound July 28, 1944.

For operation "Cobra" the 30th Division was in the U.S. 4th Corps under the command of General "Lighting Joe" Collins.

The attack was scheduled for July 24, 1944. However that morning dawned with overcast skies

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so the attack was postponed until July 25, 1944. Several squadrons of heavy bombers which had already left their bases in England did not get the word. ~~On~~ We were expecting our planes to come in on a parallel course to the road and we had worked ~~our~~ front with reflective panels. Every allied vehicle had been repainted with a large white star which could be visible even at a high altitude. We were told the bombers would not bomb within 250 yards of the road. That's not the way it happened!

I remember it as clear as things I did yesterday. I heard the sounds of the planes coming and was out of my hole cheering them on. Two things were wrong - one, they were not the fighter bombers we were told would come first; second, they were coming in on a perpendicular course which meant they would fly right over us. Someone called for us to get in ~~the~~ our holes that bombs were being released. 300 heavy bombers dropped several hundred tons of explosives with one salvo falling in the area I was in. It's hard to describe the noise and how we felt. The first explosion blast pitched me around in my hole. I blocked out with the next blast. When I came to it was all over, a medic was wiping blood off my face. He said it was hard to tell whether the blood was just from my nose ~~or~~ a trickle from my eyes ~~at~~ ears. He was working me for transport to the Hospital but I told him the attack was called off and I needed to account for my men and I could go later. The way

it ended up I was still there to take what was left of the 3rd platoon into the attack the next day.

The 120th Infantry - my regiment had had 25 men killed 131 wounded and thousands of men shaken up. I was one of those badly shook up but still going. I can't remember anything until the morning of July 25. My guess is that I was exhausted and went to sleep.

July 25, 1944 we experienced our second bombing by our own planes in a twenty four hour period. Statistics show that this bombardment killed 111 aviator soldiers including Lt. General ^{Julius M. Quinn} who with Lt. General Buckner who was killed by Japanese artillery fire on Okinawa ^{shared} the distinction of being the highest-ranking US Army officer killed in combat, another 490 were wounded. My regiment, the 120th Infantry which was scheduled to spearhead the assault had suffered heavy casualties (later calculated as 64 killed, 60 missing in action, and 164 cases of combat fatigue.)

This combat fatigue is something real. I think all of us suffered a certain degree of it. The make up of individuals is different. All of us have a different breaking point. When a soldier gets to the point where he can not do his job he is sent to a hospital where he is treated for it. When he leaves the hospital, most go to a replacement depot marked "combat fatigue" where they are held until an assignment can be made where they can serve without being a danger to themselves or their fellow soldiers. Some have to receive a medical discharge.

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I believe that July 25 was the day Enoch Potter, Pikeville, Ky. a B.A. R. gunner in the 3rd ~~rd~~ Squad of the 3rd platoon broke under the pressure. It was later in the ~~day~~ ^{day} when we were fighting close up at the German 1st line of defense. He was in a ditch with Sgt. George Marchand the last of Klumpke's original platoon Sgts. according to Potter - Sgt Marchand told Potter to move his head just before he was shot and killed. The blood from Sgt. Marchand went all over Potter and his mind snapped. In letters and phone calls to me, Potter still thinks that shot was intended for him, I don't agree. There's no way to explain what happened in Battle when one man is killed and one by him survives.

For me there were 2 big differences in the July 24th and the July 25th Bombing. None of the bombs on the 25th landed as close to me as an individual and we had to go on into the attack and leave the Rescue efforts to others. The attack was scheduled for us to take off about mid-day soon as the Bombing ended. I thought it would be called off but I was wrong. I received the "Bo" signal on my radio and took the men who were able to fight with me leaving the rescue of wounded to others.

Hopes of finding ~~the~~ German defenses shattered from the bombardment were dashed as soon as we crossed the roof. We crossed a mine field with heavy casualties and then ran into a line of Panther (Forty-five Ton Tanks) protected by machine gun nests covering our route of approach. Some of these Tanks were dug in and all were covered by brush which made it hard for us to knock out with rockets. By dawn of July 26th we were for enough to

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Pass the word back by calling out the code word, "Bob Cat". I'm sure this was passed by radio as well but the call was a morale booster for me. I yelled as loud as I could. On that signal the armor started to roll. The 2nd armored Division known as "Hell on wheels" passed its Sherman Tanks through us. After that we were following Tanks instead of preceding them. I liked this better. We entered the town of Hebronn in the early daylight of July 26, 1944. The rest of that day and into the afternoon of the 27th we made good progress. Then we were slowed down by elements of the German 2nd Panzer Division, a well trained outfit which had been pulled out of the British area for a rest but just happened to be in our way at the time of the Break out.

During operation "Cobra" the 3rd platoon had many casualties but I can recall by name only men of the original Co. K. The replacements had not been with us long enough to stand out in memory after this long period of time.

Looking back I think the 140,000 artillery shells fired by our support did more good than the Bombing. However besides the damage inflicted on us some of the Bombs were damaging to the Germans. I have read that General Fritz Bayerlein, commander of the powerful unit in front of us reported 75% of his personnel were out of action - dead, wounded, captured or mangled with most of his tanks destroyed.

Next installment will start July 28, 1944, the day I was wounded the first time. Grandfather - John