

Monday, March 12, 2001

Dear Chad:

Picking up where I left off in my last letter — The enclosed battle map shows where we stopped in late afternoon July 27, 1944, our 3rd Battalion set up for the night with I Company by the Vire River — K Company was on higher ground to the right of I Co. J Company was to our rear in reserve located near the Battalion command post.

Early in the morning of July 28th I got a call on my radio to come to the K Co. CP. Lt. Harnden who was the last of the original K Co. officers and now in command of K Co. It had truly been a battle of attrition, especially for 2nd Platoon and Platoon ~~Leaders~~. I felt comfortable talking with Lt. Harnden. Before my July 4th patrol back of the German lines at the Canal he had told me of a patrol he made in that area. He said to forget any idea of bringing a live prisoner across the Canal. Based on his experience he said if you could get into the town of St. Jean-sur-Roye it would be easy to get the prisoner but impossible to get him back thru the German main line of defense. He said the worst part would be while I was in the water with a chance of being shot from either side. I trusted him.

The mission he assigned me was considered a patrol because it would take place out in front of our lines. I was to take the 3rd platoon out through I Company in the flat land beside the river Vire and search for a suitable place to get our tanks into the town of Cordes-sur-Vire, (I'm enclosing a Battle map showing our position at this time) The 2nd Armored which had passed through us was no longer in our area. Battalion Headquarters had advised him that General Patton was on the way

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To support us with his Tanker. The bridge across the Vire in our area had been blown. The German Tankers which had stopped us were on the other side of the river Vire. My job was to scout for a place for Tankers to cross. Lt. Harnden made it clear to me that this was quite different from the patrols we had made in the Canal Area where we went out under cover of darkness. Here I could expect to be under observation from the time I passed through I Company until I got back. The only protection I would have would be bomb craters and shell holes but if I got pinned down the Germans would blast us out with mortar shells and 88 fire. He showed me on a map the spot he wanted me to investigate and stressed that I was to return rather than fight even if I could not accomplish my mission.

As I stated before, I trusted Lt. Harnden but this patrol looked even more dangerous than the one I made July 7th with Lt. Hubbert and the Bogodka Team. Looking back on this as I write ~~this~~ today I am surprised that we accepted this mission. As we discussed it we had no way of knowing that in less than a week Lt. Harnden would be killed and before the 28th would I would be in a Hospital. We never saw each other again.

The first thing I did when I got back to my platoon was to explain the mission to my men. This was something that our Regimental Division Commander, General Harrison insisted on. Every element from the top down to the Squad leader must understand the mission and must always know without question who the second-in-command was. The mission was the important thing and it must go on.

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When ~~the~~ Lt. Nash was wounded and I took over the 3rd platoon, I selected a replacement 5/sgt. Zugg to be my platoon Sgt. Capt. Smith made him a 1/sgt. rather than request a replacement who we would know nothing about. I don't even remember his first name but as far as that goes Capt. Smith doesn't remember the replacement officers who passed thru K Company. We never regretted our choice of 1/sgt. Zugg.

After I had explained our mission to the platoon, I asked 1/sgt. Zugg to summarize it for me. I was satisfied and I know we all dreaded it but I decided it was time to move out. At the out post where K Co. joined F Company we received some disturbing news. On the last replacements we received we had a couple of twins and one of them had been killed by artillery during the night. I don't even remember their names but I do remember thinking about it would have been better to had them in separate separate outfits and split their choices.

When we passed through I Company lines informing them of what we were trying to do. We traveled about a mile before we ran into trouble. I was about the center of the platoon when the 1st scout up front on our left gave the hand signal to stop. While the others hit the ground, I went charging up to see what it was. He was pointing to a 2 story brick across a tributary that ran into the Vire. It looked like the combination of houses and barn common to France. Just before I reached the scout, a machine gun opened up from the upper story. I saw the scout grab his arms and go down just as I was hit in my right leg and went to the ground.

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I think it was instinct + training instead of being knocked off my feet like soldiers ~~are~~ who receive a solid hit. I hit the ground at the edge of a steep bank. My rifle and my radio were in front and below me, another burst started chewing them up Throwing splinters back into my face, head, and chest. Instinct made me throw my right hand across my eyes and parts of my radio started hitting my wrist to elbow. By this time in a trained response the platoon started putting return fire on the building which gave me a chance to roll down the bank out of the field of fire. In another trained response my platoon Sgt. who traveled near the back of the platoon made his way up to where he could talk with me.

I told him to take charge, take the wounded scout back with them by way of I Company and tell them to watch the river for a wounded American who had lost his rifle and radio. ~~I~~ I didn't want anyone to try to come down the bank and get me out because that would mean passing thru the machine gun field of fire. Our patrol kept firing as they fell back which allowed me to get to the creek and follow it to the river. Our Division Commander, Gen. Hobbs had after said in his speech that if the 30th did any running that it would be towards the enemy and if we did have to fall back to find a better place to fight, that we ~~we~~ would do so with guns blazing, that's what we did!

at that time I had no idea of the extent of my wounds. The encouraging part was that I could walk. The discouraging part was the large amount of blood I was losing.

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I stayed in the edge of the river until I reached the I Company sector of ~~my~~ lines. I have no idea how long it took but I was getting weak. They were expecting me. Two I Co. men waded out to help me up the bank and turned me over to their Lt. to give me first aid while the medics were on their way to transport me to the Battalion aid station. I wish I knew the Lt's name, it was the same one that made me pour out my apple Jack Brody on July 19th. Neither one of us mentioned it. all was business. He asked me where he should work first. I pointed to the gun shot wound in my leg and told him to see if they had ruined me. He cut my trouser leg off and with a gun he said you are probably OK but that's about as close as you can get without castration, when I was running up to check with scout, a burst of fire had gone between my legs with only one bullet giving me a flesh wound. all soldiers carry a first aid kit ~~on their belts~~. He gave me a pill, dumped ~~salpho~~ sulpho powder on the wound and covered it with a compress bandage tied with a strip he cut off my shirt tail & wrapped around my leg. By that time the stretcher bearers had arrived to carry me back to a jeep. at the Battalion aid station they removed 3 large splinters of my rifle from my chest and sent me to the 30th General Hospital to remove parts of the radio from my wrist.

Before I write about my stay at the Hospital, I want to make a few notes from my reference books. at 1:45 pm on the 28th control of the 30th Division reverted to the SIX Corps. My regimental History lists the number of prisoners we captured on July 24-28th as 275 made up of the following units: 899th, 942th

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894th, 897th Infantry regiments, 8th Paracate Regiment, 12th Assault
Bun Brigade, and 266th, 343rd, 352nd, and 460th Artillery
Regiments. Another indication of how fierce that battle
was is that the 30th Division requested 1200 replacements for
men lost at Tesny,

on avg - When Tesny was firmly in American hands, the 30th Div,
which had been in continuous contact with the enemy for 49 days,
was finally given a break for showers, clean clothes. A red cross
clubmobile served coffee and doughnuts. They had the first
pay day in France. I missed all this since I was in the
hospital but I did have showers, clean clothes, and best of
all sleeping with clean sheets on my cot in a Hospital Tent.

One way the Americans could gauge the success
of "Cobra" was in the German Prisoners Captured - Calculated
eventually at 20,000 men. The enemy was also seriously hurt
in losses of material - Tanks, Cars, Trucks, etc.

HOSPITAL - JULY 28, 1944 - AUG. 9, 1944

The 30th General Hospital was located in the area
we ~~liberated~~ liberated from the Germans in our attack June 15, 1944
which I have already described for you. It was all tents
(both large & medium sized) and pitched out over a large
area. It included an air strip to fly out patients for
treatment in England ~~at~~ ^{and out to} United States. Next to it was
the 66th Evacuation Hospital. It included area of
towns like Montmieu - En Brozier, La Comette, and
La Ray. It was an easy walk down to the Vire - St-Tout
Corral where we waited for build up of supplies for
the attack which would be the start of the battle for
St. Lo. It certainly looked different than when we fighting.

The Hospital was very busy at the time they brought me in. There was a steady flow of wounded. When they examined me they scheduled an operation for removing the foreign matter from my right wrist to the Elbo and finished cleaning out and dressing wounds on my face, Chest, & right leg. They gave me something to knock me out. I don't ~~not~~ remember any pain after that until it was all done.

Tibby saved the letters I wrote her while I was overseas. The first one I find for that period of time is dated Aug. 2, 1944. In it I say "This is the 3rd Hospital I have been in since I was wounded." I must have counted the Battalion side station as one, 30th General as two, and this must have been the 66th Evacuation Hospital where I was tagged England. In another paragraph "Have you had any pictures made lately? I'd love to have some snapshots. Most of the ones I was carrying with me are ruined. I've been in the water with them a couple of times. Guess a river saved my life the other day. That seemed to be the only way to get under those bullets. I was on a patrol and ran into trouble."

Another letter, Aug. 5, 1944—"I've been sick today. no connection with my wounds, after so long at the front on dehydrated rations, I just ate ~~more~~ ^{more} solid food than my stomach could tolerate. It was either that or not getting enough exercise. I've been catching up on lost sleep and building a reserve for when I go back. one doesn't get much sleep or good food up front but there's no ~~short~~ shortage of exercise. It still bothers me to walk where the clothing rubs against the bandage on my leg wound."

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Another letter dated Aug 6, 1944 on paper marked with a red cross shield like they give us at hospitals. "Sitting here listening to the radio, it is hard to ~~imagine~~^{realize} that not too many miles away a bitter war is being fought. Some of the men who only a week ago were at the front, are now playing boss ball, Crib Ball, or sitting around reading or writing letters while they listen to the radio."

Aug 8, 1944 - "Mailed you a Purple Heart award this morning for wounded in action against the enemy in France. It may mean more to me later but my memory is too full of comrades wounded much worse than me."
Another paragraph, same letter - "I regret that we were so sensible and decided to wait until this war is over to save children. I know we both loved children and if the bullet in my leg had been a few inches higher there would have been no choice. I guess a mile is as good as a mile. Keep your fingers crossed sweetheart, I hope to see you soon."

Aug 9, 1944 - V-Mail letter - "I was released from hospital today and on my way, back to duty. Hope to find some mail from you."

Aug, 12, 1944. "Returned to K Company this morning and found three of the sweetest letters from you that any man could possibly want. They were full of love, faith, and a hope for ^{our} the future." another paragraph same letter, "Believe it or not, they had a pay day here in France. Being in the hospital I got red lined and didn't get paid, I have no need for money up front but I would have liked to send some home."

The letters I have selected quotes from are in their original envelopes and bear the officers name ~~and~~ ^{rank} who cursoed them. I've always been glad Tibby saved them. Especially since block 34 on my discharge lists my my wound of Aug. 44.

Since 1999 when a service officer for VFW help me file a claim for compensation for my hearing loss and other injuries, I have better proof in 3 pages of a lengthy report from the VA explaining their ~~the~~ decision to me. I have copied 3 pages for you. Before they filled this report they gave me a physical examination and secured a copy of my service record showing my treatment July 1944.

The VA refused compensation for my loss of hearing because it did not occur within one year of my discharge. They did show a treatment for shell fragments to face/fore head but permanent residual or chronic disability. Same way with the wounds in my chest. There is a record of my shell fragments treatment in the chest area but no permanent disability. ~~from them~~. The evaluation of residual of gunshot wounds to the right thigh/groin area is continued at 0% because the scars are not disabling because of limited motion or tenderness. The evaluation in the area of my right wrist does show two palpable and visible small fragments and the X-ray shows multiple foreign bodies. They ~~are~~ granted and are paying me for a 10% disability since the date of my claim.

I'm going to close and start next time with leaving the hospital for the battle at Mortain. The Hospital report of shell fragments is a broad category, it includes what I know come from my rifle + radio. ~~Heart folder, John~~