

QUEEN AND ENGLAND

On August 5, we left Camp Shanks and went to New York, to load into the Queen Elizabeth ocean liner, which had been converted for use as a troop transport. We drove to the dock, and, carrying full gear and dragging our duffel bags, we entered the ship. Because it was impossible to see anything but the entrance, we had no idea of the size of the vessel. It was like entering a huge steel building with round windows. On the 6th we sailed, two months after the June 6 D-Day invasion of France. Ironically, had the 94th not been forced by events to repeat several months of training, it is very likely the division would have been among those troops that took part in the landings in France, at such great cost in men and materiel on that fateful day. We had ship and air escort for the first day and a half, and then just went at full speed across the Atlantic. A fact of life (and death) at that time which was unknown to the American public was the quite effective campaign by German submarines (U-boats) all along the east and gulf coasts of the United States. A great deal of shipping was lost to their torpedoes.

For this reason ships usually traveled in convoys, surrounded by naval destroyers and subchasers, and with air cover insofar as possible. Even this protection at times broke down, and ships were sunk. As it turned out, we could build ships faster than they could find and sink them, so we were able to continue providing supplies and equipment to our allies. The Queen Elizabeth was a different matter. The escort for the first day got her beyond the U-boat menace along the coast, and then she just sprinted for safe haven in Scotland. Her speed was calculated to be so great that no known submarine would be

able to aim torpedoes and fire them quickly enough to hit her. Beside speed, she also zig-zagged all the way across, with randomly timed changes of course. These practices must have been effective, because the great ship served through the war, carrying many thousands across, without mishap.

When we boarded her, of course, she no longer resembled the luxury liner she actually was. Every available space was filled with bunks three high, and both a man and his possessions were assigned to each bunk. The ship was divided into three sections from bow to stern, designated as red, white, and blue. Each man's bunk was in one of these sections, and each man had a colored badge, and we were not allowed to go to any section other than our own, except that we could temporarily swap cards with someone in another section for purpose of visiting friends or exploring the ship as far as possible. I was in the white section, and occasionally traded for a red card so I could go to the bow and watch the porpoises which usually could be seen swimming immediately in front of the ship. The purpose of the zones, of course, was to prevent overloading of any part of the ship, which might seriously affect her stability and operation.

When the ship left New York, we realized that preparations were finished, and that now we would face the enemy, and that many of us would be injured or killed before our job was done. This cold fact had an effect on nearly everyone, but the effects varied. Some men became withdrawn, and spent time worrying or sometimes praying. Others read their way across, devouring the thousands of books provided to pass the time. A great many adopted a "what the hell!" attitude, and spent the trip shooting craps or playing poker with little or no regard for winning or losing, since money would probably be of no

use where we were going. In keeping with my lifelong practice, I filled the time with reading. I observed another phenomenon among some. Men who had been good friends before now sometimes deepened their companionship into a closer bond. I guess at that point former companionship became true brotherhood, which endured through the coming months of trial.

We were fed only two meals a day while on the ship, and these were not really banquets. When the call came over the speakers for certain segments to report for mess, everyone responded immediately. Much time was used standing in chow lines. The only other organized activities were daily life-boat drills and calisthenics. I am sure the powers in charge would have had us go on hikes if that had been possible, but they at least had drills and calisthenics to annoy us and remind us regularly that they were in charge. One favorable result of the size and stability of the ship was that only a very few men were seasick. The daily boat drills were designed to direct us to the proper boat in case of a catastrophe. The only fallacy, which we all noted, was that there were not nearly enough boats or rafts to accommodate even half of the men aboard. The rest, I guess, would have had to swim or drown. Happily, that event was never realized.

None of the men I knew had ever crossed the ocean, so we had no real idea of the time that was involved in this voyage, except that we expected it to be quite a few days. To our great surprise, on the 11th, just five days after leaving New York, we saw the green of Ireland just ahead. In a few more hours we were proceeding up the River Clyde in Scotland, to Greenock, where the ship anchored away from shore because there were no

docks capable of handling her great size. Smaller vessels came from shore, and moved alongside, and we exited from the same entrance we had used to come aboard, onto those smaller ships which took us to the docks. When we were leaving the Queen, and looked back at her lying at anchor, we were literally stunned at her enormous size. The idea that such a huge machine could cross the ocean at a speedboat pace, with thousands of men aboard, was almost unbelievable.

I have heard various estimates of the number of people aboard, that range from 20,000 to 40,000. I do know that our entire division of more than 15,000 was only a portion of the load, and that there were numerous other units with more thousands of men also aboard, and that the staff and crew also had to be counted. Based on observation, perhaps the higher estimate is at least reasonable. At any rate, we had now bid farewell to the Queen, and were headed for a brief stay in England, before going on to the continent.

We were met at the dock in Greenock by Red Cross ladies who dispensed very welcome coffee and doughnuts and good cheer as we moved to the railway trains waiting to take us to our temporary location in England, where we would await orders to move to the continent for deployment into the allied order of battle. It was evident that this whole operation was well practiced by the time we arrived. Many thousands of troops had already passed this way and many more would do so before victory could be won.

We loaded into the train, and met for the first time the difference between American and British rail cars. These in which we found ourselves were divided into numerous compartments, each having doors to the outside and to the passageway inside. The

compartments held, I believe, six men. As soon as the train was loaded we began to move toward our next destination. In all this movement, of course, we had absolutely no choice or knowledge of what was to come. We were, literally, just along for the ride.

We watched with interest as the English countryside sped past. It looked very much as we had expected, from exposure to pictures and descriptions. Probably the most striking impression was the deep green of the trees and grass. There was no evidence, to our eyes, of any wartime damage to buildings or roads or vegetation. Of course this was rural land, and we knew the scene in many urban areas would be quite different. We knew of the German air raids that had punished England for several years.

In due time, the train stopped, and we off-loaded and got into trucks and rode for some time and were deposited at a tent camp in a green field, we knew not where. We were assigned to tents, where each man had a canvas cot and nothing else. We were called out into formation. Officers from the permanent staff of the area spent the next hour or more telling us we were located near the small city of Chippenham. They lectured us on rules of behavior in a foreign land, on actions to be taken in the event of air raids or any other enemy action. Strict warnings about security, including complete blackout rules, were emphasized. They told us we would soon be moved to the continent, but that this camp would be our home until that move took place. We were told that we would be allowed to go into town after duty hours, and that there was an American USO center where we could hang out and meet both American and British service personnel.

Following this orientation we were dismissed to evening mess, and most of us went to our tents and to bed. It was then that I began to get cold. I had my own GI wool blanket,

and also another which was issued by the camp quartermaster. As usual, I placed one under me, on the cot, to prevent cold from rising into my bed, and with the other doubled to cover me I laid down. Soon, I realized that it was really uncomfortably cold. I grabbed my heavy wool overcoat, and pulled it over me. For a while that was enough, but then I was forced to put on my clothes and get back into bed, where I shivered until morning. I don't believe I was ever really warm, during our entire stay in England. This was in August, but it might as well have been December, at night. The days were somewhat better, and we had enough physical activity, including calisthenics and hikes, to keep us a little more comfortable. We decided that the reason English people colonized all over the world was their wish to go to someplace where they could be comfortable. When they designated India as "the jewel in the crown" it was because here at last Englishmen could be warm.

In the area around our camp were a number of airfields, and it seemed that there was a constant procession of bombers lumbering overhead, going to bomb enemy territory or returning. I have heard it said that England became, during the war, just one gigantic aircraft carrier. From my own observation I can agree with that statement.

Also, on our hikes we passed many fields filled with long rows of trucks and tanks and jeeps and other machines of war, all heavily camouflaged by netting and vegetation to prevent their discovery by enemy spy planes. It was apparent that the war we were headed into was going to be a huge endeavor, and that we would be well supplied and armed to carry out our part in it

A day or two after we arrived at Chippenham I went to town after evening mess, and to the USO. There was a soft drink bar, and some small treats, and a lot of military people from both the US and Britain, who were listening and dancing to American swing on the record player. Supplies were rather meager, but when one considered that England had been at war for several years, and had been using most available supplies for the war effort, it was surprising to find anything. Of course the US was supplying most of the drinks and sandwiches and other items but even so there was not a great plenty.

It was said by many of the British military that we "Yanks" were "over paid, over sexed, and over here." It is true that while many British young men were in Italy or Africa or now, after D-Day, on the continent, their own country was full of US military, including thousands of pilots operating out of British airfields, and hordes of ground troops staging for movement to the continent. The general relationship in the Chippenham USO was quite friendly, and the governmental alliance seemed to extend down to this basic level. While I was drinking a coke that first evening, I began talking with a British young lady in uniform. We exchanged names, and talked about our origins, and spent a couple of pleasant hours chatting.

I should point out here that the "over sexed" in the quotation above was in many cases accurate. Because of the years of absence of home-grown males, and also because of the classic attitude "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die" a number of soldiers found ready and willing females in the villages and towns around our camp. I do not claim to be a saint, but I was only three months from my wedding, and truly loved Pat, and for various other reasons, including the chance of contracting a venereal disease,

I did not engage in what seemed to be quite a popular form of "entertainment." My new friend, Sheila Hughes, a country girl from Wales, seemed to be of the same mindset. We hit it off very well. During the time we were at Chippenham, we spent many off-duty hours together, walking through the town, eating fish and chips bought from a sidewalk vendor, just talking, or sometimes being silent together. We were really quite similar, both from small places and not very sophisticated, and overwhelmed by the situation we and our nations were in. I think she was pleased to find a "non-predatory" GI, and I was glad to have a non-GI friend to spend time with.

On a Sunday Sheila and I walked to the little park, which was really lovely with roses and other flowers and neatly trimmed grass, and a small band stand in the center. The local band was playing a concert, and there was a small crowd of local citizens listening, with children playing, and for a brief time everyone was forgetting the war. I watched the kids for a while, and then Sheila and I went to our company kitchen on a spur-of-the-moment mission. I had ironed the mess sergeant's uniform several times months before, and now was the time to use some credit. We talked Sgt. Blum into giving us about a dozen oranges, and went back to the park, where we began giving the rare fruit to kids. The dozen oranges were soon taken, and then I was delighted to see that the kids who got them didn't run and hide, or eat them as fast as possible. Instead, they, without exception, carefully peeled the oranges and divided them into sections, and shared their prizes with other kids. I have never forgotten that lovely scene, in an English park on Sunday, with children behaving in such generous fashion, and without any adult suggestion or instruction.

Sheila remained friends while I was in Chippenham, and she wished me well when I left with my division to go to war, and I never heard from her again. I hope her life was a good one, after. This brings me to comment on the strange circumstance in my life that brought female companionship to me when it was most welcome, and without any special effort on my part. There was the girl who sat with me in the movie in Sioux City, and Julya Lewis at Ole Miss, and Sheila Hughes in England. I think of them with gratitude for the pleasure I felt in their company. They were gifts of fate, at times when I really was lonely, and they have remained warm in my memories. Of course, if they are still living as I write this, they are all in their eighties, but in my heart they remain young and sweet, and cherished friends.

In the course of our training, both basic and advanced, we had become familiar with the sound of our own weapons, and those of the support artillery pieces. Each sort of arm has its own rate of fire and distinctive sound. Our mortars made a sort of thump, and one could differentiate between the 60 mm. and the 80 mm. sizes, both when fired and when the missile struck the target and exploded. Our machine guns fired at a fixed rate, and so did the BARs and Thompson sub-machine guns. Now, in England, much time was devoted to learning the sounds of the enemy armament.

Captured German weapons were plentiful for instruction purposes, and we soon learned to identify them. A distinguishing feature of their automatic weapons was the rate of fire. Their model '39 light machine gun, a basic infantry weapon, sounded much like ripping a piece of cloth, greatly amplified. It was not possible to separate the individual detonations. In contrast, our own guns had a steady thump-thump sound. The German infantry had many Schmeiser machine pistols, in contrast to the very few Thompson guns we had. Their Schmeisers, nicknamed Burp Guns, also fired at an extremely fast rate. Our instructors, all of whom were infantrymen from units that had seen much combat action, remarked that this high expenditure of ammunition would require the Germans to carry a much greater load of rounds into action, because they would be used in much less time than our own. Listening, we decide privately that our instructors probably knew what they were talking about, but even so it might be handy, in a fire fight, to be able to outshoot the enemy.

At any rate, we did learn the sound and other characteristics of the enemy's guns. The biggest surprise, however, was our first exposure to the 88 mm. cannon with which the

German army had replaced the howitzers and long rifled cannons of World War I. They did have heavy artillery, but by far the best gun in use in our war was the dreaded 88. While our artillery was very accurate, and the shells had a devastating effect on targets, they fired on a high trajectory, sort of like tossing a ball a long distance. The 88, in contrast, was the equivalent of a huge rifle. It was used with great effect in shooting directly at targets, exactly like a rifle. Whereas one could hear our artillery shells soaring overhead, with the 88 there was no sound except the impact of the shell because the projectile sped faster than the sound of the gun.

Also, the 88 was extremely versatile. It was used for infantry support. It was the gun mounted in the Tiger tanks which were superior to our own Sherman tanks, both in armor and in armament. It was used in antiaircraft action. Typically, it was mounted on a base with 360 degree traverse and 90 degree elevation, so it could be fired at any target on the ground or in the air. The only change required was in the ammunition used for different purposes. Months later, when we were facing the German infantry and artillery and tanks, we were grateful for those hours spent in England listening to the sounds of the enemy.

A weapon which we did not hear in England was the Nebelwerfer, nicknamed the Screaming Meemie, which was in essence rocket artillery. These had both physical and psychological impact. They were assemblies of rockets, which all fired at the same time and which emitted a truly terrifying howl when fired and while in flight, and impacted with heavy explosions on the target area. These were used with significant effect by enemy troops responding to our attacks. We first encountered them in Germany, and they

caught us by surprise.

There is no doubt that the German military had devised and produced some highly effective weapons. Generally, also, they were skillfully employed by the troops to which they were assigned. However, the German war machine could not match the output of American industry, and in the end they were out-produced. Also, I really believe the GI was superior in performance to his German counterpart. In addition, we had vastly superior transport, a fact strikingly apparent months later when the Wehrmacht collapsed.

We were also provided intensive instruction in aircraft identification. Up to this point, this knowledge had been without use. The infantry is most concerned with his terrestrial surroundings, and pays little attention to what is overhead. Now, however, it became wise for us to know when to hide from Messerschmidt fighters strafing our roadway. There were movies and flash cards, and most of us learned the silhouettes of both friend and foe.

As I think back on these matters, I am in retrospect impressed by the number of different life-preserving skills we ordinary infantry riflemen had to learn if we were to be able to fight and hopefully to survive. To walk forward until finding the enemy and then to fight and conquer him sounds like a pretty simple affair. In the actuality there is a lot more to it, and those who learned their lessons well had a much greater chance of survival than those who did not. I make no pretense that there was not a significant element of luck or fate in living instead of dying, but the better trained and wiser soldier often did manage to

augment luck with knowledge and thereby to live longer.

We were in the United Kingdom from August 12 to September 5, less than a month. The time went by swiftly, filled as it was with hikes and calisthenics and classes. When orders came to move out, we boarded trucks and were taken to South Hampton, where we boarded a British transport to go to the continent. We landed on Utah Beach, scene of the very costly D-Day landing by American troops on June 6. The crossing took about 48 hours, and we were very happy to get off the boat. While aboard, we were served meals of boiled cabbage, some sort of unidentifiable and questionable meat, and bread. Many preferred to eat K-rations if they were lucky enough to have them. With money, one could go to the galley and buy a steak sandwich from the British cooks. As I said, we were glad to go ashore, even though it brought us closer to the shooting war.

We left that British ship via cargo nets draped over the sides, down which we descended with full packs on our backs and rifles slung over our shoulders. We found ourselves in LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) boats, manned by two navy sailors, who ferried us to the shallows of the coast. When we began our descent on the nets, light rain began to fall, and it continued far into the night. The landing craft took us to the shallows, and we waded to dry land. Captain Donovan assembled the company, and we began our hike to our designated overnight camping area.

Captain Donovan was an excellent company commander, who had given us his best all through the months that led to this point. One of his strong points was his ability to accurately read maps and aerial photographs. On this occasion, however, that skill failed

him. Inexplicably, as dark fell and we hiked through the thoroughly unfamiliar French countryside, we lost our way. No, he lost our way. We continued to hike, after a brief stop to eat K-rations, until the captain realized that we had passed the same road junction, guarded by an MP, three times. Around midnight, the order came to fall out and set up pup tents and go to sleep. Of course, because we were now in an actual war zone we had to post perimeter guards, and this was difficult since there was no way of knowing from which direction an enemy might appear. The fact that the nearest active fighting was now taking place far away, since the enemy was now pushed back from Normandy, seemed to us lowly enlisted men to eliminate the necessity for guards, but nobody asked us.

It was decided by the officers that since we didn't know where any enemy might be, we should post guards in every direction. Meanwhile, my buddy and I decided against putting up our tent, but decided to use the shelter halves to make a ground bed, with one under on the soaked ground and the other over us like a blanket. We arranged ourselves as well as possible, and I had just gone to sleep when someone tapped on my shoe and I was told to relieve one of the guards. Which I did. My post to which I was escorted in pitch dark by our platoon sergeant, was behind an earthen bank or wall, covered with grass and shrubbery. (I soon learned that this was one of those infernal hedgerows, that made every field a fortress and cost countless American lives before the war moved to the interior and away from Normandy and Brittany.)

I stood for two hours, on brave alert, staring into the blackness, trying to see something, anything, that might be an accursed enemy coming. As I looked, I saw a tree, and then another, and soon was looking at a very respectable grove before me, in the dark. Behind

any one of them might be an enemy, creeping up, to shoot or bayonet me into oblivion. Nothing, however, happened, and in due course, after two hours of very conscientious guarding, I was relieved and went back to sleep.

When dawn broke, my buddy and I woke up, with the realization that we had slept with our feet in a drainage ditch and our shoes and legs were soaked. As the company stirred to life, we ate more K-rations and prepared to move out again. Before we did, however, the captain came to each platoon and apologized for leading us in circles the night before, and promised that today we would get to our destination without delay. Which we did, I am happy to say. As we moved out, I passed by the place where I had spent those two hours during the night. I looked over the hedgerow, and saw a large open field, with no trees, exactly where I had been seeing a grove during the night. I then realized that I was nearly as powerful as the general who had converted goats to lambs at Camp Claiborne. I, all by myself, had produced a verdant grove potentially filled with lurking enemy assassins, in a large and open pasture, and it took me only two hours to accomplish the job.

After an uneventful trek through a bright and sunny morning, we eventually arrived at the battalion assembly point, where we were able to set up our camp in proper order, and where our company kitchen was already set up and had a hot meal ready. (Kitchen and administrative people had been landed separately, and taken by transport to our assembly area.) At any rate, now we were in order, and could dry out, and everything was back to somewhat okay for now.

Before I begin telling about my story on the mainland of Europe, I want to present an excerpt from : **FIGHTING DIVISIONS**, which was written by Chief Warrant Officer E. J. Kahn Jr. and Technical Sergeant Henry McLemore.

94th INFANTRY DIVISION

There were dozens of Allied Divisions in the European Theater of Operations, but for nearly four months one of them - the 94th Infantry - fought a strange war on a 450-mile front all by itself.

When most of the Germans retreated back across France toward their own borders, after the breakthrough out of Normandy, some of them sought refuge in the ports of the west coast of France. Those at Brest gave up after six weeks of siege, but those at St. Nazaire and Lorient remained a menace. The 94th got the job of keeping them bottled up.

For 111 days the division kept a watchful eye on the 60,000 Germans in the two ports, with frequent battles on the perimeters of the enemy positions. Perhaps one of the oddest roles in the war was that played by the division's cavalry reconnaissance troop, which secretly established itself on an Atlantic island between the two ports, to observe German sea traffic back and forth.

Rarely before had a division operated on so wide a front and with such thinly held lines. To reinforce its own ranks, the 94th trained and equipped 29 battalions of French troops, who later, with the 66th Division, took over many of the division's responsibilities.

The 94th had headed for its "forgotten" war in Brittany right upon landing in Normandy on - coincidentally - D-plus-94, after a stormy crossing of the Channel during which some units were at sea as long as 30 days. For a while the men of the black and gray numerals thought they'd never get to see the main part of the war at all.

But they soon had those illusions shattered. The Doughboys of the Division - first of all American divisions to have its three principal units designated "Expert Infantry Regiments"-rushed northward from Brittany on New Year's Day, 1945, to help fill the gaps on the Third Army front caused by the shifting of General Patton's forces to help stem Rundstedt's counter-offensive.

Then the 94th ran into the Siegfried Switch Line, a series of strong buffer defenses on the Moselle and east of the Saar River. For the next five weeks the Division fought there, first merely holding ground and then, as the German bulge was lopped off, attacking through the Switch Line with the 10th Armored Division. By erasing this line, the 94th cleared the Saar-Moselle triangle and paved the way for the capture of the key city of Trier.

Then the 94th drove forward and forced a bridgehead across the Saar, at times paddling furiously against a 7-mile-an-hour current which gave the German defenders additional time to hurl steel at the oncoming Doughs. By early in March the Division had consolidated its gains across the Saar and was ready to strike again.

On March 16 the 94th was given the job of spearheading the Third and Seventh Armies' drive to the Rhine. Eight days later, the Division was at the river. It had taken the prize industrial city of Ludwigshafen, had fought for 195 consecutive days, and had captured more than 17,000 prisoners. The "forgotten" Division had made itself well remembered in a war it no longer had to worry about being left out of.