THE WAR YEARS

1942-1945

Pfc Robert P. Bowers
Aachen, Germany
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FOREWORD

I dedicate this story to my family and their future generations who may be interested. "The War Years" tells the experiences of Pfc. Robert Perry Bowers during his World War 2 Army military service period from November 7, 1942 to October 17, 1945. It includes over 15 months of foreign service in the European Theater of Operations with participation in the five major battles of: Normandy, Northern France, Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge), Rhineland and Central Europe.

Foreign Service was as a gun crewman in the 3rd section of Company "A" of the 959 Field Artillery Battalion. This Battalion was attached to the 2nd Armored Division and was a part of the 19th Corps, 1st Army from Normandy to the German border and the 9th Army from the German border to Barby (near Magdeburg) on the Elbe River when European operations ended.

WW2 was the most extensive, expensive and destructive war in our country's history. 16,000,000 Americans served in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard with an additional 130,000,000 supporting them at home. All had their lives disrupted and were subjected to varying degrees of hardship and sacrifice with the ultimate sacrifice being made by those who lost their lives.

I am especially grateful to my mother, father, brother and two sisters who supported me during this time with their daily letters and prayerful thoughts and especially to my brother, Lt. Clifford W. Bowers, who was a P-51 pilot in Europe and helped keep the German air force off my tail during this trying period.

This is but one story of the millions that could be told. I was one of the lucky ones in many ways.

This story is being written in June, 1994, 50 years after D-Day. (June 6, 1944).

THE U.S. DECLARES AND PREPARES FOR WAR

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941 set in motion a series of events none could have foreseen. In rapid succession the United States declared war on Japan and Germany and joined a worldwide conflict that had been going on since Germany invaded Poland in September, 1939.

The United States was ill prepared for war, having only a token Army (458,000 men) and an Air Force and Navy that had been subjected to terrible losses in the Pearl Harbor attack. Although mobilization came quickly, there were many enemy gains before much progress could be made in winning the war.

Men, 18 to 40 years of age, were required to register for the Draft. They were called up for military service according to a random numbering system that was supposed to be fair to everyone. When a number for a group of men came up they were all given physical examinations and classified as to their ability to serve. The classification of "1A" made him eligible for combat duty whereas "4F" was the classification for ineligible for military service. Once classified "1A" it was but a short time before being inducted into the military service. Local draft boards were responsible for supplying their quota of men.

All civilian personnel were put on a rationing system to obtain goods of any kind including food, gas, tires etc. Stamp books were issued that limited the amount of that item they could buy. Exceptions were hard to come by. Using up your quota of stamps quickly meant going without later on.

INDUCTION INTO THE ARMY

While attending the 1st semester of my junior year at Platteville Teacher's College at Platteville, Wisconsin I was inducted into the Army on November 7, 1941, 11 months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This had been preceded by a physical examination at Milwaukee and classification "1A LS" (the “LS" was for "limited service" because of poor eyesight in my right eye. The “LS" classification was eventually removed as I found out later while serving combat duty). Because I was within two months of finishing the first semester of my junior year at college I applied for a delay in my induction until I could finish the semester. At a 3 minute oral request session before the local Draft Board at Dodgeville, Wisconsin. I was denied this request.

My trip into the Army began at 5:00 AM at the Dodgeville, Wisconsin. courthouse on November 7, 1942. I was checked in, loaded on a bus with others I didn't know and transferred to Ft. Sheridan, IL near Chicago. The time here was spent in being processed which involved issuing Army clothing, medical inoculations, registration on the Army payroll, getting $10,000 life insurance, assignment to another Army base, etc. At that time I also signed up to buy an $18.75 War Bond each month that was sent home to my parents. This was from a total monthly payroll of $50 that left me about $31.25 to splurge on myself for movies, stationary, magazines and an occasional hamburger at the Post Exchange. I always had plenty of money and never required that any be sent to me from my parents. In fact, while overseas, I even had another $20 per month deducted and sent home.

Almost two weeks were spent at Ft. Sheridan. Most of the time was spent in learning "Close Order Drill".

One evening some local college girls were "imported" for a dance at the post.

I was relieved that I been inducted and accepted as fit for military service into the Army. The stigma of being classified "4F" had always been a possibility because of poor eyesight in my right eye. I would have detested it very much.

Although my family and I put up a brave front at our parting at Dodgeville our inner feelings were difficult to hide. Being a man, 21 years of age, I considered myself to have good control of my emotions; however, the uncertainty of what was yet to come and if I'd ever come back alive and all in one piece hit me suddenly one night while lying in my top bunk bed at Ft. Sheridan. Quiet, uncontrollable sobs shook me for a couple of minutes as I felt sorry for myself. After that I put it out of my mind and never had this problem again. I felt ashamed that I had allowed this to happen to me.

CAMP McCOY, WISCONSIN

Actual Army service began at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin on November 21, 1942 after a long ride on a train from Ft. Sheridan to Winona, Minnesota to catch an Army truck that took us to the camp. I was surprised and pleased to have been assigned to a camp within 150 miles of home.

The men transferred from Ft. Sheridan with me were all strangers. This caused me a slight problem when we were all assigned different barracks. I inadvertently walked away from my barracks that evening and couldn't remember its number or the people in it. The barracks all look alike and I spent a little time finding out where I should be. (I never forgot No.1831 again and could find it today).

About 3 months were spent at Camp McCoy receiving Basic Training. The winter was cold with a lot of snow. Since overshoes had not been issued, because of a shortage, it was easy for me to get frost bitten feet while drilling and marching in the snow.

Waiting for reassignment after completion of Basic Training left a lot of time on our hands. To use up some of this time a number of us were "selected" and given Fireman training. I was given four barracks to keep warm which I did for about two months. (I kept the boilers so fired up that the windows were open most of the time). Each week we had boiler room inspection that had to be "White Glove Clean" without any dust to be found. From time to time we were also subject to call to be firemen at theaters, P-X's, etc. which took a little more expertise. Being a fireman was not one of the favorite periods of my life. I felt I was capable of better things such as fighting the Germans or Japanese.

"Mail call" was an important, vital ritual of a soldier's everyday life. I was fortunate to have parents, a brother and two sisters who saw to it that a letter got off to me almost every day. Such devotion deserved a letter in return and I made sure that I did the same to them. In addition I wrote a prolific number of letters to others, hoping to get one in return. Most of them did, especially those in service who had experienced the disappointment of no mail at a "Mail Call". One week I received 27 letters and was the envy of everyone.

A lot of free time was spent going to movies and to the P-X's. Everything was very cheap which allowed your money to go a long way. At home the family was confronted with rationing of everything. I stupidly mentioned in one of my letters that some Kraft Velveeta cheese would sure taste good. A package containing the cheese soon came.

Little did I realize at the time that they had to give a lot of Food Stamps for something I could easily have done without. I had plenty of "free" food, clothing, housing, transportation, medical care, etc. and they didn't have to make this sacrifice for me. They were also making many other sacrifices, with shortages of everything, so that we might have enough to win the war.

It was during this time that I applied for the ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) which was open only to those meeting certain above average "IQ" standards (115). While on a 3 day pass to my home the Captain called and ordered me to return as I had been accepted for the program. (My brother, "Bud", who had driven up to get me in a smokey, oil burning "Model A" Ford had to make an early return trip). Immediately after returning to Camp McCoy I was sent by train to the University of Illinois at Champaign for further tests and eventual reassignment to Indiana University where I was to spend six months in this very intensive, highly accelerated (double the normal college pace) program. My days as a Fireman were over !!!!

INDIANA UNIVERSITY - BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

Basic 2 and Basic 3 Engineering courses were completed during my 6 month stay here. I was one of 7 students who had passing grades in all subjects out of 33 ASTP students who began the program here. Even so, the Army abandoned the ASTP program after Basic 3 was completed and I, along with 145,000 others, were reassigned back into the Army.

Mother visited me for about three days while here. It was great to see her. My very busy schedule of classes, drilling and Phy. Ed. during the day and studying at night did not give us too much time together but she was able to see me graduate from Basic 3 and receive my diploma at a brief ceremony on the football field.

I developed an infected big toe while here that would not heal. The Dr. had to remove the nail on each side of the middle section to get it to heal properly. I missed some time doing drills because of it.

Some of the courses taken here were later transferred to the University of Wisconsin after the war toward my Electrical Engineering Degree.

I was happy and lucky to have been a part of this program while it lasted. Less than 2% of those in the army qualified for it. It also gave me six months delay in being assigned to

an outfit going overseas to some South Pacific jungle island paradise. I much preferred going to the European theater if I had to go.

The abrupt canceling of the ASTP program after only nine months of its existence was very controversial. Many thought it was a waste of these so called "bright young men's" talents to send them back to the army. Those already in the army weren't happy that they were getting shot at and the ASTPers were living in comparable plush surroundings. Also some ASTPers and others thought they should step into some noncom job or be an officer once they were sent back to the army. I personally didn't see how my short stay in the ASTP program had qualified me for anything special. The army command didn't think so either and rarely assigned anyone to any job that fully used any special talents they might have had.

* Of regular enlisted men in the pre WW 2 army prior to Pearl Harbor 75% had failed to complete high school and 41% had never been to high school at all.

Henry A. Kissinger, future United States Secretary of State, was among the ASTP students at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania.

ASTP Program, Indiana University,
Bloomington, Indiana. December, 1943

FORT LEWIS, WASHINGTON

Upon discontinuing of the ASTP program I was put in charge of the 33 former students and transferred them by civilian passenger train to Ft. Lewis, Washington. All were assigned to the 14th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Three months were spent with the 14th training to obtain weather data for artillery firing information at Ft. Lewis and Yakima, Washington.

While at Ft. Lewis with the 14th I qualified as a Sharpshooter on the 1903 Springfield rifle. It had a real wicked kick to it. (Later I was issued a carbine which I never received any training on and which I never fired while overseas. This did not concern me as I had considerable experience with guns while hunting).

While training at Yakima, Washington we lived in 12 man tents heated with wood stoves that had the habit of sending sparks onto the tent roof and burning big holes in it. The weather was extremely cold and the stoves were very inadequate for heat, especially in the morning when they died out. Ice formed in the wash basins and in the cans of drinking water. The blankets and overcoat on top of the cot did not compensate for the cold coming up from below, resulting in very uncomfortable nights, even with all of our clothes on. While there I obtained a pass and went to a USO (United Services Organization) Club and did some dancing and had a couple of their famous apples.

On return from a furlough to visit my brother "Bud" (taking AT-6 pilot training at Aloe Field, Victoria, Texas) I found that I had been reassigned to the 959 Field Artillery Battalion. This Battalion was "next door" to the 14th at Ft. Lewis, was scheduled to go overseas and was one man short of being at full strength. Their choice of taking any man they wanted from the 14th 'boiled' down to picking the very best or that "Bowers" was near the top of the alphabet. In any event, after two days of scrambling to fit me out with all of the gear I needed, I was on a troop train heading across the northern part of the U.S. to Camp Shanks, New York.

I had never seen an Artillery gun fired in my life nor had any training for it. (Maybe I shouldn't have told them that I had shot a 16 gauge shotgun when I went rabbit hunting.)

The 959 Field Artillery Battalion, a former Tennessee National Guard outfit, was composed of soldiers primarily from that area although it had a few from all parts of the country. It consisted of a Headquarters Co., Three Artillery Co.'s and a Supply Co. Each Artillery Co. had four sections, each section of which had a 4.5" artillery piece towed

by a continuous track vehicle capable of hauling some of the ammunition, etc. and the 11 people required to operate the gun and vehicle. I was assigned to the 3rd section of Company "A" with Sgt. James Folk, from Findlay, Ohio in charge.

The 4.5" gun (about 114 millimeters) was of British design and could shoot about 13-14 miles. It was not very common in the U.S. Army. It had a separate 45 pound projectile, powder charge and primer cartridge that ignited the powder when struck by a striker when a rope (lanyard) was pulled. I was generally the one who pulled the lanyard (That ASTP training really qualified me for the job) although everyone did each other's job whenever he was needed. The projectile could be fitted with a standard fuse in its nose to explode on impact or a proximity fuse that could be set to explode a few feet above the ground. Smoke shells were also available to mark impact areas to be fired upon. Forward Ground Observers as well as Airborne Observers in L-5 Stinson aircraft were used to guide where the guns were to be aimed. (I never saw any of the thousands of shells we fired actually impact).

The Tennessee flavor of the 959 Field Artillery Battalion was detectable in the soldier's southern type speech and "hillbilly" philosophy to life. Added to that was Polish and Greek from Chicago, Germans from Ohio, Norwegians from Minnesota, etc. that mixed things up a bit. All of the Non-Com positions were filled with career army personnel so there was little opportunity for advancement.

CAMP SHANKS, NEW YORK

On our trip from Ft. Lewis to Camp Shanks we had a continuous night and day ride that took about 4-5 days. Meals were served aboard the troop train.

At Camp Shanks no one was allowed to leave the barracks they were in. A guard was posted at each door to prevent anyone from slipping out and "forgetting" to go overseas.

We were moved from Camp Shanks to the New York docks where we boarded a Dutch ship called the "Niew Amsterdam" on April 16, 1944. It was a large ship of 36,000 tons that was relatively fast compared to the "Liberty" ships and would take us across the Atlantic ocean unescorted. Its speed and zigzagging would enable it to evade the German submarines. It would cross in about seven days with additional time being used for loading and unloading, totaling 10 days.

The 959 F.A.. Battalion was "selected" for Military police (MP) duty while aboard ship. My job was to stand at the foot of the stairs and make sure that no one went on deck without their life jackets on. (There was always someone trying to sneak by). Standing way down in the cold bottom of the ship, at the foot of the stairs, at midnight, expecting a torpedo to blow in the side of the ship at any time was not something that I enjoyed. Add to that the stink and smell of several thousand people crowded together, with a large number of them seasick, sleeping in stacks of about 10 high 2 feet apart. (Before leaving port I bought a box of Hershey candy bars and ate about six of them. As we progressed across the ocean they became so distasteful to me, because of my sea sickness that I couldn't eat any for about three years). Although I did not vomit I was definitely on the verge of doing so most of the time. The North Sea was very rough and cold. No one could have survived in it for very long.

SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

We arrived at Glasgow, Scotland on April 2, 1944 (41 days before D-Day). We then boarded troop trains and traveled south through London to Salisbury, England near its south coast. Pitching our two man pup tents on the side of a very windy hill we then went to the Ordnance Depot near Winchester to pick up our artillery, trucks and other equipment which had been previously shipped. The artillery equipment was protected by thick sticky grease called "Cosmoline" which we had to remove before we could fire it. It was a real sticky mess. The next few weeks were spent in training, actual firing of the guns and preparation for the invasion of France. Trucks and other vehicles motors were equipped with air breathing "snorkels" so that they could travel in 3-4 feet of water if necessary while disembarking from the ships.

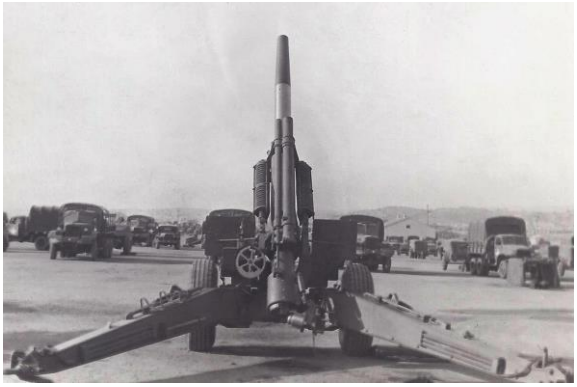
At the start of the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944 we were still at Salisbury. The tremendous number of airplanes (11,000) flying in this operation made us aware that something important was happening. We listened to the radio like everyone else and didn't know any more about it than the civilians did. About 5300 ships were participating in the greatest invasion ever attempted, depositing their loads of men and materials in the Normandy area. Our soldiers managed to get and keep a "toehold" there, after which our allied forces began to consolidate its position and build up for the eventual breakout at St Lo. The first several hours were utter chaos with many casualties and loss of equipment. During the first 24 hours 6600 Americans, 3500 British, and 1000 Canadians were wounded, killed, or missing in action. During that 24 hour period 175,000 fighting

men and their equipment including 50,000 vehicles of all types were transported across 60-100 miles of open water and landed on a hostile shore against intense opposition. It was as if the cities of Green Bay, Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin were picked up and moved---- every man, woman and child, every automobile and truck, to the east side of Lake Michigan in one night. I felt lucky again not to have been there that first day.

We received our "March Order" to go to France at 6:00 PM on June 19, 1944, 13 days after D-Day. We had anticipated it since our Colonel Jones, 959 F.A. Battalion commander had given us a little "pep talk" a few days before under some trees. Within about one hour we were ready to leave Salisbury and head for Southampton for boarding of our LST (Landing Ship, Tank) named the St Seiriol. Our trip to Southampton was at night, using slitted headlights pointing downward, overcrowded roads clogged with vehicles heading in the same direction and past fields jammed with materials, ammunition, etc. The logistics of this operation as well as the coordination of it is one of the great accomplishments of the war.

Our boarding of the LST, backing our vehicles into the ship, went smoothly but after leaving port a bad storm (worst in 100 years) caused us to stay near England for a couple of days before heading for Normandy. The rolling up and down motion could only be duplicated if it was done on a roller coaster and a bucking bronco all at the same time. I felt seasick again.

The British people were grateful for our help during the war and were generally friendly. 3,000,000 American soldiers did cause friction, however, because of their higher pay, competition for their women and the fact that we crowded into their limited living space. They were glad to see us leave to get the war over with and to have their country get back to normal again.

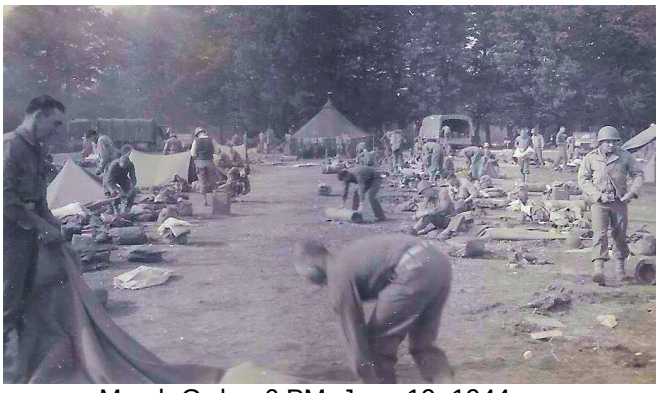


4.5 inch Cannon

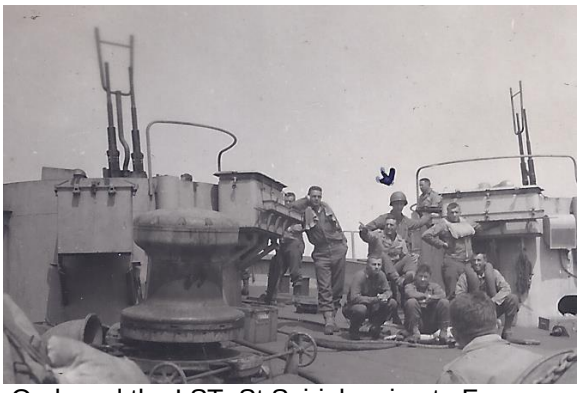
Cannon practice near Salisbury, England.

Bivouacking on a windy hill near Salisbury, England, May 1944

Testing Air breathing "Snorkel" for deep water beach landing.



March Order, 6 PM, June 19, 1944. We are going to France !!



On board the LST, St Seiriol, going to France. That's me with the helmet.

Our first view of Omaha Beach, Normandy, France, June 21, 1944.

Our last view of Omaha Beach with some of the 5300 ships in the background.

BATTLE OF NORMANDY

We landed at the six mile wide Omaha Beach in Normandy on June 21, 1944, 15 days after D-Day. The "Jerries" were several miles inland and since we had control of the air there was no interference due to enemy aircraft. Our unloading of men, materials and equipment went very smoothly without any enemy artillery fire. The beach was crowded with hundreds of ships, some of them sunk. Many ships had large balloons tethered above them with steel cable for protection from low flying enemy aircraft. War materials were stacked everywhere.

It was only after we had climbed the winding road from the beach to the higher ground (about 200 feet) and looked back at the vast number of ships (5300) that took part in the invasion that the seriousness of our situation began to "soak in". As we moved inland closer to the German lines we heard the sound of guns and saw the sky light up at night. We knew it was for "real" when enemy artillery shells ("Return Mail") whistled overhead or exploded close by. Everyone suddenly got an incentive to enthusiastically dig a deep foxhole. This was especially so when a neighboring artillery unit received "Counter Battery Fire" one evening with many casualties. Our first foxhole was a common "Community" one for about 11 men but was the only one of this type we ever built. From then on it was every man digging his own foxhole as he saw fit. (Communism doesn't work even when you are digging a hole----there is always someone who doesn't do his share of the work).

The Normandy area had many narrow roads with the small fields of 2-3 acres surrounded by earthen dikes with dense growth (hedgerows). The up to 6 foot high by 10-12 foot thick dikes were a real hindrance, providing ready-made, natural fortifications for the enemy as well as ourselves. A few Germans with a machine gun could sit in one corner unseen and command a whole field against a much larger force. It was very difficult to make much progress against them.

The U.S. buildup of military forces in Normandy from June 6 to July 25 became so concentrated with men and equipment that our Artillery Battalion was actually located closer to the front than a nearby Mortar Battalion--not a normal practice.

Our time in Normandy until the breakout at St Lo on July 26, 1944 was spent in digging in, sand bagging and camouflaging our position and equipment. Farmers went about their business tending to their red and white cows and old women picked up sticks for firewood

directly in front of our guns. We weren't sure if they were German spies reporting our position or not.

Very little firing of our guns were done during this time but we would make up for it later. We did have some harassment from low night flying enemy aircraft. (Bed Check Charlies) No one was allowed to fire their rifles at them because it would give away our position.

The control of the air by our Air Force was the major factor in making our positions tenantable and tolerable throughout the war. Without this control we would have experienced far more enemy plane bombing and strafing casualties. We would also have had to contend more with German Tiger tanks with their dreaded 88 mm high velocity, flat trajectory rifles. The Germans, on the other hand, had to contend with this problem and were continuously harassed whenever they moved. All of us remain eternally grateful for the contribution the Air Force made to our wellbeing. I especially want to thank my brother "Bud", who was a P-51 pilot during this same time, for anything he may have done in his 54 missions in this regard.

Our first (and last) "community" foxhole we ever built.
That's me sitting on the far right.

Our first camouflaged gun position, with sand bags.
Red and white cows grazed in front of us.

BATTLE OF NORTHERN FRANCE

St. Lo was a highway hub in Normandy that had to be taken before we could advance toward Paris. The hedgerows were a major obstacle that kept our progress to a minimum. To breach this obstacle we used "Saturation Bombing". On the morning of July 25, 2500 bombers of all types flying directly overhead of our position, concentrated their bombing in a relatively small enemy area just west of St. Lo. Our artillery also fired into this area at the same time helping to blast everything in it to "Kingdom Come". The German historian, Paul Carell wrote:

> *"Nothing could withstand it. Trench and gun emplacements were plowed up. Petrol, supply and ammunition dumps were set on fire. At least half of the 5500 men in the area were killed, wounded or buried alive, or driven out of their minds. All tanks and guns in the forward area were wiped out. Every road was made useless".*

Our troops were able to pass through this devastated hole in the enemy's lines with minimum interference from them. We actually went through bombed out St Lo as it had been captured the day before. It was only about 10-11 o'clock that night that the war began to take on a more serious note. After bivouacking in an orchard just south of St.Lo, surrounded by hedgerows, a low flying German airplane lighted up our area with flares and dropped bombs. One of the bombs hit our nearby ammunition truck causing shells to explode over an extended and unpredictable period of time. Another bomb hit near our artillery gun and within 75 feet of my 3 inch deep foxhole which I was frantically trying to dig deeper. The ground was made up of many small gravel type rocks so my progress in digging deeper was nil. I finally gave up and burrowed as flat to the ground as I could and would have gone deeper except for my buttons. After this raid our total Battalion damage included one man killed, a blown up ammunition truck, a destroyed 6 foot high red and white artillery aiming stick and a lot of dirty underwear. Needless to say, digging foxholes as soon as possible became one of my top priorities.

One reporter described the breakout as follows: "The breakout, when it came, developed with bewildering speed. On the 25 July 1944 Collins' 7th Corps, supported by Corlett's 19th (ours) and Middlton's 8th Corps jumped off for Operation Cobra south from the Periers-St Lo (Saturation bombing area) road". (We were with the 2nd Armored Division, 19th Corps of the 1st Army). The 2nd Armored was split up for some reason with the part we were with going farthest south. (They didn't tell me why.)

One of our main activities after the breakout was "around the clock" firing into the southwest corner of the Falaise pocket near Mortain and Domfront south of St. Lo. A large part of the German army in this area was trapped, mounting a counter offensive west towards us at Mortain and trying to escape to the east through a gap in the pocket the allies were trying to close. Our artillery was supporting the 2nd Armored Division that was helping to stop the German counteroffensive. Because of the fast movement of army units on both sides we were most fearful of German Tiger tanks suddenly showing up. Their 88 mm guns could pulverize you without warning. Fortunately, some British Typhoon fighters, equipped with rockets, were able to take care of them. The Falaise Gap did not get closed as soon as it should have been, thanks to the slow moving British, and quite a few Germans did escape to fight another day. The devastation in the Falaise Pocket and Gap included 10,000 Germans killed, 50,000 taken prisoner with about 20,000 escaping to the east. 344 German tanks and self-propelled guns, 2447 soft skinned vehicles and 252 guns were destroyed. The scene in the Falaise Gap area was described by James Lucas and James Barker as follows:

> *"The smell was all-pervading and over powering. So strong in fact that pilots of light artillery observation aircraft flying over the area reported that the stench affected them even hundreds of feet in the air. Above the battlefield shimmered a miasma of decay and putrefaction; everything was covered with flies and blue-bottles. In the hot August sun the cattle which had been killed only days before were masses of crawling maggots, and the unburied Germans, swollen to elephantine grossness by the hot sun inflating the gasses in their stomach, lay with their blackened faces in grotesque positions. Here there was no dignity of death. In the worst bombarded areas fragments of bodies festooned the trees ..... Some roads were impassable due to the congestion caused by burnt-out trucks, dead horses, smashed tanks and destruction on a scale which the Western Allies had never seen".*

The effect of our artillery fire was described as follows by the Germans.

> *"The incredibly heavy artillery and mortar fire of the enemy is something new for seasoned veterans as much as for the new arrivals from reinforcement units. The assembly of troops is spotted immediately by enemy reconnaissance aircraft and smashed by bombs and' artillery directed from the air; and if, nevertheless, the attacking troops go forward, they become involved in such dense artillery and*

mortar fire that heavy casualties ensue and the attack peters out in the first few hundred meters. The losses suffered by the infantry are then so heavy that the impetus necessary to renew the attack is spent. Our soldiers enter the battle so low in spirits at the thought of the enemy's enormous superiority of material. The feeling of helplessness against enemy aircraft operating without hindrance has a paralyzing effect; and during the barrage the effect on the inexperienced men is literally soul shattering. The best results have been obtained by platoon and section commanders leaping forward uttering a good old fashioned yell. We have also revived the practice of Bugle calls." (Over 50% of all enemy casualties were due to Artillery).

South of Domfront, on the southwest edge of the Falaise pocket we came across a huge crater in the ground made by a B-17 that had crashed with its full load of bombs. The crater was about 75 feet across and about 25 feet deep with the plane blown to smithereens.

We circled counterclockwise below the Falaise Pocket with the 2nd Armored Division and then westward toward Paris. Our rapid movement across northern France included driving at night with headlights slitted and pointing downward. One rainy night another raid by a low flying enemy aircraft dropping flares and bombs was experienced with no casualties or damage except a desire for another change of underwear. We couldn't dig any foxholes here either because of the rocks. How we found our way during those black nights over unfamiliar roads I'll never know, but we did.

Our main job was to help the 2nd Armored whenever they ran into spots of tough enemy resistance by blasting away at it. Forward observers either on the ground or in small aircraft would radio back information for aiming of our guns on the target.

We crossed the Seine River about 30 miles north of Paris and were able to see the Eiffel Tower. We were this far north because the slow moving British on our left couldn't (or wouldn't) keep up and we had to go into their area to make sure there were no Germans on our flank before going further. The British were always more cautious than we were and were the main reason for not doing their part in closing the Falaise Gap and letting 20,000 Germans escape to fight another day. This irked us very much.

It was shortly after this, on the east side of Paris about 30 miles, that our advance across France came to an abrupt halt. The U.S. Army's rapid advance had out run its gasoline,

ammunition and other supplies. Our Battalion trucks were temporarily given the job of helping to haul these supplies from Normandy to the front as part of the "Red Ball Express". This "Express" was a day and night operation with trucks going to the front traveling on one set of roads and those returning to Normandy over another set. This operation went on for about a week. The men of the 959 F.A. Battalion were kept busy helping to unload all of this equipment. Because of this delay the Germans were able to withdraw and regroup farther east.

Shortly after this our Battalion resumed its advance and was hit at an intersecting roadway by hidden 88 mm enemy artillery fire from across a valley. The Germans had allowed about a half dozen vehicles to go through the intersection, including the vehicle I was riding in, before firing and destroying the vehicle and its crew. This "split" in our forces had both a psychological and a sobering effect for those ahead and behind the intersection. Those behind were concerned about entering the intersection and those ahead wondered if they might be isolated and cut off. The Germans fired only one time and then pulled out but managed to achieve their apparent goal of slowing us down a little.

Our zigzagging journey across France through its small villages was an uplifting and exciting experience for me. The French were anxious to welcome us and continually asked for information as to the progress of the war. The war's fast pace made it impossible to give them accurate information even if we were able to do so. Being one of the spearheads with the 2nd Armored made us the most recent information they could hope to have. Sometimes we would go through a town's narrow streets at full speed with our personnel carrier pulling our cannon, barely missing the walls of the houses. Other times our convoy might have to stop while passing through. It was during one of these stops I was invited by a couple of small boys to visit their sister. (I didn't have the time).

One time while camped near a small town one of our men visited a home only to have a woman accuse him of rape. The mayor of the town contacted our Captain Saunder's. The Captain took action by loading twelve soldiers into a truck, including the accused and myself. We were transported into town, caused to stand in a line with the woman looking closely at each of us to identify the soldier who did it. Although she picked the accused man I am still sweating since we both look the same under the armpits. I have no doubt that the man was guilty since his favorite saying was "If they are big enough to look over a barrel they are old enough"

On reaching the Belgian border some of the town's people showed their appreciation by inviting a few of us to their homes for dinner. In Belgium we went up through the Meuse river valley to Liege and on to Maastricht, Holland. It was here, during a lull in the fighting, that I went to a movie house there and saw an American film with Dutch subtitles. I also went to a cave at Herleen, Holland that had numerous prehistoric animals sculptured in it.

It was now about the middle of September, 1944. There was very little enemy opposition or damage to the buildings in these towns as the Germans had rapidly retreated back toward Germany to consolidate their position. We were able to use barns and sheds for shelter rather than Pup tents, a real treat. In one of these barns I found several loaves of rye bread in a wall behind some boards. After tasting a slice I put it back. I figured someone else might find it later who was more hungry than I was.

Our rapid advance from Normandy to the German border contrasted sharply with that of "WW1" when trench warfare resulted in progress being measured in yards rather than miles. My father's brother, Perry Bowers, was a marine killed in that war, participating in nine major battles over many months that had a total progress not exceeding a half a day of mine. I traveled over much of the same territory that he fought in although I did not realize it at the time.

One of our positions in Holland was directly on the Holland-German border. I slept in a ditch dividing the two countries one night with another equally stupid soldier. It rained hard and we had to get up about 5:00 A.M. and haul our "gear" out. Needless to say, we didn't do that again. It was here too, as in Normandy, that old women went out in front of our guns to pick up sticks for firewood.

We were starting to get into the rainy, foggy, muddy season that is bad to start with and gradually gets worse. Our rapid movement had slowed to a snail's pace. We were staying in our positions so long it appeared we were going to stay there permanently. Our forward progress to the middle of December, 1944 had 'put us a short distance into Germany near Aachen. It was here that a few of us were given leave to go to a nearby rest camp for three days. We left most of our "gear", including our rifles, with our 3rd section of Company "A". We were at last going to sleep in a real bed for a change!!!

Breakout at Normandy going through
St Lo on July 25, 1944.
That is me in the center.

B-17 crash crater in France.
I am at the lower center of the hole.

Our camouflaged cannon firing into the Falaise Pocket below Normandy near Mortain and Domfront about July 31, 1944.

That is me (on right) pulling the lanyard (rope) that fired the cannon. We fired hundreds of rounds into the Falaise Pocket where thousands of Germans were trapped.

ARDENNES (BATTLE OF THE BULGE)

It was on the second day of rest camp that the Germans surprised everybody and began the "Battle of the Bulge" on December 16, 1944. I was about 20 miles north of this location near Aachen. The word soon spread and vehicles with their armament began to crowd the roads going everywhere in what appeared to be mass confusion although I'm sure that they knew where they were going. I was distressed because I wanted to get back to my unit and didn't know how I was going to do it. Fortunately a truck from our unit was dispatched to pick us up and we arrived back with our group an hour before they pulled out to go farther south in the Aachen area to defend the northern shoulder of the Bulge.

The Germans made considerable progress at first in their attempt to divide the 1st and 9th armies and to go all of the way to the sea. The ground was snow covered with low cloud cover and extremely foggy. Our Air Force could not help us under these terrible flying conditions. The main German force of about 300,000 men had (fortunately for me) struck about 20 miles to the south of my location. Their penetration was stopped by others including those at Bastogne and Patton's 3rd Army. The Germans began their retreat when the weather cleared and our Air Force was able to hit them real hard. The "Krauts' were pushed back to their pre-bulge location by the latter part of January, 1945.

I have since read that the Germans were originally going to penetrate into the Aachen area where I was but for some reason changed their minds. Luck was again on my side? Or were they afraid to come because I was there?

The Germans dropped parachutists behind our lines dressed in American uniforms and able to speak English. They disrupted things quite a bit by making everyone check everyone else, turning road signs around and giving false directions. There was a lot of confusion because of this. Those that were caught were executed as spies.

During the period of the "Battle of the Bulge", on January 1, 1945 one of our machine gunners shot down a German Focke-Wulf 190 fighter. It came hedge hopping over the trees of the Hurtgen forest, passed within 100 feet of me standing by my foxhole and circled around low to the left. Our machine gunner who had yet to fire his gun in combat, was alert, fired, and caused the plane to 'crash within 1000 feet of my location. Within minutes souvenir hunters from our Battalion were, animal like, tearing the plane and pilots

clothing apart. One was even using a hacksaw to cut out a swastika from the tail section. It bothered me that people could act in such a disgusting manner.

This plane was but one of 300 the Germans lost on that day as well as 253 trained fighter pilots. Hitler sent out his whole air force in an attempt to strike a surprise blow on our airfields. 206 allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground but his losses were irreplaceable and far more devastating to Germany than ours were to us.

Marlene Dietrich, the movie star, made a short U.S.O. visit while we were at this location and the Red Cross served us coffee and donuts.

My foxhole here was real deluxe. It had an old door over the top with dirt piled on it and an oil table cloth (with camouflage) covering it that was able to keep the rain and snow out. At one end my partner and I built a fireplace with a chimney and burned coal briquettes in it. It was extremely warm and cozy and about as close to being like home that I could hope for. I hated to leave it for something I was sure would be worse.

During the 'Battle of the Bulge" General Dwight Eisenhower transferred temporary command of our Ninth Army to the British General Montgomery. This was not a popular decision with us as we did not believe that, with his cautious, arrogant nature, that he could get the job done. Montgomery also had a habit of saying the wrong thing and taking more credit for things than what he deserved. Fortunately, this command was restored to the U.S. in about a month and a half when the Germans were pushed back to their original positions.

The cost of Hitler's desperate gamble was about 100,000 casualties in killed, wounded and missing. We also paid a stiff price with 80,987 casualties. 10,276 were killed, 47,493 wounded and 23,218 missing. Luck was again on my side in not being one of them. On January 28, 1945 the Battle of the Bulge was officially declared to be over. This German defeat, no doubt, helped to shorten the War by several months.

BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

The next obstacle before the Rhine River was the Roer River. It was not a very wide river but it could be flooded by the Germans who controlled the dams above it. The Ninth Army concentrated 3000 Artillery pieces, "hub to hub", west of the Roer near Julich. Our artillery gun was sandbagged in a garden adjacent to a house we were living in and a 240 mm artillery outfit was right next door living in the other half of the house. On February 23rd, 1945, about 4:00 A.M., all of this artillery began firing at once and for two hours made the loudest and most sustained noise anyone ever heard. They lit up the sky as if it was daylight. The offensive to cross the Roer was successful and we were on our way to the Rhine.

One evening before the Roer crossing, while living at this house, incoming enemy shells exploded in the garden about 50 feet from the house and also at one corner of the house. Six of us, including myself, all dived for the door leading to the basement and almost killed ourselves getting down the steps. Another one of our guys was outside in a shell hole doing “#2" and jumped from one shell hole to another with his pants half down trying to find the deepest one. There was no damage to our sandbagged gun. One soldier from the 240 mm outfit, living in the other half of the house, wasn't so lucky. He had the lower part of his jaw torn off during the shelling. Once you are shelled you get uneasy, expecting it to happen at any time.

It was at this location that I saw my first German V-1 Flying Bomb go overhead at about 1000 feet. Its stubby wings with pulse jet engine made a strange motorcycle like sound that pushed it along at about 400 miles per hour. When it reached its target over London the motor would stop and it would go into a steep dive. Its accuracy was not too good but the 5600 bombs launched toward Britain did cause considerable damage and havoc. Many were intercepted and shot down by our fighter planes in the later phases of its use. The long range German V-2 rocket, first used in September 1944, was almost impossible to intercept and also caused great damage to London. Driving the Germans back out of range of these weapons and bombing of their launching pads was a top priority. The Germans also had a twin engine ME-262 jet fighter they used toward the end of the war that could go much faster than our fighters. Their Tiger tanks, 88 mm artillery and machine (Burp) guns were better. Even the powder they used in their shells smoked less so as not to give away their position. The Allies were fortunate to be able to bring the war to an end before these weapons were able to be used in greater quantities. The

Germans were also very resourceful in using their dwindling manpower and materials to the greatest advantage. It is conceded that our Artillery was superior to theirs, however.

From the Roer to the Rhine, near Dusseldorf, an unusual instance occurred. One P47 American fighter, followed by another into a low cloud bank, chewed the tail off of the leading P47 causing it to go into a flat spin and "pancaking" in 82 steps from our gun position. The pilot parachuted to safety and the other P47 kept on flying. The crashed P47 had two large unexploded bombs still attached beneath its wings. I was lucky again.

Abandoned German artillery pieces, their breeches missing or barrels blown at the end so that they could not be used by us became a more common sight as the Germans retreated. Also the effects of Allied bombing of Germany's industrial Rhur valley was apparent in destroyed factories, bridges, railroad tracks, etc. The Germans were being pounded by the Allies and Russians from all sides and from the top by the Air Force. I was glad that I was not them.

Also on our way to the Rhine we had stopped momentarily to regroup. A German Messerschmitt 109 came over at about 1000 feet followed by about a dozen American P47's. We were able to witness a real dogfight as they twisted and turned at this low altitude. The P47's finally got him but we were subjected to quite a bit of stray machine gun fire from the action.

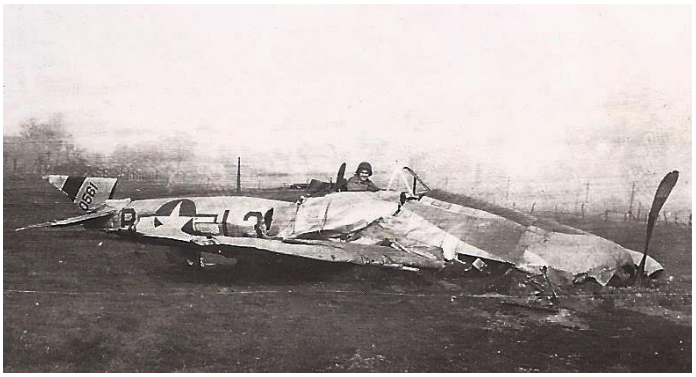
It was also at this location that I first saw a long line of prisoners being marched to the rear. This was to become more frequent in the coming weeks. Quite a few of them were old men and boys that had been forced into the Army to fill up the spaces left by their regular soldiers who had been killed in action. We could see that the war was coming to an end but that there was still plenty of fighting left to do. Our problem was how to do it and still survive.

Being shot at was bad enough but the lousy, cold, rainy, snowy weather in the winter of 1945 made everything muddy and miserable. Standing guard in the rain at our gun position in our leaky "Ponchos" was an often change of pace to being crowded into a Pup tent with your partner, listening to the rain pitter-patter on the cloth tent and have it seep through spots on the tent where you might have touched it. Our raincoats were really sieves and their pocket openings were slanted so as to be sure to fill up with water. Our shoes were muddy all of the time which we transferred liberally to the sides of our pants as we did our work. Staying warm in this miserable, cold, damp environment was impossibility. Some experienced frozen feet because of lack of overshoes and dry socks

during the snowy, wet weather. (The above experience is probably the reason I have never been enthusiastic about camping. To get my point of view, try camping outside of your home for a month straight in all kinds of weather without going inside for meals, toilet, having a bath or getting warm. Also stand guard with a rifle (and keep it from getting rusty) for two hours each night to keep the boogy man away).

A Focke Wulf 190 we shot down

Fire Mission in Holland



P47 crashed 82 steps from our gun position

That's me !!

Long line of German prisoners march to the rear.

3rd Section, Company "A", 959 F.A. Battalion, 19th Corps, 2nd Armored Division, Ninth Army, at the Roer River, Germany, February, 1945

Front Row: Cpt. Herb Cross, Pfc. Marshall Ward, Pfc. Bob Bowers Pfc. Birger Andeen, Cpl. Ted Siupski

Back Row: Sgt James Folk, Pvt. Donald Landkammer, Pvt. Floyd Irby, Pvt. Robert Wilson, Pvt. Ward Robinson, Pvt. Elmer Lundgren

Comments:

This group was together most of the war with Elmer ("Jake") Lundberg (Rhinelander Wis.) being our only replacement. Only Ward ("Robinson") Robinson and Birger ("Andeen") Andeen (Minnesota) were married. James ("Folk") Folk (Findlay, Ohio) took all of the 959 FA pictures and visited my parents place in Madison for a month after the war. Donald ("Landscape") Landkammer (Hebron, Nebraska) was not always prompt in relieving for nighttime guard duty. Floyd "(Irby") Irby's (Texas) philosophy of life was, "If they are big enough to look over a barrel they are old enough". (12 of us were made to stand in line while a German woman picked him out as the one who had raped her. I am still sweating this one out). Robert ("Two Gun") Wilson was a hillbilly (Big Piny, Missouri)

who was always digging up additional food to eat from some source and cooking and eating it all by himself. Ward Robinson did a lot of praying when things got tough but not otherwise. Elmer Lundberg was the only other person than myself from Wisconsin. Herb ("Herb") Cross (Tennessee) and I shared pup tents and foxholes together. (During a German shelling at this location Herb was doing #2 and jumped from one shell hole to another with his pants down trying to find the deepest one). Marshall ("Ward") Ward was a big, burly, no nonsense guy who was good to have around when it was necessary to wrestle that heavy gun into place. Robert ("Bowers") Bowers' fireman and ASTP training made him one of the best lanyard (rope) pullers in the group. I fired most of the several thousand rounds fired by our gun. Birger Andeen was the driver of our tracked vehicle that towed the gun. Ted ("Slup") Siupski, a Pole from Chicago aimed the gun as to direction and elevation from instructions relayed to him from our firing officer.

The lousy February weather is evident from the bare trees and muddy boots. But notice the firm resolution in all of the faces and the devil may care attitude of the cocked hats, none of which seem to fit. For as diverse a group as we were we got along extremely well together and if I had to do it all over again I couldn't choose to be with a better group of guys.

BATTLE OF CENTRAL EUROPE

The end of the war in Europe was beginning to be in sight but we still had the Rhine River to cross and to go on to Berlin. A lot still had to be done to bring Hitler and the Germans to their knees.

On March 24, 1945 we helped with a 2000 gun artillery barrage near Wessel that enabled our engineers to build bridges across the Rhine. We were still attached to the 2nd Armored Division and they spearheaded the drive to the Elbe River where it terminated at a town called Barby, south of Magdeburg on May 8, 1945, ending the European conflict. It was a zig-zag path, much of it at night across Germany's northern flat plain area. Toward the end we were going as much as 50-70 miles per day. One town we went through was Hamlin, the town where the Pied Piper lured all of the little children away. The weather remained rainy and cold with mud everywhere which was not my preference while traveling. The houses in the small towns were in good shape and had not received much damage. One homeowner pointed a shotgun at us in an attempt to protect his property but soon put it down when he realized his position was hopeless. Canned fruit and vegetables were in the basement of one home that I would have liked to taste but I left it as it was knowing that someone else would use it that was more hungry than I was.

One highlight of the "trip" was swimming across the Wesser River. The river is not too wide but is quite swift, green colored and cold. Two German kids had swum across it and were swimming back and I decided to do the same. Stripping down to my shorts, I jumped in and began swimming, ending up on the opposite shore about 300 feet down stream. Needless to say I went 600 feet upstream first and then wasn't too sure I would make it. It ranked as another of the most stupid things I have ever done and helped reduce my chances of coming through this thing alive.

Another memorable moment was when we came upon a road intersection that had two dead horses. Russian and Polish slave laborers were cutting them up for food.

Standing guard every night, looking into a blackness like a coal bin and waiting an eternity for your two hour shift to pass was definitely non habit forming. Every sound was magnified and suspicious and you didn't dare stray from your position because you'd never find your way back. (Then I wondered how my brother, in his P-51, ever found his way back from a mission over Germany to his English, postage stamp size base, in all of that cloudy, foggy weather and I felt lucky again.)

We waited for the Russian soldiers advancing from the east to come up to their side of the Elbe. They finally got there but I never did see them; nor did I care to. I was happy that this part of the war was over. I was now concerned that I would have to go help "win" the Japanese Pacific war before going home and finishing my college education.

There were some people back in the U.S. that thought we should have beaten the Russians to Berlin and saved all the headaches that came later with the Russians in this regard. Maybe so, but let them come over and take my place. I would have gladly let them do it. I had enough to last the rest of my life.

Lt. Clifford W. Bowers on a mission over Germany
In his P51D Mustang, "Skunk Chaser".
(I always did look up to my brother)

POST WAR GERMAN OCCUPATION

After May 8, 1945 we spent some time at a hunting lodge near Neuhaus, Germany. The Officers immediately ordered that we get back into our prewar routine of keeping everything spic and also span. The artillery, tractors, and clothing were washed. Artillery and rifles were cleaned and oiled, boots were "shined", roll calls were observed, inspections made, presentations made for medals, and Retreat was observed. We were again a "chicken __ " outfit.

Not long after this we were assigned to help guard about 10,000 German prisoners of war at a stockade near Nemitz. One day a grass fire broke out nearby. We loaded three truckloads of prisoners with two guards at the rear of each truck. I was most uncomfortable standing there with my rifle, actually rubbing shoulders with the German prisoners in this crowded truck as we sped along to the fire. Fortunately they took pity on me and didn't push me out.

It was not long after this that the 959 F.A. Battalion was disbanded. I was sent to Antwerp, Belgium to Camp "Lucky Strike" for return to the U.S., a 30 day furlough, and eventual reassignment to the Japanese Theater of War. This I did not look forward to.

My months stay at 'Lucky Strike' included a one day pass to Paris which I enjoyed very much. The French now wanted to get all the money they could from you for their "cheap" trinkets they had for sale and were no longer as friendly and grateful as when we talked to them while they were being liberated. They just hoped we would get out of their country and go home.

I began to wonder if they were worth all of our effort. Maybe I was expecting too much.

RETURN TRIP FROM EUROPE, FURLOUGH AND DISCHARGE

On July 20, 1945 we left Antwerp, Belgium, boarded a Liberty ship and took a "cruise" to the U.S. that lasted 13 days compared to the 7 going over. Although the ocean was relatively calm that uneasy sick feeling accompanied me most of the way. I knew I'd never be a sailor. I dreaded making that long trip across the Pacific that I was sure was going to come later. Dolphins swam alongside and were fun to watch.

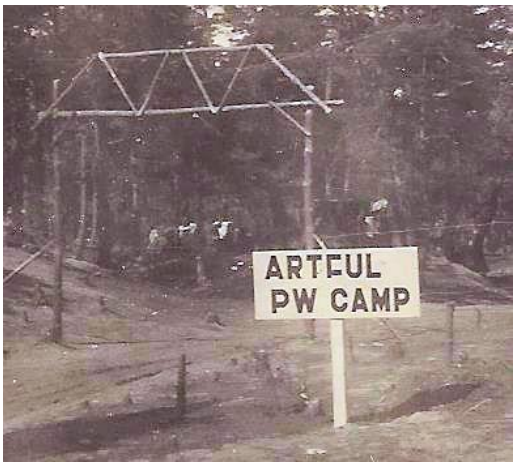
Our arrival August 3 1945 at Norfolk, Virginia was welcomed with a brass band on the docks. (I wondered how many times they had played the same tunes). We were transferred to nearby Camp Patrick Henry and served food at a mess kitchen by German prisoners. They seemed happy that the war was over for them and that they were in the

U.S. I was then transferred by train to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin where I was met by my parents for a 30 day furlough home. It really felt good to see them again and be in familiar surroundings. We didn't have to write letters for a while either.

It was during this furlough period, August 6, 1945, that the first Atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and another one on Nagasaki a few days later. The Japanese sued for piece on September 2, 1945.

For me the end of army service was still not over. The order of discharge depended on the number of "Points" you had which included how many battle stars you had on your army record. Although I had participated in five major battles and had enough "Points" with them to be discharged at Camp McCoy only three were on my army record at the time I returned from furlough to Camp McCoy. As a result, I was shipped almost 2000 miles by train to Camp San Luis Obispo, California where I spent over a month waiting for my battle stars to catch up to my record. Some of this time was spent at nearby Pismo Beach sun bathing and listening to the popular song, "Paper Moon", over and over again.

I was finally transferred to Ft. MacArthur, California near Long Beach and spent about a week going through the tedious process of getting discharged on October 17, 1945. I was within two days (October 19) of my 24th birthday. While here I visited my Aunt Min Hitchcock at nearby Long Beach. I returned home by train to Madison, Wis., a trip that took about three days. My total time in the Army was two years, 11 months and 10 days. One year, 3 months and 18 days were spent overseas.



Guarding 10,000 German prisoners after the war.

Once again-- a spic and span "Chicken ----" outfit.

OBSERVATIONS AND AFTERTHOUGHTS

WW2 killed over 50,000,000 combatants and civilians worldwide, maimed many more and caused untold suffering. Billions of dollars in property was destroyed. It disrupted peaceful lives and caused uncountable hardships to everyone who participated in it. It was the most extensive, destructive and expensive war ever fought. My own life was disrupted for almost three years and subjected to many dangers. Some of my friends and acquaintances who paid the ultimate price will always be in my memory.

Artillery, especially indirect fire artillery such as ours, was responsible for more casualties on the battlefield than any other type of weapon. I'm sure that the thousands of shells I help fire was responsible for some of these. I am not proud that I killed or hurt anyone.

In my opinion the war could only have been avoided by allowing the Germans and Japanese to take over the world, a country at a time as they had been doing, until our country was finally absorbed too. It had to be stopped. That was why millions of Americans were willing to sacrifice and make the effort to get the job done. Although I despise war I am proud to have participated and played a small part in its successful outcome.

I was fortunate and lucky in many ways. I could not have experienced what I did without qualifying for military service with combat duty. Poor eyesight in my right eye might easily have caused me to be classified "4F" and I would have stayed home and missed it all. Although subjected to a number of close encounters I was able to come through alive and unscathed for which I am grateful.

The war expanded this "Country Boy's" horizons many fold. The Army's "Guided Tour" enabled me to visit foreign countries, talk to these people and see firsthand how they live. The Army experience also taught me discipline, how to obey an order and how to perform under very trying and stressful conditions. I think it may have helped to make a better man of me.

My great grandfather, John Bowers, immigrated from the German State of Wuerttemburg, Germany in 1854. He probably left a number of relatives there. Many of his descendants here, grandchildren and great grandchildren, have returned to Germany to fight his mother country's people in WW1 and WW2. It is ironic that relatives have had to fight and kill one another that would have loved to know one another under normal, peaceful conditions.

The Japanese-American citizens in California during the war who were put in detention camps were treated with a great injustice. They were later awarded $20,000 each to partly compensate them for this. During this same period I was paid less than $1900 and got shot at besides.

Although I believe in an all-powerful God who is the Creator of all things and the Father of us all I still cannot resolve His permitting 50,000,000 of His children to kill one another during this world wide war. As the father of four children I would not let them do that to each other if I had the power to prevent it. I have no quarrel with those who found comfort in praying to God for their wellbeing and survival. I could not, however, see how God could choose between me and a German soldier, also praying for the same thing, that I was about to kill. Each of us were doing what our governments told us to do, which we had little control of and which we believed in. God probably was looking after me during this trying period in my life but luck had a lot to do with it too. I am still confused.

I am convinced that our purpose in being on this earth is to carry on the struggle of those that have come before and to create others to carryon after we are gone. This struggle includes trying to overcome all natural and manmade calamities and events that are a part of the environment we happen to be living in, or get in the way of; to try to find peace and happiness; to love and help others along the way while we are doing it and live our lives in accordance with the Golden Rule and the 10 Commandments. Being in the way of a disastrous event is a part of the universe, whether it be an exploding galaxy, a hurricane, a tornado, a war or my inadvertent stumbling over an ant hill and killing a thousand of God's creatures through no fault of their own.

Our country, without its church steeples, is unthinkable. The church provides a haven for people to express their love to their God, live according to his teachings and hope for an everlasting life. I cannot quarrel with it. Our family has regularly gone to church and will continue to do so. Personally, I believe that there is a Creator. I have reservations however, that any amount of praying will change the outcome of whatever I may be praying for or that I will ever go to heaven because of it. I am a hypocrite of the worst kind because I'm hedging my bets by continuing to go to church.

UNITED STATES ARMY SERVICE SUMMARY

Name: Pfc. Robert Perry Bowers 36281546

Gun Crewman: 4.5" Medium Artillery

Sharpshooter: 1903 rifle

Personal data: Caucasian, Brn eyes, Brn hair, Height 5' 8.5", Wt 170 lbs

Born: October 19, 1921 at Platteville, WI.

Parents: Clifford Lawrence Bowers; Myra Viola Power

Brother: Clifford Wallace Bowers

Sisters: Mary Jane (Burda); Maryellen (Barbian)

Ft. Sheridan, IL: Inducted Nov 7, 1942; Time 2 weeks; (Dodgeville to Ft. Sheridan, by bus).

Camp McCoy, WI: Nov 21, 1942; Basic Training, Fireman duty; Accepted into Army Specialized Training Program: Time 3 months

Indiana University: Completed Basic 2 and Basic 3 of ASTP program

Bloomington, IN: Total time 6 months

Ft. Lewis, WA: Assigned to 14th Field Artillery Observation Battalion; Later transferred to 959 Field Artillery Battalion; Time 3 months with 14th and 2 days with the 959 F.A. Battalion.

Camp Shanks, NY: Total time about one week. Troop train from Ft Lewis to Camp Shanks, NY; Embarked from NY on "Niew Amsterdam" to Glasgow, Scotland,.. Departed Apr.16, 1944, unescorted.

Glasgow, Scotland: Arrived April 26, 1944. Transferred by train to

Salisbury, England: Stayed in England until June 20, 1944. Lived in Pup tent on side of a hill.

Normandy, France: Arrived June 21, 1944 at Omaha Beach on LST navy ship, St. Seriol, from Southampton, England after 2 day bad storm. Stayed here until July 25, 1944. Went on to the Elbe River in Germany. Attached to 2nd Armored Div., 19th Corps, 1st and 9th Armies to May 8, 1945.

Battle Stars: (5) - Normandy, N. France, Ardennes, Rhineland, Central. Europe.

Europe Departure: July 20, 1945 from "Camp Lucky Strike" Antwerp, Belgium on Liberty Ship (13 days).

U.S. Arrival: August 3, 1945 at Norfolk, VA. and Camp Patrick Henry. Transferred by train to Camp McCoy, WI for 30 day furlough. Transferred by train to Camp San Luis Obispo, CA. (One month) and Ft MacArthur CA. (One week) and then discharged October 17, 1945.

Service: Total 2 yr. 11 Mon. 10 Days.
Foreign 1 yr. 3 Mon. 18 Days.

STATISTICAL INFORMATION

EUROPEAN CASUALTIES DATA

	AMERICAN	ALLIED
Wounded & missing	450,052	129,666
Killed	135,576	60,000
Total	585,628	189,666

It is estimated that Germany had 5,000,000 soldiers and civilians die during the war.

Eisenhower commanded 5,412,219 troops, 1,000,000 vehicles and 18,000,000 tons of supplies. One out of every seven of these troops were casualties. If only combat troops were included the ratio would be much higher.

As a combat soldier who experienced a few close calls I can only say that I was one of the lucky ones. The white crossed graves I saw on a recent visit to Normandy showed me thousands of the unlucky ones. I could so easily have been among them.

World War II Honoree

World War II Veteran

Robert P. Bowers

BRANCH OF SERVICE
U.S. Army

HOMETOWN
Dodgeville, WI

HONORED BY
Darlene Bowers,
Daughter-in-law

ACTIVITY DURING WWII

SERVED NOVEMBER 7, 1942 TO OCTOBER 17, 1945. PARTICIPATED IN FIVE MAJOR BATTLES: NORMANDY, NORTHERN FRANCE, ARDENNES (BATTLE OF THE BULGE), RHINELAND AND CENTRAL EUROPE. SERVED AS A GUN CREWMAN IN 3RD SECTION OF COMPANY A OF THE 959TH FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION, ATTACHED TO 2ND ARMORED DIVISION, PART OF 19TH CORPS, 1ST ARMY, FROM NORMANDY TO GERMAN BORDER, AND THE 9TH ARMY FROM GERMAN BORDER TO BARBY.

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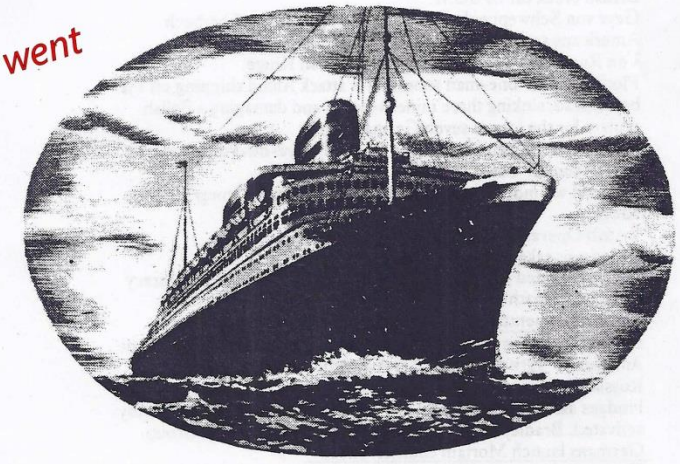

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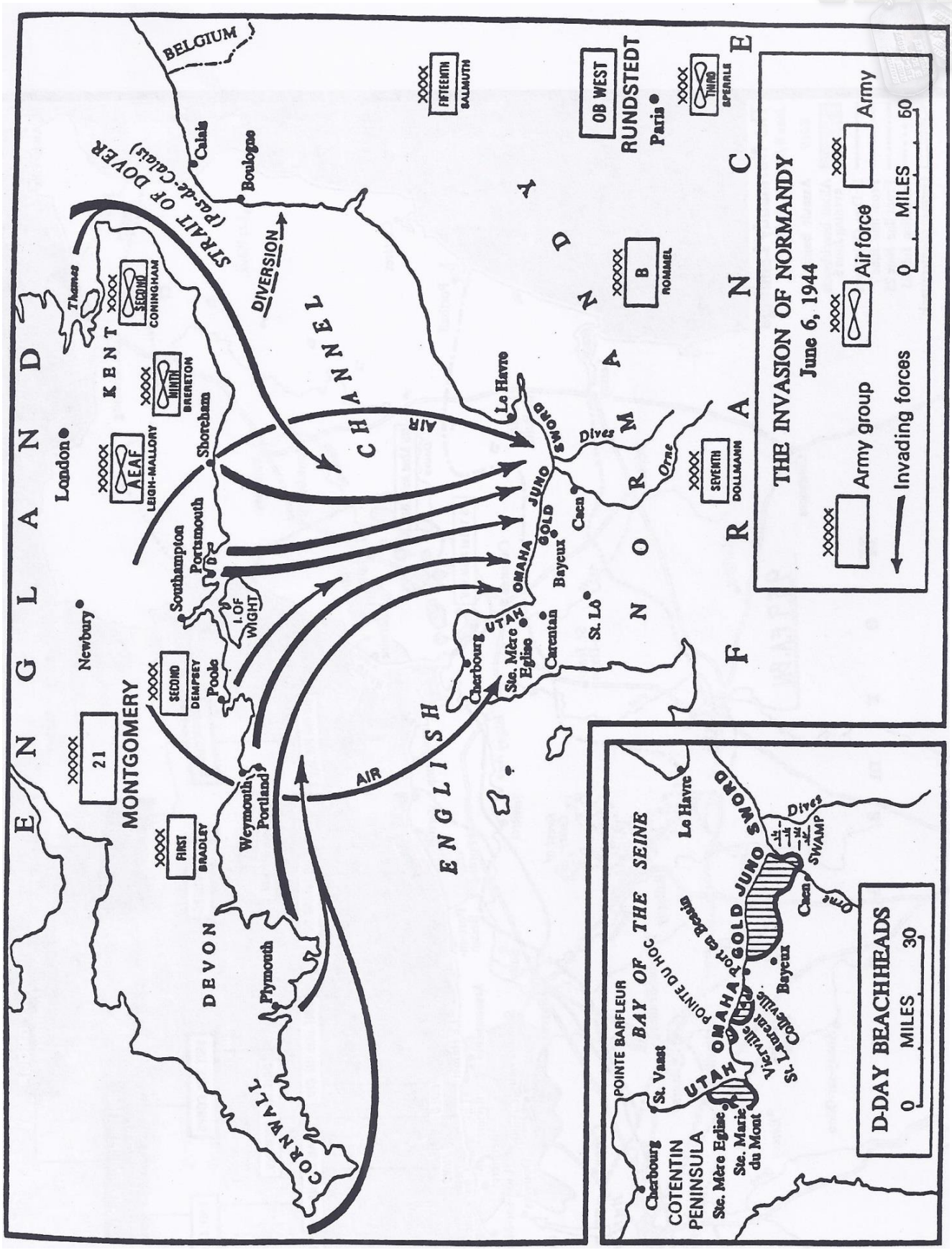
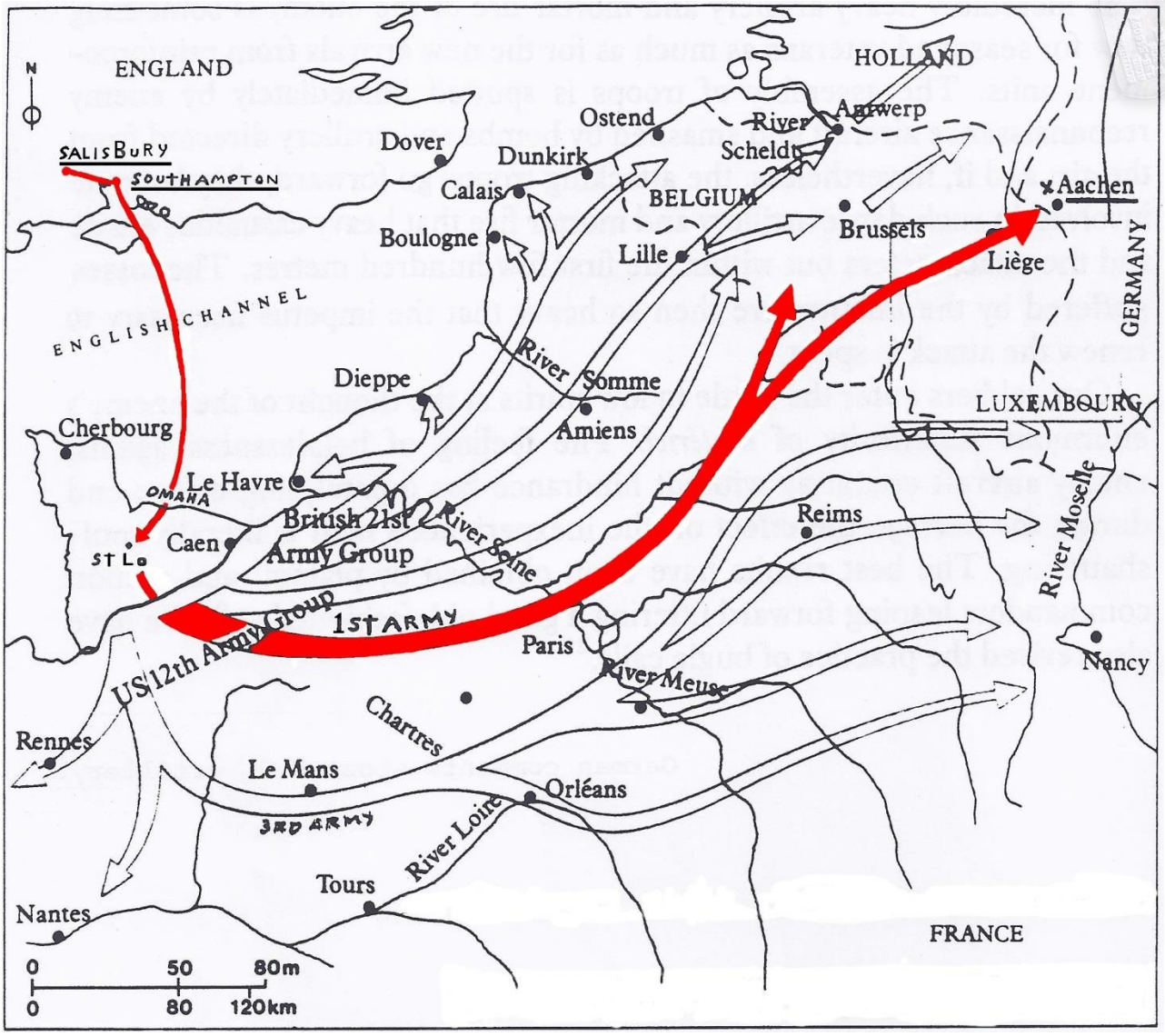
CHRONOLOGY OF THE NORMANDY CAMPAIGN

13 MAR 1943	Lt-Gen. F. E. Morgan appointed COSSAC - Chief of Staff to the Supreme Commander (designate)
23 JAN 1944	Eisenhower approves Montgomery's plan for the landings in Normandy
7-8 APR	Montgomery presents the OVERLORD plan at St Paul's, and presides over Exercise THUNDERCLAP with subordinate commanders
15 MAY	Montgomery's final presentation at St Paul's
3 JUN	D-Day postponed from 5 June to 6 June
4 JUN	D- Day ordered for 6 June
6 JUN	Allied landings in Normandy
7 JUN	Bayeux falls
8 JUN	U.S. First and British Second Armies link near Port-en-Bessin
12 JUN	Omaha and Utah beachheads united
13 JUN	British 7th Armoured Division checked and repelled at Villers- Bocage
	Germans open V-1 flying bomb offensive against Britain
18-21 JUN	The "great storm" in the Channel
18 JUN	U.S. VII Corps reach west coast Cherbourg peninsula at Barneville
19 JUN	Americans take Montebourg
22 JUN	Russians open their summer offensive against Army Group Centre with 146 infantry divisions and 43 tank brigades attacking on a 3oo-mile front
25 JUN	British Operation EPSOM south-west of Caen
26 JUN	Americans in Cherbourg
27 JUN	Resistance in Cherbourg ends
29 JUN	British break off EPSOM
1 JUL	Geyr von Schweppenburg sacked and replaced by Eberbach Americans secure Cap de la Hague
2 JUL	Von Rundstedt sacked and replaced by von Kluge
6 JUL	Flotilla of *biber* one-man submarines attack Allied shipping off the beachhead, sinking three minesweepers and damaging a Polish cruiser for the loss of seven German craft
8 JUL	British attack Caen, Americans seize La Have-du-Puits
10 JUL	British occupy Caen
17 JUL	Rommel wounded and replaced as C-in-C Army Group B by von Kluge
18 JUL	British Operation GOODWOOD east of Caen Americans take St Lo
20 JUL	Hitler wounded by bomb at his headquarters, abortive conspiracy and its aftermath rocks the Third Reich
25 JUL	American Operation COBRA launched west of St Lo
30 JUL	British Operation BLUECOAT launched south-east of Caumont Americans "turn the corner" at Avranches
31 JUL	Russians within 10 miles of Warsaw. Uprising begins
1 AUG	Hodges assumes command U.S. First Army, Patton's Third Army activated, Bradley becomes C-in-C U.S. Twelfth Army Group
7 AUG	Germans launch Mortain counter-attack
	Canadian Operation TOTALIZE launched towards Falaise
10 AUG	TOTALIZE broken off
12 AUG	U.S. XV Corps takes Alencon
14 AUG	Canadian Operation TRACTABLE launched towards Falaise DRAGOON landings in southern France
17 AUG	Model assumes command German armies, orders full retreat east from Allied pocket
	Falaise falls
19 AUG	Polish Armoured Division and U.S. 90th Division reach Chambois
21 AUG	Falaise Gap closed
25 AUG	Paris falls
1 SEP	Eisenhower assumes direct command Allied ground forces Montgomery promoted Field-Marshal
2 SEP	U.S. First and Third Armies ordered to halt by Eisenhower due to huge fuel and supply problems
3 SEP	Brussels falls
16 SEP	U.S. First Army units cross the German border near Aachen
17 SEP	Operation Market Garden launched against Arnhem and the Maas and Waal bridges

Overview of Normandy Invasion



Battle of Northern France



Path of 959 F.A. Battalion - June 19 to December 16, 1944

Normandy Bocage

Much is made of the hedgerows of Normandy, the bocage. The problem of putting a border around farm lands has always existed. In some areas, where glaciers had left a lot of rocks, stone walls were common. In other areas, wooden fences were the rule. In Normandy, the farmers had put up hedges to border their farms.

However, these were not the ordinary hedges of the kind found in people's front yards. These had deep ditches running along them and had been in place so long that their roots ran deep and they were very thick. A tank can uproot a small tree. But tanks running into the bocage found that they could not penetrate the hedges. More typically, they would ride up on the hedges, which would bend but not break under the tank's weight. The tank would ride on it and, like as not, find itself hung up on the hedge, the growth actually holding the tank off the ground, with its tracks unable to get enough of a purchase to either back off or move ahead, and with their thin belly armor now presented to enemy fire.

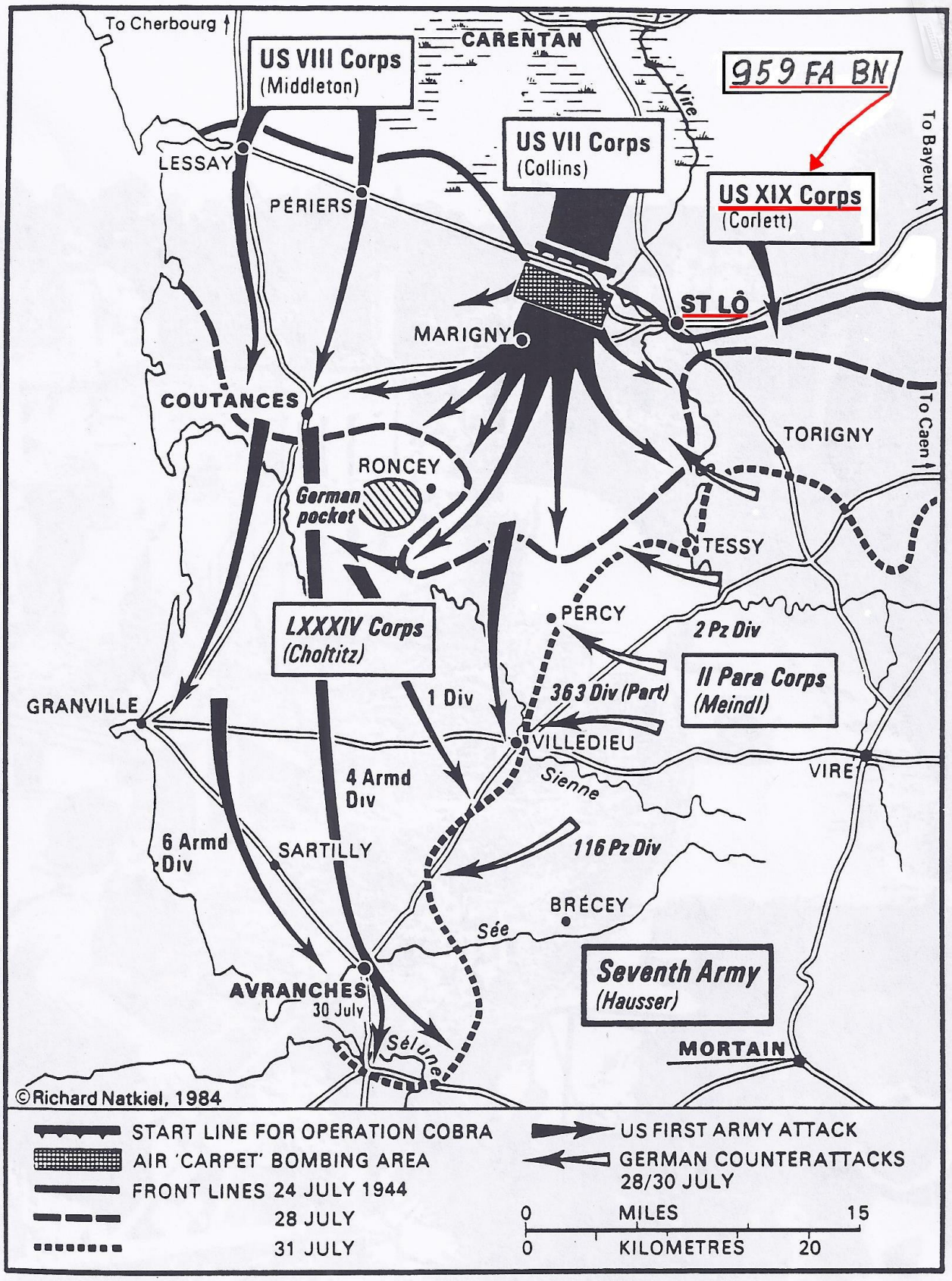
One could fire through the hedges but not move through them.

The solution was devised by two members of the American 102d Mechanized Cavalry Squadron, originally part of the New Jersey National Guard. Named after one of the inventors, Sergeant Cullin, the solution was to weld a series of steel teeth or prongs to a bracket which would then be mounted on a tank. The prototype was made from pieces of the German anti-tank defenses. This device would cut into the hedges and clear a path for the tank. While the Cullin Hedgerow Device didn't make the hedgerows disappear, it did ensure that they were not the obstacle they once were.

Typical scene in bocage illustrates how suited the country was for snipers, ambushes, and booby traps.

Tank modified with iron teeth, cuts through the bocage.

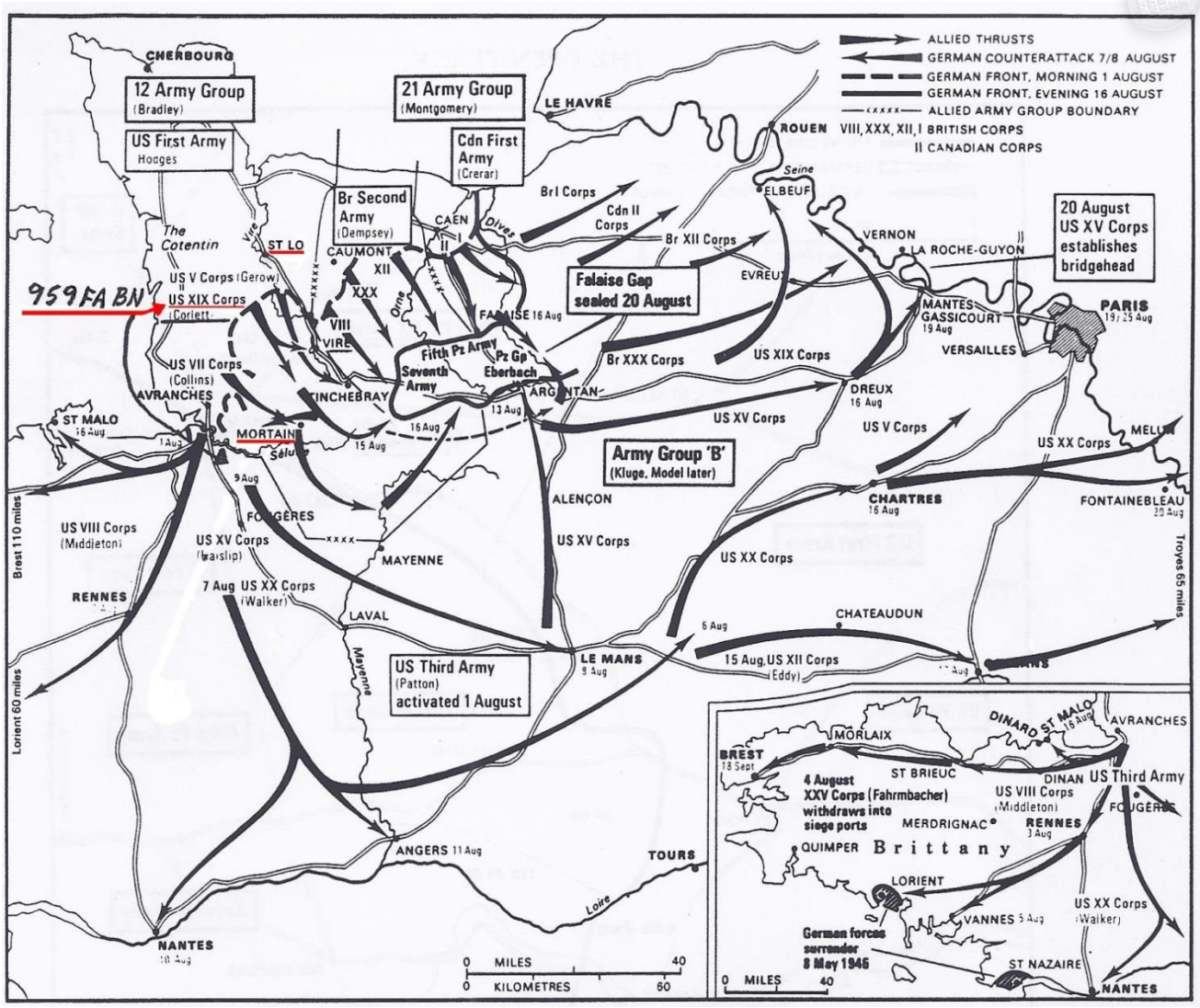
Operation COBRA - 25 July



Operation COBRA: 25 July–

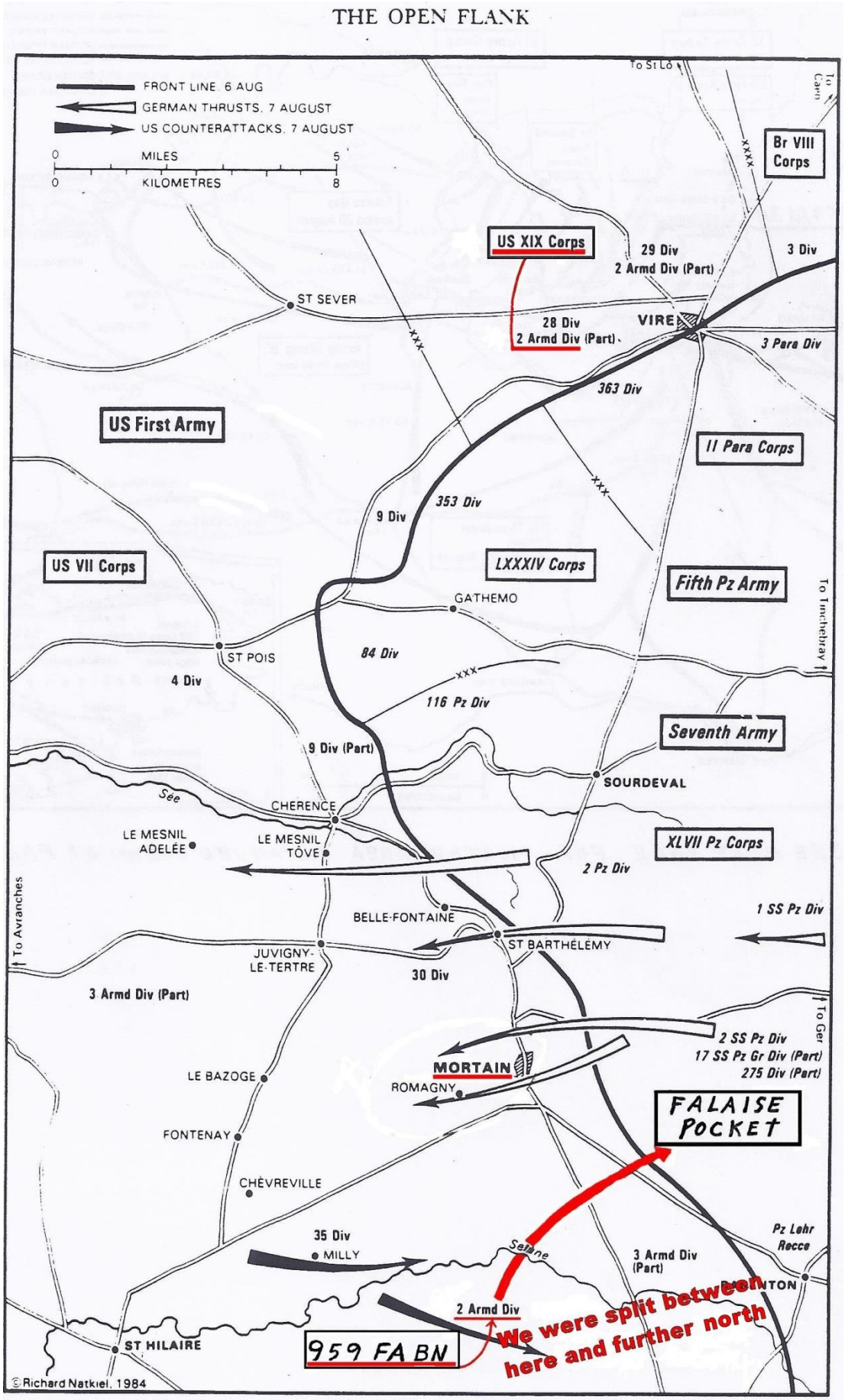
From a hilltop overlooking the road into St. Lo, two French boys watch convoys of Allied vehicles pass through the badly damaged city en route to the front. St. Lo was the scene of major fighting during the latter stages of the Normandy campaign.

Battle of Northern France



See next page for Mortain Area detail with Falaise Pocket

Battle of Northern France (Mortain & Falaise Pocket detail)



Bradley's Decision in Normandy

When Bradley learned of Patton's intentions to close the Falaise Gap he made what was to become the most controversial decision of the campaign. He ordered Patton not to proceed north of Argentan, later arguing that he was fearful of colliding with the Canadians, 'For any head-on juncture becomes a dangerous and uncontrollable maneuver unless each of the advancing forces is halted by pre-arranged plan on a terrain objective. To have driven pell-mell into Montgomery's line of advance could easily have resulted in a disastrous error in recognition. In halting Patton at Argentan, however, I did not consult with Montgomery. The decision to stop Patton was mine alone; it never went beyond my CP.'[1]

During this conversation with Bradley, Patton had begged to be allowed to continue north, saying in half-jest: 'We now have elements in Argentan. Shall we continue and drive the British into the sea for another Dunkirk?'[2] Unhappily, Patton's flip remark got back to the British, whose sensitivities over Dunkirk were still raw. They were not amused. The controversy resulting from Bradley's decision has yet to be resolved and he has defended it by contending that he preferred 'a solid shoulder at Argentan to a broken neck at Falaise'. Bradley has maintained, correctly, as we shall see, that Montgomery never prohibited his closing the gap nor had he ever proposed such a course of action. 'I was quite content with our original objective and reluctant to take on another.'[3]

The Canadians did not capture Falaise until late on 16 August, which still left some fifteen miles between the American and Canadian armies - the now famous Argentan-Falaise gap. The Germans began a massive withdrawal from the east and it was not until 19 August, when the Polish 1st Armoured and the US 90th Division joined forces at Chambois, that the gap was finally sealed. In that time the Germans absorbed terrible punishment as the units of the Seventh Army and the Fifth Panzer Army tried with great desperation to fight their way out of the pocket till the Allies slowly but inevitably closed the trap.

Some *10,000* German soldiers perished in the Falaise pocket and an estimated 50,000 were taken prisoner. There were thought to be nearly *80,000* Germans trapped, and though it later proved impossible to make an accurate accounting of how many escaped, the figure is thought to be about *20,000*.[4] Most German units simply disappeared as troops fled individually and in small groups toward the Seine. Of the fifty divisions in action in June, only ten were left as fighting units.[5]

Hitler's blunder at Mortain and the inspired decision to envelop and trap the forces of von Kluge at Argentan-Falaise had destroyed German resistance in Normandy and turned near- stalemate into one of the most crushing and decisive victories ever attained by the Allies during the entire war. As the remnants of Army Group B fled east with four Allied armies in hot pursuit, France was left wide open and undefended all the way to west wall of the German Reich.

Several brief descriptions will provide an idea of the magnitude of the German defeat. The area of the final battles around Trun, St Lambert and Chambois was littered with unburied dead, thousands of dead horses which had served as one of the principal means of transport for the Germans,[6] dead cattle and everywhere, broken and burning vehicles. In their excellent account of the battle, James Lucas and James Barker have

described the scene:

> The smell was all-pervading and overpowering. So strong in fact that pilots of light artillery observation aircraft flying over the area reported that the stench affected them even hundreds of feet in the air. Above the battlefield shimmered a miasma of decay and putrefaction; everything was covered with flies and blue-bottles. In the hot August sun the cattle which had been killed only days before were masses of crawling maggots, and the unburied Germans, swollen to elephantine grossness by the hot sun inflating the gases in the stomach, lay with blackened faces in grotesque positions. Here there was no dignity of death. In the worst bombarded areas fragments of bodies festooned the trees ... Some roads were impassable due to the congestion caused by burnt-out trucks, dead horses, smashed tanks and destruction on a scale which the Western Allies had never seen.[7]

1 Bradley, *A Soldier's Story,* p. 377.

2 Hansen Diary, 12 August 1944.

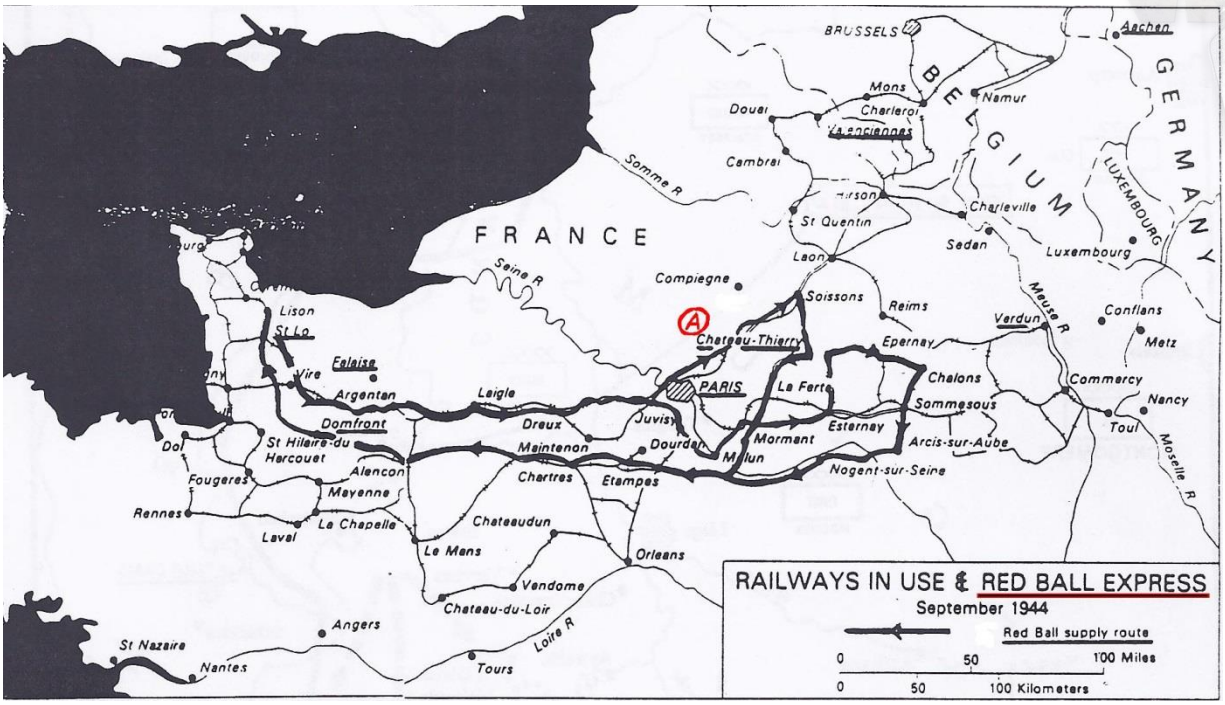
3 Bradley, A Soldier's Story, p. 377.

4 James Lucas and James Barker, The Killing Ground, London, 1977, p. 160.

5 Ibid.

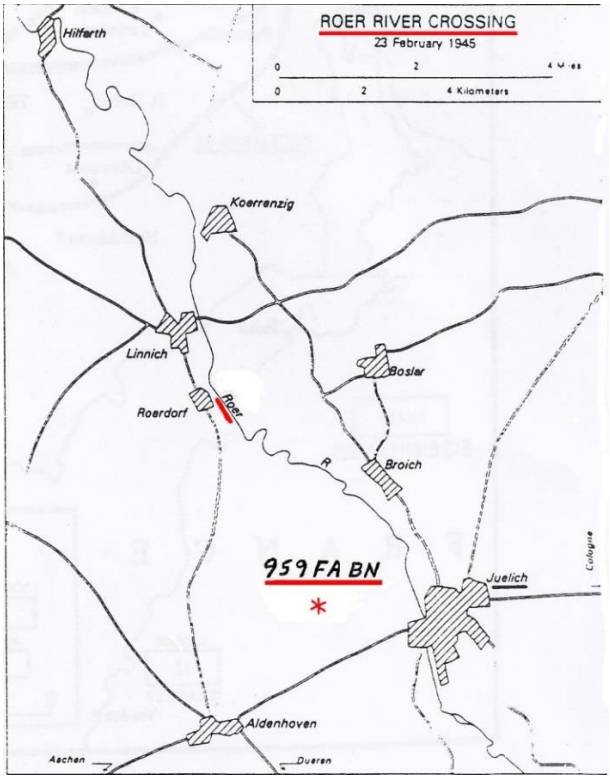
6 The Germans had lost so many vehicles to Allied air that for much of the campaign the use of horses became the only feasible means of transport, hauling guns, etc. In the age of the blitzkrieg it was a measure of the seriousness of the German situation in Normandy that what was once the most modern army in the world was reduced to the use of horsepower.

7 Lucas and Barker, p. 158



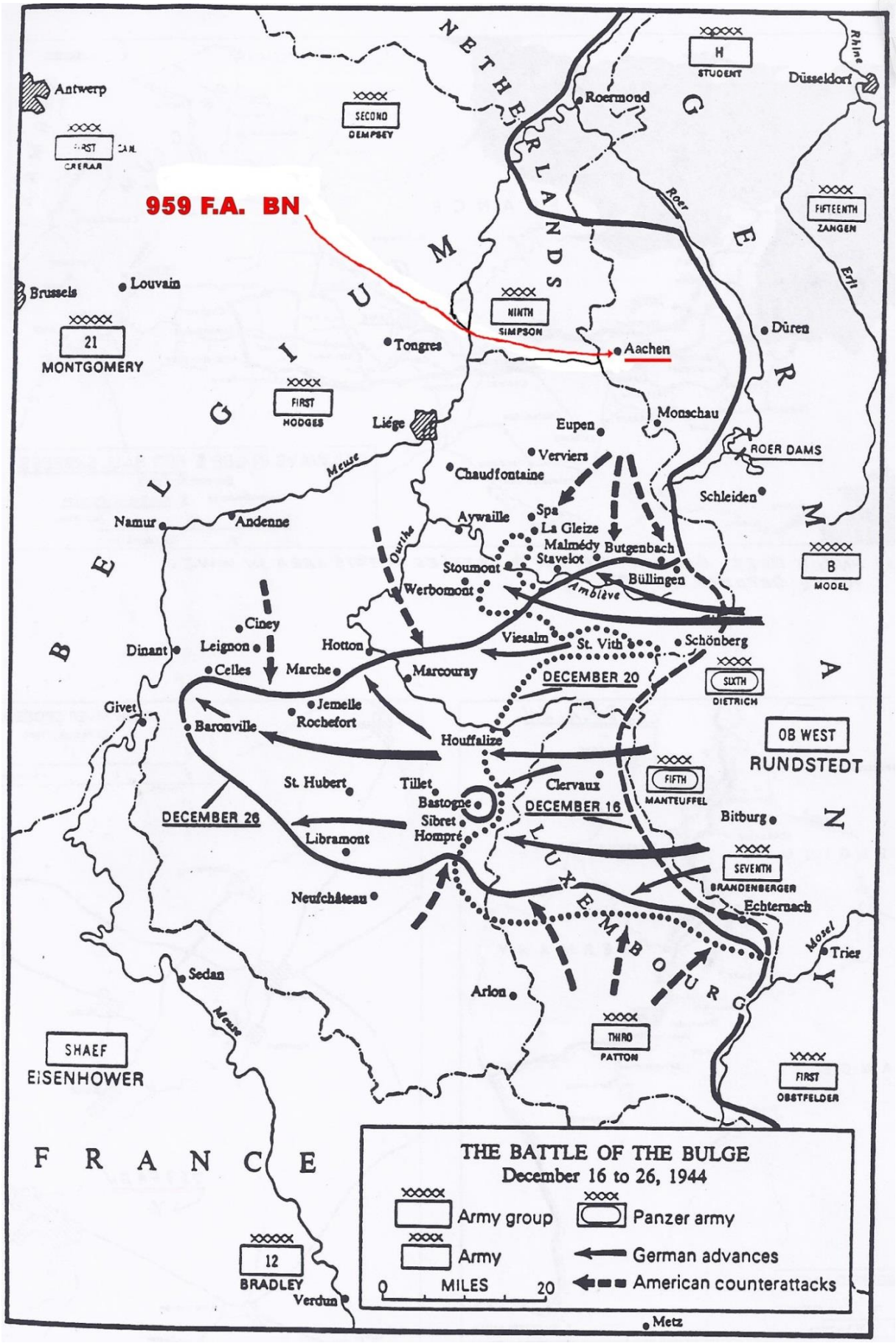
"Red Ball Express" re-supply route (loop).

(A) Uncle Perry Bowers fought (9) Battles in this area in WWI (killed 3 Oct, 1918)

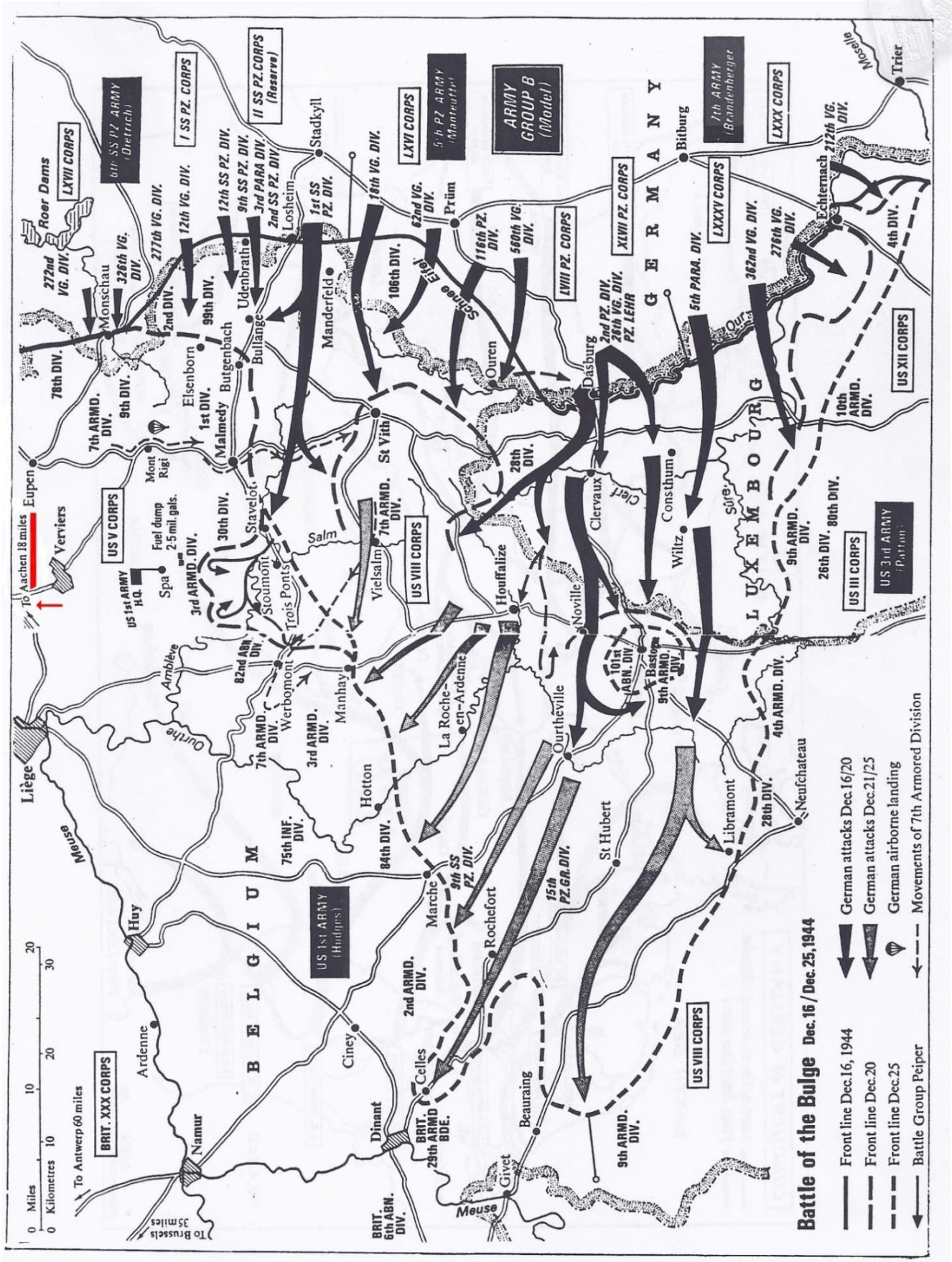


Where we crossed the Roer River near Juelich

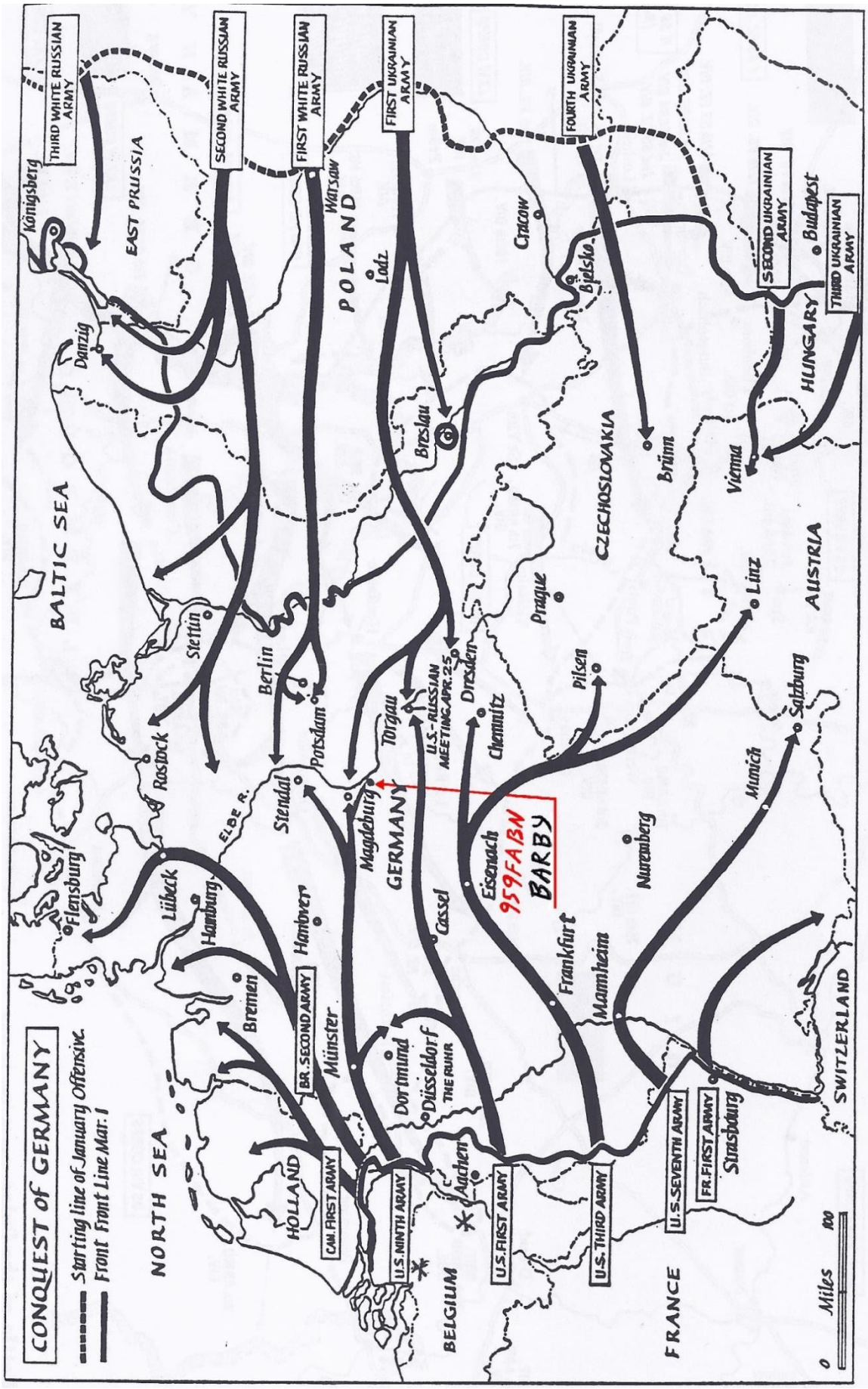
Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge)

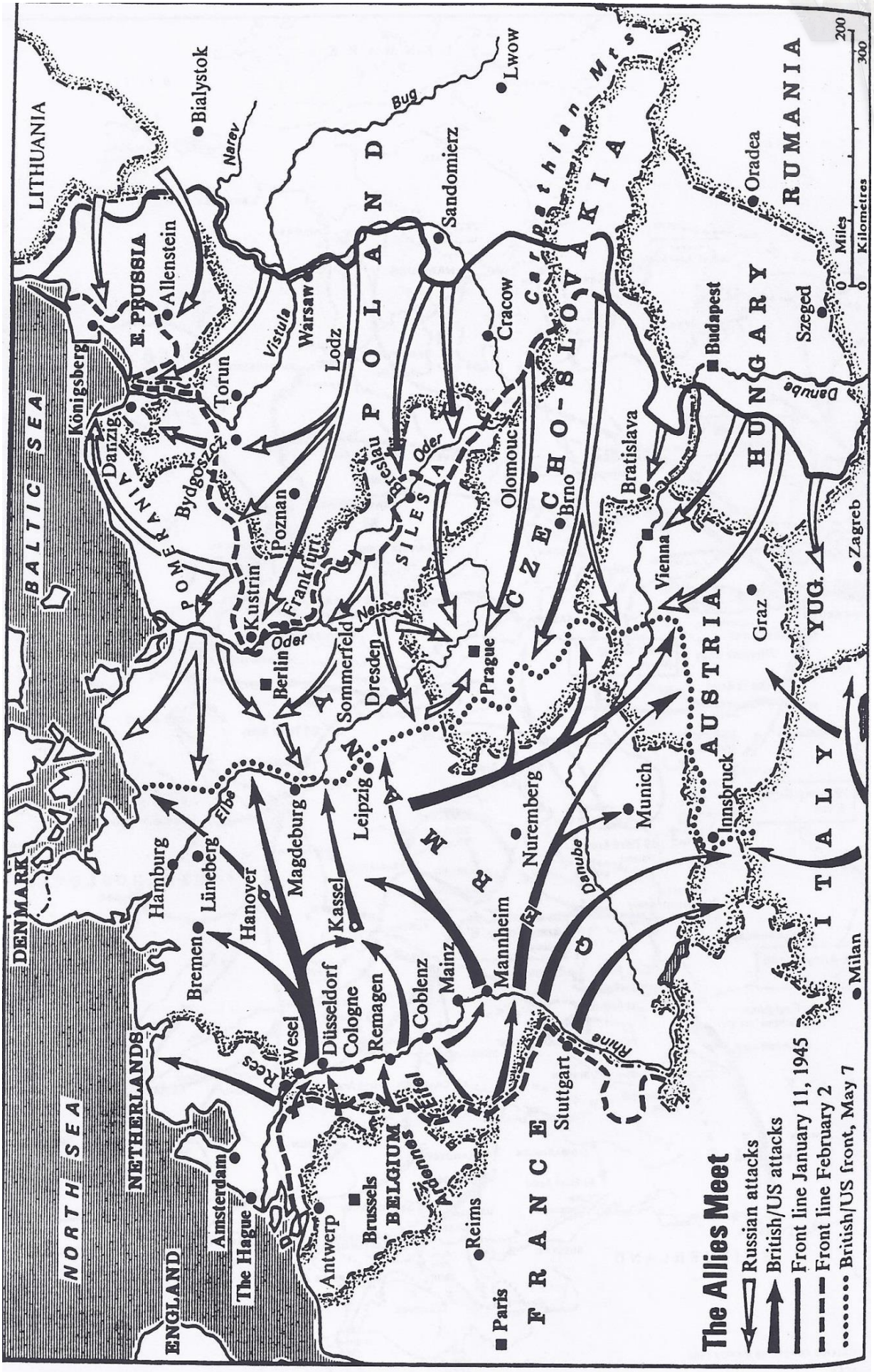


Ardennes (Battle of the Bulge)



Battle of Central Europe

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Allenstein
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Torun
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Bug
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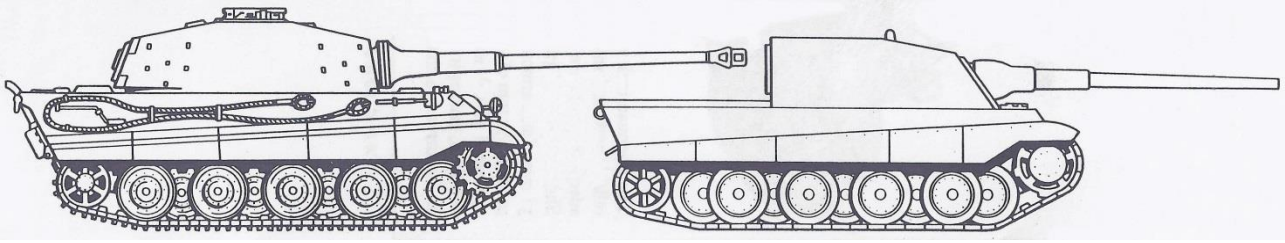
Rhine
Stuttgart
Danube
Amsterdam
The Hague
Antwerp
Brussels
Reims
Paris
Ardennes
Eifel
Miles
Kilometres
The Allies Meet
Russian attacks
British/US attacks
Front line January 11, 1945
Front line February 2
British/US front, May 7

Sherman Tank like used by the 2nd Armored Division

The Sherman tank was the principal armoured weapon of the Allied armies, magnificently reliable and mechanically efficient, but critically handicapped by thin armour and lack of an adequate gun, save for the few British I7-pounder-mounted Sherman Fireflies. The Sherman weighed 32 tons and could move at 24 mph. It carried only 76 mm of frontal armour, 5 I mm of side armour. The Mk V 75-mm gun with which most models were equipped could penetrate 74 mm of armour at 100 yards, 68 mm at 500 yards, 60 mm at 1,000 yards. Even the upgunned 76-mm and I7-pounder versions suffered problems from the fierce flash when they fired, making it difficult for the crews to observe fall of shot. Note the white star painted on the turret side, the universal identification symbol for all Allied vehicles in Europe.

Hitler's Super Weapons

Despite intensive bombing of industrial targets, vital German tank and aircraft factories still produced technically advanced weapons. During the Battle of the Bulge, formidable weapons were available, but their deployment in limited numbers was inadequate in the face of the massive numerical superiority of Allied weapons. Germany possessed two closely related armoured vehicles. The PzKwVI Tiger II tank, known as the King Tiger, was the biggest tank of the time with the most powerful gun. Its relative, the Jagdtiger, a self-propelled gun or tank destroyer, was built on the Tiger II chassis. It was the largest and heaviest armoured fighting vehicle of World War II and carried the biggest gun, the 128-mm Pak 44. But its bulk and slow speed made it an easy target.



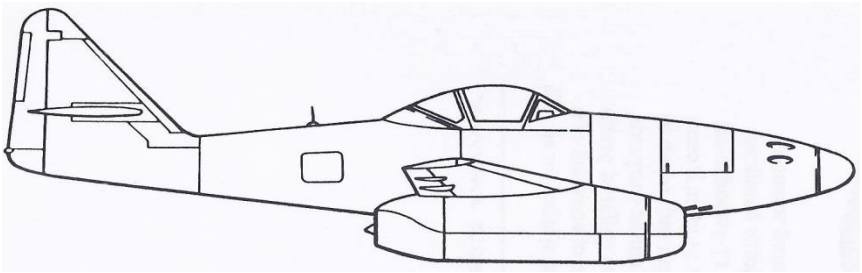
PzKwVI Tiger II:

Weight:	68 tons
Road speed:	38kmh/25mph
Range:	110km/68miles
Max armour:	185mm/7 ¼ in
Armament:	one 88-mm gun,
	two 7.92mm machine-guns

JgPz VI Jagdtiger:

76 tons
38kmh/25mph
110km/68miles
250mm/9 ¼ in
one 128mm Pak 44 gun
one 7.92mm machine-gun

Some German aircraft also were farther advanced technically than those of the Allies. The single-seat Messerschmitt Me 262, for instance, powered by two Junkers Jumo 004B turbo jet engines, was the first jet aircraft to fly in combat. It came in a fighter version, the 'Schwalbe' (Swallow), and also a fighter-bomber version, the 'Stiirmvogel' (Storm bird), and was the precursor of a new age in military aviation.



Messerschmitt Me 262:

Max Speed:	869kmh/540mph
Range:	966km/600 miles
Armament:	
Fighter	(4) 30mm cannons in nose
Bomber	various, including rockets with total weight of 1,020kg/2250 lb

German 88mm gun

The 88-mm dual –purpose gun was the decisive force in the German destruction of many Allied tank attacks in Normandy, above all in the open country on the British flank, where its long reach could be exploited to best effect. It was, quite simply, the best gun produced by any combatant nation in the war, with a formidable killing power against all allied tanks.

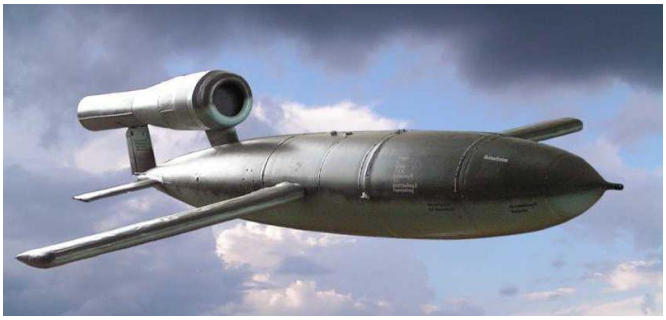
German V-1 Rocket

The V-1 was an unmanned, un-guided, flying bomb. Although primitive by today's standards, it was the first of what we now call a "cruise missile." It was designed by the Fiesler Company and designated the FZG-76. The Germans called it "Vergeltungswaffe" or "retaliation weapon." Since it was the first such weapon, it was designated the V-1.

The V-1 was a liquid fuelled, pulse-jet drone aircraft that could carry a 2,000 lb warhead. There was no navigation system, so it was simply pointed in the direction of it's target. Simple gyrocompasses kept it level and range was controlled by the fuel supply. It's typical target was a city in southern England.

The first V-1 flew in 1942 at Peenemunde on the southern Baltic coast. A series of fixed launching sites were constructed in France, Holland, Denmark and Germany to allow the Germans to shower V-1s on any part of southern England. However, German planning did not take into account a strong bomber and fighter-bomber offensive against the V1 launch sites. This forced the Germans into creating mobile launch sites and launching some from Heinkel 111 bombers.

The first offensive launch was on June 12, 1943. Once the Germans got their stride they launched an average of 190 V1 rockets a day. The British quickly became expert at spotting and shooting them down and only some 25% of the V1s hit their target. They English established defensive zones, first were the fighters (Mosquitoes, Spitfires and Typhoons) over the English Channel, then came a thick zone of heavy AA guns equipped with the first radar proximity fuses, then a zone of light AA guns and rocket projectors and finally barrage balloons. Once the Allies captured the launching sites the target of choice switched to Antwerp, the main Allied port. It received a pounding by 11,988 V1s and most of the 1,766 V-2 missiles launched. Fortunately, for the Allies they overran the launch sites that could have deluged the Normandy beachhead with these high explosive bombs, interfering greatly with the supply and logistics of an army in Europe.



The V-1 was an ungainly creation, half airplane and half bomb

V-1 on reconstructed launching ramp.

German V-2 Rocket

The **V-2** rocket was the world's first ballistic missile. It was originally designated the A-4, as it was the fourth in a line of rocket developments, however, Joseph Goebbel's propaganda ministry renamed it Vergeltungswaffe 2 (Retaliation Weapon 2). It was naturally shortened to V-2. Engineer Werner von Braun was the driving force in the development of the German ballistic missile program. He became the director of the German Rocket Development Center in Peenemunde. As an engineering student he was a member of the Verein fur Raumschiffahrt (Society for Space Travel) and was always interested in furthering the cause of rockets as a means of space travel. At the request of the Reichswehr Ordnance Department, he began work on rockets in 1932 upon graduation from the Berlin Institute of Technology. The fledgling Reichswehr's interest in rocketry was to legally get around the restrictions on the number and size of artillery pieces laid out in the Treaty of Versailles following WWI. Rockets were not included as artillery pieces.

Unlike the V-1 developed by the Luftwaffe, which flew low, and slow enough to be intercepted by fast aircraft, the V-2 was a true, guided, ballistic missile, rising into the stratosphere before plunging down to the target. The only warning of an approaching V-2 was the double boom as it broke the sound barrier shortly before impact. There was no defense against the V-2, so the English went after the launching sites. They did this very effectively in the Pas de Calais so that only mobile V2s could be launched. None of these systems were ever successfully attacked.

The U.S. War Department was very interested in this new weapon. After the army occupied the Peenemunde base, all the remaining V-2s were shipped back to the United States, along with many of the German scientists and engineers. About 500 German rocket specialists were used in "Operation Paperclip" for this purpose, including Werner von Braun. The V-2 became the army's Redstone missile and it was the beginning of the United States Space Program. Von Braun became it's director.

The V-2 rocket poised for launch.

Typical devastation in London street.

Bill Mauldin's Cartoons told a story like it was.

"I'll let ya know if I find th' one wot invented th' 88."

"Me future is settled, Willie. I'm gonna be a expert on types of European soil."

"Now that ya mention it, Joe, it does sound like th' patter of rain on a tin roof."