



Submitted by Rocco N. Gedaro

### **An Infantryman's True Story in Normandy**

I landed on D+2 at Utah Beach, Normandy, France as a replacement for Company "C" 357 Inf. 90th Division. I fought as a rifleman from June 8, 1944 to Jan. 13, 1945, without being wounded. Any infantryman, who landed in Normandy, France on June 06, 07, 08, or 09, 1944, saw plenty of combat action against the enemy (The German Army).

An infantryman had to fire his weapon, whether it was a M1 rifle, BAR, or machine gun, at the enemy. He also had to throw hand grenades from behind one hedge, to where the enemy was taking cover, behind another hedge. At the same time he has to seek cover behind a hedge, all the while, he is being fired upon by the enemy with rifle fire, concussion grenades, machine gun fire, motor shells, and artillery.

He has to pray, that he is not wounded or killed. He has to relieve himself often, (pee). When darkness falls, he has to dig a fox hole, and open a can of "C" or "K" rations, then if he has a buddy near him, they take turns on guard, one sleeps 2 hours and then the other one, wakes him, and then he sleeps 2 hours. This is to be sure that the enemy doesn't counterattack, and catch us both asleep. If the enemy doesn't attack during the night, then we have to attack. Some days we may take one or two rows and some days we take none, other days we have to fall back.

This hedgerow fighting went on for over a month until we finally broke out of the hedgerows. It was a great relief to be able to ride atop a Patton Tank until we met resistance again. Then it was back to fighting and digging foxholes again.

General Patton was our commander. We hated him because he made us continue to chase the enemy, after we broke out of the hedgerows. We were tired. Then our Sherman Tanks ran out of gas, and we had to park them in open fields.

This is when the enemy observers saw us and they zeroed in on us, and we were clobbered. After that we all loved General Patton and think that he was the greatest General we ever had.

We had just broken through the hedgerows of Normandy and were traveling fast and meeting no resistance. We entered the town of St. Susanne and settled down for the night. My sergeant told me to stand in the middle of the road because "B" Co was coming through and I was to tell them to go to the left, at the fork in the road about 50 yards up the road.

It was about midnight and I heard a truck coming and soon saw it approaching me. I said "HALT" and jumped onto the running board, I asked "B" CO, and heard the driver say "VAS IS." I realized then that they were Germans. I jumped off the running board and started to run toward the buildings, yelling "JERRIES JERRIES." My squad opened fire on the truck as it started to move forward. It went about 20 feet and stopped. We counted nine soldiers in the back of the truck and three in the front seat. All were dead or dying. My sergeant removed a luger pistol from the dead Captain and gave it to me.

We moved so fast in the breakout of Normandy that there were pockets of Germans hiding out in different locations. Most of the Germans didn't realize that we were ahead of them. This is one of the many combat experiences I was involved in.



### Crossing the Moselle River

*I am writing this experience because I have read in the newspapers and veteran magazines that 1200 WW11 veterans die each day. They all stress that we should tell our stories so that our children and others would realize that "WAR IS HELL."*

Tonight is June 21, 2002 and it is 0200 hours and I cannot sleep thinking of WW11 (58 years ago)

I remember it this morning as if it were yesterday. We were on the banks of the Moselle River and had been told earlier that we were to attack at 0500 and at 0400 the artillery, mortars, and machine guns would open fire on the enemy positions on the opposite bank. At 0400 our firing began and it stopped at 0500 and my squad climbed into pontoon boats. There were 4 to 6 men in each boat and we had to paddle to the opposite shore and attack the enemy. We paddled as fast as we could, all the while, the enemy sent flares into the sky, lighting up our crossing and firing mortar and artillery shells at us. My boat and some others made it to the other side. Other boats overturned due to the swollen and swift current of the Moselle. Others were hit with mortar and artillery fire.

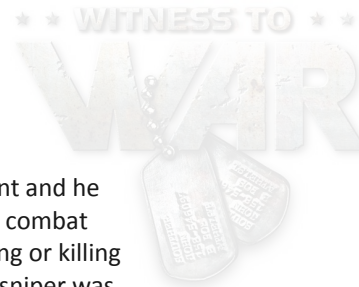
We jumped out of our boats and started to fire our rifles at the top of the bank. We received no return fire and climbed to the top of the riverbank.

There we saw one of the best sites and surprises of the war. In front of us was a trench about 5 ft. deep and about 2 ft. wide. It ran quite a long way, mostly to the left of where we were and at our right, it curved and went inland, on our right side front, were trees, probably 3 or 4 about twenty to thirty feet tall. We jumped into the trench and knew that we would not have to dig a foxhole tonight. The Germans had retreated and we were alone.

At 1400 word came down to us to be on the lookout for a counterattack and see if we can take any prisoners if they do counterattack. Just before darkness the Germans counterattacked us. We didn't know how many or them there were. They had very little cover and we kept firing at them. Some of us who had German pistols and other stuff began to throw them into the Moselle River. I threw my German luger pistol into the river. We didn't want to be caught with them for fear of what they would do to us. As it happened we stopped them cold and they turned and ran. As darkness came, one enemy soldier was wounded and kept moaning "Ma, ma, ma" all evening long. This was terrible to listen to all evening and if we could, we would have killed him. It was very demoralizing. At midnight we could hear the enemy moving around. We surmised that the Germans were removing their wounded and dead. As daylight arrived we saw two German medics waving a white flag and motioning to us that they wanted to remove their wounded and dead. This, we let them do and it was a peaceful morning.

In the afternoon we had several bullets hit the dirt in our trench and looked to see if we were being attacked. No enemy was in sight. We figured it was snipers firing from the trees. The three of us in the trench decided that I was closest to the trees. I would fire a clip of bullets into the trees and move to a new position, then the second man would do the same thing and then the third man would fire and hope we would hit the sniper. We got lucky. A sniper fell from the branch he was tied to and hung there. All three of us emptied our clip into him. We wanted to make sure he was dead. A short time later another sniper jumped or fell from the trees. We could not see him. A few minutes later I heard what sounded like a person running towards us. I backed away from the corner towards my men.

The sniper came around the corner and I yelled "Hand De Hock" (meaning, put your hands above your head). He stopped and quickly did as I ordered him to. He was young and frightened. He did not have a rifle and I searched him for a pistol. He had none. When he fell or jumped he must have become



confused and ran right into us. We had our prisoner. I led him down our trench to our Sergeant and he sent him to the rear for questioning. That sniper never knew how lucky he was to be alive. All combat infantrymen hated and despised snipers. Snipers would hide and fire at us. Sometime wounding or killing some of our men. We had no use for them. I often think of that day and think how lucky that sniper was that we let him live. Then, I think of how lucky we were that we didn't kill him. I think that perhaps God spared me and I lived through the war. Strange things happen in a war. I am sure other soldiers have had strange experiences.

### **Normandy Invasion**

Today it is November 7, 2002 and it is 3:00am and I can't sleep so I am writing about "My Normandy Invasion."

On June 08, I was aboard a troop ship anchored off the coast of Normandy, France. We were waiting to disembark into landing crafts. At about 1200, we were ordered to start climbing down the rope ladders into landing crafts. We were crowded together and soon the boat headed toward the beach.

The boat hit a submerged obstacle and they lowered the front ramp and told us to jump out the sides of the ramp because it could not be lowered any further.

My buddy, a tall Texan, jumped in front of me and then I jumped. The water was a little over my head and my buddy grabbed me and pulled me toward shore. I am 5'4" tall and he was over 6" tall. If he hadn't pulled me toward shore, I would have drowned for sure, because I had an 80-pound pack on my back an ammunition belt full of bullets, canteen, and bayonet, two bandoleers strips full of clips and two grenades along with a rifle and a steel helmet. I was really weighed down. Thanks to my buddy, I made it to shore.

As I neared the beach I had to go around dead bloated American soldiers, and on the beach was dead bloated horses and cows. The stench was sickening, as was the sight of dead soldiers. From there on, I had to crawl, run zig zag, crawl and run zig zag until I reached the sand dune. All the while, a German machine gun was raking the beach with bullets.

At the sand dune, I was next to a captain and we looked over the sand dune and could see coiled barb wire and through the wire we could see the German pillbox that was firing at the soldiers arriving at the beach. The captain called for a "bangalore torpedo," (this is a long hollow tube filled with explosives) it soon reached the captain and he pushed it threw the opening in the barbed wire and blew a large hole in the wire. He told me to crawl through and the rest of the men followed us into a gully and we crawled up the gully until we were aside of the pillbox.

The captain then called for a "satchel charge." ( a satchel full of explosives) and that soon arrived and he told me to take off my back pack and take the satchel charge and run to the front of the pillbox and set the charge and run back as fast as I could. I ran as fast as I could both ways.

The charge went off and blew a hole in the wall and the men captured or killed the stunned German soldiers inside the pillbox. This pillbox would no longer machine gun our troops still coming ashore.

A pillbox has a long slit in the front of it and this is where the Germans fire out the front to anything that is in front of them. They have no vision out of the sides of the pillbox.

We advanced through the town of Sainte Mere –Eglise that was freed by the 101 Airborne. Here we saw a man in a parachute. His parachute was caught on a barn with him just hanging there. We yelled to him



that we were Americans. There was no movement from him. We assumed that he was dead. The Captain ordered two men to get up there and cut him down.

We continued on to the hedgerows where we met the German soldiers and our fighting begun.

