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N O R M A N D Y

In the distance a blue streak of land stretched out along the Normandy coast. This was the famous "Omaha" beachhead. The soldiers crawled atop the mass of vehicles which jammed the decks and peered out to catch their first glimpse of French soil. As the LSTs rolled through the rough seas all eyes were fixed on the panorama of invasion which was unfolding before them. Warships of all descriptions were crowded up to the shore. Huge navy vessels rode at anchor as their smaller sisters the LSTs, LCIs and other invasion craft plowed toward the shore. Small "Ducks" darted in and out like hundreds of small water bugs, rolling with the surf, bringing supplies and equipment ashore. The maze of barrage balloons protecting the ships bobbed about in the wind and fighter aircraft winged overhead, keeping a watchful eye open for any attempt of the Luftwaffe to make an appearance. The hundreds of vessels, both on the water and in the air, stringing out as far as the eye could see, represented the greatest invasion fleet that the world had ever known. How diminutive the Spanish Armada must have been in comparison to this. The sight of this great display of power instilled a feeling of confidence, making us feel that we were here to stay until Germany was beaten to her knees and that there was to be no turning back in spite of the Nazi threat to throw us "back into the sea".

Mingled with this feeling of confidence was one of determination as we looked out over the land. On the sandy shore where only a few days before men had fought and died, engineers were working, building roads and clearing away the debris left in the wake of the battle. Burned out tanks and abandoned equipment littered the shore. Shell and bomb craters pocketed the entire area and the face of the land rising behind the beach was burned and scarred. Off to the left the ruins of a house stood out in bold relief against the sky, its walls smashed and battered by the terrific preparation laid down by our Navy

2074, 1945

gunners. Here and there on the face of the cliffs could be seen pill-boxes which had fallen to the pounding of our guns. Of to the right a field hospital had been set up and vehicles could be seen rolling up to the large hospital tents marked with huge red crosses. Casualties were coming in and medical personnel were seen moving about, ready to aid those who had fallen in the battle. A large air-strip had been cleared behind the hospital and C-47s sprawled about, loading up with the wounded and taking off in the direction of England, carrying men back to where the best medical attention awaited them.

The high winds and rough seas which had accompanied us on our voyage across the channel remained with us causing huge breakers to roll up and smash against the shore, thus making a landing on the coast impossible at this time. The anchors were dripped, the engines stilled and our convoy settled down to wait for fair weather. The LSTs looked like so many corks bobbing on the surface of the water as they rolled and pitched with the moving current. Now and then a particularly large wave would crash against the bulwarks and engulf us in a sea of foam, shaking the ship like a shoe in the mouth of a puppy. Night descended on us again and hatches were closed and things made shipshape for the night. Small groups gathered in the galley for coffee while others went to the sailor's quarters to swap yarns with the crew. Card games were being played in all sections of the ship and everyone talked of the days that lay ahead. The sailors told us of how they participated in the initial landing on D-Day and about the girls they knew in Liverpool. They were fine hosts, sharing their smokes with us and wishing us well in the days to come. We came to know these men and admire them for the great work they were doing. As the evening turned into night we took off with our bed rolls and settled down to sleep. At approximately midnight a wild clanging of bells was sounded throughout the ship. "General Alarm!!" Lights went on below decks and the pounding of feet was heard as the sailors came to their battle stations. All deck anti-aircraft gun crews

sailors made for thier battle stations. On deck anti-aircraft gun crews unlimbered their pieces and prepared to go into action. The Luftwaffe was "upstairs" tonight searching for our ships. The planes came in low circling overhead and then dropping star flares which lit the water up as bright as day. Despite the excitement of the action one could not help but marvel at the beauty of it all. The red tracers of the machine-guns dotted the sky in a flaming glow. It seemed like a Fourth of July display. The roar of the planes' engines could be hear above the steady rat-a-tat of our guns. The heafier anti-aircraft weapons belched out shell after shell at the winged Nazis. Off the port bow of the ship a plane was hit. There was a large burst of flame and the plane soared upward and then drunkenly rolled over and screamed down like a flaming meteor, crashing into the sea. The other planes continued on. Off in the distance thier trail was marked by the tracers fired from other ships as the planes flew into the night. The battle was over for us for the present and we all returned to our bed rolls onl to be interrupted on two more occasions during the night.

Throughout the following day the sky was filled with a great number of British and American bombers flying from bases in England. Squadron after squadron droned over on their mission of destroying the German resistance along the invasion coast. From horizon to horizon you could see them flying in. Toward evening the enemy sent out a few planes one of which was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed to Earth somewhere in the beachhead area. From the deck of the LSTs we saw our bombers returning from their bombing mission. A few of the mighty planes dragging behind, unable to hold their formation, but gamely limping back to base. At night the enemy returned and the alram was sound-ed again.

The bad weather continued to hinder our landing and it was not unitl June

22 that the sea became calm enough for us to land. LST 516 made a successful landing on the coast and Battery "C", Service Battery and the Headquarters section of Battery "B" debarked but LST 317 was unable to beach due to the fact that she hit a sand bar in low tide and was unable to get close enough to the shore to permit the remainder of the battalion to land. She lay there until the tide came in again, floating her off of the bar and a successful landing was made the next morning.

Ashore the battalion proceeded in convoy to a bivouac area north of the village of Bricqueville. There was a tenseness about the men as they locked a round in the chambers of their carbines for the first time since leaving the firing ranges used during our period of training. The convoy rolled up the beach and stopped inland a few hundred yards at a Division concentration area. Colonel Thompson brought up the tail of the column, bringing in Technician Fifth Grade Joe Robbin of Headquarters Battery who had slept through the landing operations and who narrowly missed being left behind. He had gone to the galley of the LST for breakfast only to discover that he was the only GI left aboard and after a wild chase down the beach had caught up with Colonel Thompson's command car which was just then leaving to catch up with the battalion. We pulled out again to our final assembly area. The day was clear and warm and the roads were thick with dust as we moved toward Bricqueville. Here and there along the road French civilians waved a greeting to us from in front of the rubble that had been their homes. Little children waved small French and American flags as we sped by. A few of us tried some of the French phrases that we had learned from the blue French-English dictionary that had been given to us prior to our departure from England. The column moved on through the village of St. Laurent-sur-Mer where we beheld the results of the terrible

Pounding inflicted by our warships and airplanes. Civilians picked through the rubbish, trying to salvage what remained of thier belongings. To the right of the road stood the walls of what was once a church. Over to the left was nothing but destruction. On every post that remained standing directional arrows of various units bristled out. An impossible network of telephone wire hung in deep scallops from every pole and post. Despite the fact that there seemed to be no room left for as much as a single strand, wire patrols dotted the roads stringing more. Jeeps, reconnaissance cars, tanks and every other type of army vehicle crowded the roads. A tank commander stood at a crossroad and shouted orders to his men who were trying to disentangle themselves from a traffic snarl. Civilians pushed carts and bicycles along the road, brushing by an old woman who was clutching a small handful of flowers which she attempted to throw to us as we rolled by. The battalion arrived at its bivouac area near Bricqueville and last minute preparations started before the Battalion was to be comitted to the line.

Near the bivouac area there were many signes of the German occupation in all open fields long poles had been driven into the ground in an attempt to thwart any landing by our aircraft. A sight that became familiar to us was that of the German finefields marked with a skull and crossbones with the wording "ACHTUNG MINEN". Our engineers had gone to work and marked the fields with white tape and our own red and white signs. Mile after mile of red communication wire was still hanging where the Germans had left it as they retreated from the outer defenses along the coast. The souvenir collectors went to work on the German equipment that was to be found laying in abandoned fox-holes and slit trenches. Now and then prosioners were to be seen being marched back from the front lines or from a place of hiding somewhere behind the lines.

The days that followd were busy ones. Colonel Thompson made trips to

Division Artillery with members of his staff, returning late in the evening with instructions for the battery commanders. Vehicles were overhauled and weapons serviced. Equipment was checked an untold number of times and all shortages were taken on here. The period of waiting was soon over and the battalion received orders to go into action.

On the 25th of June the Division was relieved from assignment to the Third Army and was assigned to General Hodge's First Army. The following day the alert order came in. Colonel Thompson and Major Boyce-Smith left the bivouac with the BC parties and traveled to apoint where they were met by General Montague. The General informed them that the 908th was to move that night followed by the rest of the Division Artillery. The reconnaissance party was accompanied by the executive officer of the 101st Airborne Division. He warned Colonel Thompson that the route they were to follow was under observation by the enemy and all members of the reconnaissance party kept a watchful eye to the south, where the enemy was lurking. The party proceeded on to the area assigned to the battalion where Colonel Thompson, after a trip around the area, assigned the batteries to different positions. The whine of incoming shells was heard and the members of the party hit the dirt after a warning cry from the Colonel. This was their first shelling. Major Boyce-Smith and Lt Reichert who were reconnoitering for Charlie Battery fell to the ground in a wheat field and when the fire lifted they returned to the rest of the party. Captain Fleming went to the regimental CP of the 501st Paratroop Regiment and met their artillery liaison officer. Captain Fleming got the information as to the set up on the OPs, how much of the area was to be taken over by us and the status of communications. They left the CP and went up to the forward OPs on foot. The OP was overlooking a swamp which lay in the center of our assigned

sector. This swamp was to be the scene of much bitter fighting by the 2nd Battalion, 331st Infantry Regiment. Captain Fleming visited another OP which had very limited observation. This OP was at the end of a fence row interwoven with greenery which was changed every night in order to keep it fresh and thus provide an excellent camouflage for the observer. Back at the CP Colonel Thompson was in a conference with the Regimental and various Battalion Commanders. These officers were exchanging overlays, passing on information and arranging for the relief of the 501st. The information that was given us was that we were opposing a German paratroop unit and that for the past three days there had been little activity and other than active patrolling and sporadic mortar fire. In the meantime the clouds had burst and the rain was coming down in torrents. We had seen movies of the war in France during the years of 1914-1918 and our fathers had told us of how it seemed to be always raining as they slogged through muddy trenches so in our mind's eye this was the perfect picture of men preparing to move up to the front. The sky was a steel-grey color and into the twilight of the day shadowy figures moved about in glistening raincoats, loading equipment aboard the vehicles. The schedule for the move of the battalion was changed due to the fact that the enemy was able to observe our route of march and it was not until the morning of the 27th at 0200 hours that the battalion moved out.

The tires of the vehicles sang on the wet roads as we moved through the Countryside of France. The small blackout lights on the vehicles resembled a procession of fire-flies stretching off into the darkness. The shadowy ghosts of destruction slipped by us on either side of the road. Lt Sweet, who was leading in Service Batteries column, noticed that he had lost the column and upon doubling back along the road discovered that some of the trucks had gone off of the road and were holding up the others.

The column halted in the town of Carentan which only a short time before had been the scene of bitter fighting. As the trucks sat along the side of the road we watched the doughboys marching down in double file toward the front. In the dim light of morning we could see them strain under heavy loads of equipment, pausing to rest occasionally and then move silently on. General Macon was there calling to the men, reminding them that the enemy was not far away and that they should proceed with caution. There was little noise save the echo of the soldiers' footsteps clumping on the wobble stoned streets. This town was another monument to the struggle that was going on in this beachhead. Piles of rubble that had once been houses lined the streets. The walls of the remaining buildings were poc-marked with holes from mortar and artillery fire. Criss-crosses of holes in the plaster facing of the buildings showed where machine gun fire had swept up and down, trying to cut down the German defenders baricaded within. Suddenly the unmistakable whine of an incoming shell cut through the morning mist. A crimson flash was observed in the sky and seconds later the crack of the bursting shell was heard. A few more rounds came in from the enemy batteries off in front of us. Men jumped to the ditches in the road. Soon the column started again and arrived in its position at 6:30 in the morning. As Service Battery was pulling into position the Germans started to shell them but their artillery was not very accurate and no casualties were inflicted.

Our position area was the typical Normandy countryside. All of the ground was crosspatched into small fields bordered by high hedgerows. Here and there were to be found battered farm houses. The farmers' homes were large rambling affairs with cobble stoned courtyards. A large space in these buildings was reserved for the huge cedar barrels with which most of us became familiar. The source of the cedar supplies were the apple orchards that spread over most of the

fields. Large swarms of mosquitos were everywhere and proved to be a constant source of annoyance and scratching. The civilians remaining in the combat area were simple farm folk. The women dressed in plain woven dresses and usually wore a shawl over their shoulders. Occasionally these shawls were pulled up over their heads and used as a sun-bonnet. The men wore brightly colored shirts and dark trousers and the familiar French beret was worn on the side of their heads. Both sexes of all ages wore their heavy, homemade wooden shoes. The farmers kept busy tending their cattle, seemingly unaware that there was fighting going on around them.

From the time we arrived at our positions near Carentan until the morning of our initial infantry attack everyone was kept busy. In the CP area dug-outs were built for the Command Post and for Fire Direction Center. Everyone in the battalion was busy digging his own individual fox-hole. Camouflage nets were strung and natural growth laid over vehicles and installations. Service Battery experienced some tough digging in the mouldy looking soil that was present in their area. Each shovelful was like digging through granite.

Amidst the digging communications had to go in. Due to the fact that many lines of the outfit which we were relieving were said to be serviceable we endeavored to use them but much to our regret they were not. By nightfall of our first day in combat the headquarters battery wire crew plus men from the firing batteries had laid twenty-seven miles of wire to establish a net. Thirty miles of additional wire was requisitioned immediately to complete the net. It was here that the forward switch made its debut to facilitate wire routes to the forward observers and liaison officers. One switch was located behind the church at Meutis and the right switch was located 2000 yards to the flank of it. The complete net consisted of three switchboards at the CP, a twelve drop board at each of the switch which were located behind the Infantry Battalion CP and

fifty-five miles of wire.

Able Battery was the first battery to fire into enemy territory. Eugene L. Bonfiglio was the man who had the honor to pull the lanyard and send our first shell screaming into Jerry's lap. Colonel Thompson went with Captain Fleming to the OP where he detected enemy movement in the hedgerows, about 300 yards in front of the OP. The Colonel fired five missions into the hedgerows. This was the first artillery that was brought down upon these Germans who had been observed digging there for the past three days. The 501st Paratroop Regiment was relieved by the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 331st Infantry Regiment, the 1st Battalion remaining in reserve. The 329th Infantry Regiment moved into the line on our right flank while the 330th stayed in division reserve. The first man from the 908th to be hit in combat was Tec 5 Glenn H. Ramsey of Baker Battery. He had been operating a switchboard and was struck in the head by a fragment from an enemy shell which burst nearby. He was therefore the first man to be decorated with the Purple Heart Medal. The front was rather quiet and there was only occasional small arms fire and now and then a round of mortar fire would land in the infantry area. Lieutenants Sulak, Tetlak and Cobble were among the first forward observers. During the day the OPs were manned by our observers and at night the observers returned to the Infantry Company CPs. During this time the observers were kept busy with a number of missions which they fired on enemy installations and troop movements in enemy territory. At night a great deal of fire was laid on roadworks and other fine targets which could be handled by harrassing fire.

The sounds of battle were new to us but it was not long before we were able to tell between "incoming" and "outgoing mail". There were times when not a sound could be heard other than the wind through the trees but on other occasions it would seem that all hell would break loose. We came to recognize

the sound of enemy machine pistols which sounded to us like ripping silk. American .30 caliber machine guns blurted away in short bursts and the crack of M-1s became a familiar sound. Enemy mortars could be heard in the distance croaking away like an old bullfrog on a pond and then a few seconds later the crashing shell could be heard. Quite often when shells were landing in the area we could hear the report of the gun as it fired at us from its concealed position. The German "88" is probably the most familiar of all enemy weapons. It was upon more than one occasion that we were forced to take cover from their fairly accurate fire. An amusing incident took place when the Germans started shelling the church at Meutis, where Baker Battery had an OP. When the shelling began Captain McNamara, Staff Sergeant "Spike" Nelson and Corporal Moby Carter of Headquarters Battery were high in the church steeple observing. As the shells poured in the men hastily evacuated their precarious perch by means of the bell ropes. Corporal Carter vaulted over a high concrete wall to a place of safety. From that time on the area was continually being shelled by the enemy. The forward switch was forced to move from that area due to the fact that the enemy would shell whenever there was any movement visible to them. In Normandy the enemy was a firm believer in harrassing fire. Occasionally he would cover the area with quite a few rounds which, during this period, did no more harm than to give us all a few anxious minutes. In Charlie battery, First Sergeant Morrow and Staff Sergeant Freeman had quite a close one when a shell landed only a few feet from where they were sleeping in their slit trench. Overhead the shell fragments had cut the kitchen's lister bag to ribbons but left the men below unharmed.

The ammunition train in Service Battery was having a time of its own during this period. Lt Sweet's men had the problem of getting the ammunition

from the ASPs to the gun positions in spite of the hazards which lay in their path. It was necessary for the train to move primarily at night as a good part of its path from the position areas to Isigny was under enemy observation. Lieutenant Sweet made the vehicles stretch out and make a dash for it every time the column went through Carantan as the bridge there was almost always under terrific fire. One night they arrived there just after the bridge had been shelled and a wrecked jeep was being towed off of the bridge. For the drivers of the vehicles it was a matter of running the gauntlet with their delicate loads of explosives. No vehicles were ever hit and the ammunition was delivered intact. The ASP at Isigny was a number of great fields in which thousands of rounds of ammunition were spread all over the area. The negro workers amazed us in the way they handled the ammunition. They must have known what they were doing as they never had any accidents but the way they slammed the boxes around and into the trucks gave us a few anxious moments. In time we became used to this sort of handling and no more was thought of it. Another thing which caused much concern was when Jerry came out to bomb the ASPs at night. Here in the midst of tons of explosives the men crouched while the fireworks exploded overhead. In spite of all these dangers the trucks kept rolling and the ammunition was delivered to the Nazis by way of our 105s.

The fourth of July was the day on which we launched our great attack. The 331st Infantry was supposed to jump off at daylight, with the Second and Third Battalions on the line and the First in reserve. They moved up along the roads accompanied by tanks which were to be employed in order to supply direct covering fire from the Second Battalion OP ridge. We started to lay down our preparation, supported by the fires of the 957th Field Artillery Battalion (155 How.), at H -15 and at H-Hour our fire was lifted for the advance of the infantry. In the Second

Battalion area Captain Fleming was operating with his two observers, Lieutenant Cobble who was with "F" Company and Lieutenant Burr of the 324th Field Artillery battalion. In the Third Battalion sector Captain Lysaght was with his liaison section, Sergeant Smith, Technician Fourth Grade Hetrick, Corporal Carter and Technician Fifth Grade Adecock. His two observers were Lieutenant Sulak and Lieutenant Tetlak. As the attack was to take place at dawn the men all wore a piece of white gauze on their helmets in order to be able to identify each other in the semi-darkness of the morning. It was just getting light as the infantry moved out. In the Second Battalion area the enemy side of the swamp which stretched in front of us was quiet and there was no return fire except for a few rounds of artillery fired when we laid down our preparation. These rounds landed about 400 yards to the rear of the Second Battalion OP. All hell broke loose when the Third Battalion moved out. The Germans threw everything they had. Unlike the area in which the Second Battalion was operating, the ground here was thickly crowded with hedgerows and no good OPs were to be had.

The Second Battalion started across the line of departure and our guns were firing on prearranged targets about 700 yards in front of them. The infantry mortars were very active, firing away in support of the attack. The first sign of enemy resistance was when the sun's rays lit up the swamp, reflecting its rays in bright streamers over the murky terrain. Lieutenant Burr was hit about three minutes after he crossed the line of departure, which left "E" Company without an observer. Lieutenant Cobble had reached a point about 75 yards from a "U" shaped house which lay in the swamp. The heavy machine gun fire had caught him and he lay pinned down in a ditch. Soon the enemy was firing heavy artillery and mortars. Two high-velocity weapons fired round after round into the ridge behind the swamp. The Third Battalion OP was under continuous machine gun fire and the men had to lay low. It had been necessary for them to get to the OP by infiltration. Captain

Lysaght was there with Sergeant Hetrick, a 4.2 mortar man, the heavy weapons commander and the battalion commander with his party. When they were able to see in the early hours of the dawn it was found that the troops had moved but a very few yards. The situation was very serious and the infantrymen were being cut down by the enemy every time they made a move. Colonel Schuster, the battalion commander, decided to contact "L" Company personally as there were no other communications. He crawled out of the OP and started along the hedgerow. He reached a point about fifty yards from the OP when he was hit. A few of the men rushed to his side and brought him back to the aid station.

The Second Battalion was having its own troubles. "E" Company had gone about 200 yards when they were stopped by heavy machine gun and mortar fire. "F" Company was pinned down about fifty yards from the "U" shaped house. All of the enemy gun positions were well camouflaged and it was impossible to pick them up as targets for our artillery. Colonel Faber, commander of the Second Battalion, brought up six tanks to the field by the OP. The tanks pulled up and started firing direct fire across the swamp. Captain Fleming had contact with Lieutenant Cobble Nor about twenty minutes but due to the fact that Lieutenant Cobble was pinned down by machine gun fire he was unable to observe and Captain Fleming reported this to the battalion. The enemy picked up the tanks firing from the OP and started shelling them with mortars and 150s. The fire was extremely heavy and a great number of casualties were inflicted. "G" Company which was in reserve and about 500 yards to the rear was caught under this rain of fire and received as many casualties as did the troops out in the swamps. Enemy movement was detected about 1200 yards over the "U" shaped house and we immediately began to adjust. This was the first observed target picked up in the four hours of the attack. We had been firing many missions "from the map", where suspected mortar and artillery pieces were believed to be set up.

On the OP at the Third Battalion the men discovered that bullets were flying overhead from the left rear. The battalion S-3 decided that the OP party would be able to exercise better control from the battalion CP and ordered them to try to make their way back. The enemy was making an encircling movement around the party and all haste was made to abandon the position. The phones were disconnected and the radios broken down. The men crawled on their stomachs back to the CP. At one time it was necessary for them to crawl through one of their own minefields. The trip was made without mishap except that when Sergeant Hetrick tried to set his radio up to establish communications with the 908th he discovered that his radio had been knocked out on the trip back.

In the Second Battalion, Captain Fleming had the only communications to the rear. All other wire and radio communications were out and runners who were sent out in an attempt to contact Regiment and the Companies never came back. From the OP you could see the men crumple over and fall to the ground. It seemed as if the scene from "All Quiet on the Western Front" were being enacted before us in the swamp. Only things were not so quiet. Colonel Faber, Captain Fleming and Technician Fourth Grade Warren, who was Captain Fleming's radio operator, made their way out to where "E" Company was attempting to push ahead and it was then that they learned that Lieutenant Burr had been hit. There was only one officer left in the company and there were approximately only fifty men known to be left alive and effective. The company was turned over to Lieutenant Oliver, an energetic young infantry officer. Lieutenant Oliver claimed to have picked up some enemy mortar positions and we fired two missions into the area for him. "F" Company launched a new attack and in the resulting battle killed and wounded scores of Germans and secured the "U" shaped house. Lieutenant Cobble got into the house with his radio and remained there for about half an hour when the enemy counter-attacked in force, preceded by direct fire from high velocity guns.

Our doughboys were driven back to their former positions about fifty yards from the house. The Germans moved back into the house and one of them started up a phonograph which was inside. Over the din of the battle came the voice of Al Jolsen singing. Shells crashed nearby and all the sounds of warfare echoed in the ears of the men and through all of this the phonograph played on. Captain Fleming and Sergeant Warren attempted to get back to the ridge in order to get better observation but were unable to do so because of the heavy fire. Sergeant Warren got a gash in his helmet and pieces of shrapnel cut into the radio he was carrying. One platoon of "F" Company, which numbered only about twelve men by now, pushed in against the German counter-attack and retook the house. They brought with them a heavy machine gun which they set up just inside the door. They closed the door and in about fifteen minutes forty enemy troops came down the mainroad toward the house. When they were just up to the door, Lieutenant Mitchell, who was in command of the platoon, kicked open the door. The machine gun chattered and mowed down and killed the Germans in the line of fire. The enemy then started to lay direct fire into the house and the majority of our troops there became casualties and the remainder were forced to withdraw, after destroying the machine gun. Lieutenant Cobble

had not accompanied the troops to the house on this last occasion as he was pinned down in water up to his neck, holding a field dressing to the stomach of a wounded man who was slowly bleeding to death. They remained in this position for twelve hours and finally made their escape when Lieutenant Cobble displayed his handkerchief as a white flag and carried the wounded man to safety. The enemy held their fire until he had taken the man to safety where quick medical attention saved his life.

"F" Company's casualties had been very severe and as a result the fighting efficiency was reduced. It was decided to throw "G" Company into the line on the left flank of "F" Company, with the mission of storming the objective. The objective lay on the opposite side of the swamp about 1400 yards away. Through a sheet of

enemy fire the platoon leaders and scouts reached the objective but were killed as soon as they reached it. The whole company had become strung out in a thin line all of the way from the line of departure to the objective. Captain Fleming went with "G" Company as an observer as no regular observer was available at the time. In the meantime Corporal Bastien and Technician Fifth Grade McKennon had been stringing a communication line up to the front. It seems as if only by a miracle they reached Captain Fleming as they worked their way through intense mortar fire and the infantry wire team that they had been working with had been practically wiped out. Up to this time no targets appeared for Captain Fleming but he fired time and again at suspected target locations. Then four enemy tanks rumbled down a road, firing as they came, and entered the conflict. On so the tanks turned to the left while the others pulled up on a line in a field and faced the narrow ribbon of men that remained as "G" Company. This was about eleven o'clock in the morning and these tanks presented the second observed target since the attack started in the early hours of the morning. We adjusted our artillery on them and set one of them on fire. Two of the tanks withdrew under our fire and one remained there, apparently abandoned by its crew as it did not fire any more during the day. Sometime during the night this tank also withdrew, apparently not having been damaged to any great extent. Early in the evening we threw smoke shells in to allow "G" Company, which was badly tattered by the day's action, to reorganize.

The hard working wire crews had their first casualty on this day. It was at about the same time that we were smoking the battlefield for "G" Company's reorganization that a wire crew was tracing an OP line which had been cut. The crew under Lieutenant Bender consisted of Sergeant Walker, Corporal Kelly, Private Thatcher and Private Hydrew. 88s began to crack around them as they worked along the road and Lieutenant Bender ordered the men to hit a shallow ditch nearby. On shell hit a building directly above where Thatcher was laying and ripped into his right arm and

leg. Fragments from the same shell ripped through Corporal Kelly's canteen, allowing the water to soak through his trousers and thus giving him the impression that the water was also hit. The men worked swiftly in administering first aid to Thatcher and soon had him back to a clearing station for evacuation.

By nightfall it was apparent that we had lost the first round in our battle with the Germans. The enemy had been resisting stubbornly throughout our entire attack and we had been thrown back in every attempt to break their line. "G" company withdrew under the cover of the smoke which we had laid down and attempts were made to reorganize the regiment. Late into the night men came straggling back from the field, tired and worn from the terrific action of the day. We had learned much during the day. We knew now that we were opposing an enemy who would not give up, without a fight, his ground he had taken during ~~the~~ years of conquest. We learned that he was strong and determined and that only by force of arms would we ever hope to defeat him.

On the fifth of July the enemy had cut a salient between the First and Third Battalions. The Second Battalion was moved to attack through this salient and at 1900 hours they crossed the line of departure. They moved into the center of the salient and there set up defensive positions for the night. Lieutenant Schroder had a bit of excitement when the Germans started to throw their 88s into our lines. Sergeant Calvey and Grain, of Baker Battery, were with him and the three men ran against a hedgerow when the peculiar whine and crash of an 88 was heard. Lieutenant Schroder was cursing and praying in four languages as he tried to draw his head, legs, arms and other dangling parts into his body. Oh to be a turtle! From there on in they made it a point to check their entrenching tools before any other piece of equipment. Lieutenant Schroder remembers that all was not grim there. Even in the darkest moments there were occasional flashes of light. On the night of July 6, Corporal Bacha, Powell and Friese had constructed a small executive post, a small room with two trenches going out from each corner. At about nine o'clock a light mist began to fall, along with about ten rounds ~~from~~ a high velocity gun. Major

room with two trenches going out from each corner. At about nine o'clock a slight mist began to fall, along with about ten rounds from a high velocity gun. Major Fosque called Lieutenant Schroder on the phone, and the lieutenant sensed the rounds, closer, closer, and finally at 30 right, range correct, he told Major Fosque that he would call back. Then came another scream, flash, the stench of cordite, and all was quiet in the hole. Bacha, the recorder, murmured, "Lieutenant Schroder", paused and repeated, "Lieutenant Schroder". Finally he hollared, "LIEUTENANT SCHRODER!" The lieutenant turned his head and asked what was wanted. With a sigh of relief, Bacha explained his plight. The rain had dripped down through the roof and he had reached down and felt his thigh, slippery and slimey. His first thought was that he had been hit and when he heard no sound from the others ~~was~~ was about to resign ~~themselves~~ them to the happy hunting ground. All was well however and the men had a good laugh over the matter.

At six o'clock on the morning of the sixth the Second Battalion was relieved from their sector by a regiment from the 4th Infantry Division. The Second Battalion was moved around to attack through the First and Third Battalions. The attack was made at about 1400 hours and advances were made. The Germans, instead of defending their positions, started to retreat through the fields but this proved to be a great blunder as they were cut down by accurate fire from our riflemen. This day is remembered as a "Turkey Shoot" for the doughboys. By 1600 they had effected a small breakthrough and as the infantrymen advanced they encountered only occasional sniper fire. The Germans decided to move up tanks to help hold the area. At about 1700 our men ambushed the leading elements of a tank column which consisted of a motorcycle, a volkswagon and a light tank. Twelve Germans, of which six were officers, had been either killed or wounded as a result of this action. The infantry dug in and prepared defensive positions. Normal barrages were prepared by our fire Direction Center. At

about nine o'clock that night enemy tanks were heard moving into the area and a call was sent out for artillery. We laid fire all around the infantry position and on the roads leading into it. The enemy tanks did not get into the area as a result of our fire but they did throw in some rounds which did not cause any damage.

Word was received by the infantry that the Air Corps was to bomb in front of them the next morning and that a withdrawal was to be made in order to protect the safety of our troops. The doughboys pulled back 1200 yards by eight o'clock the next morning and at nine our P-47s and P-51s came in for the kill. The planes circled over their targets like giant condors and went into a deep dive as they released their bomb load. Our airmen covered the area, striking at the enemy from all angles. The attack was over shortly and at nine-thirty our doughboys started back in. They found that the Germans had moved up into the 1200 yard area which they had just vacated. There was sharp infantry fighting supported by mortar fire as the doughboys advanced. Two enemy tanks were taken under fire by our 105s, the effect of which was unobserved.

On the eighth the battalion made a short move over to the flank where we set up our guns amid the wreckage of battle. The litter and debris that was scattered over the entire area was grim evidence of the struggle which was taking place. The fields were lined with slit trenches, dug by the soldiers of both the American and German armies. Gas masks, ammunition, camouflage nets, TNT, small arms and trailers were strewn about. Bits of torn clothing lay in the trenches and shell craters scarred the fields and roads. Dead cattle, bloated to enormous dimensions lay about, their stiffened legs stretched out awkwardly in all all directions. In the CP area the skeleton of a wrecked German JU-88 was smashed into the ground, its pieces showered over the fields. Everywhere there was the sickening stench of death. The men dug in and the batteries were registered.

At 0500 on the same morning the infantry had attacked and progress had been slow. Captain Fleming, Lieutenant Goodridge and Private Broughton, of headquarters battery had established an OP with "F" Company. The Germans had counter-attacked and outflanked these men. For about two hours they fought off the Germans with infantry weapons and by bringing down constant fire, close to their position, from our artillery. The mass of fire brought down by our howitzers apparently ~~brought~~ broke the back of the German attack and "E" Company seized this opportunity to launch a rapid advance of 500 to 700 yards. They drove on and then held up, after securing a prominent crossroad, before the town of Sainteny. Colonel Long, commanding Regiment, called Captain Lysaght and placed him in charge of all of the forward observers with the purpose of breaking the German defensive line with artillery. Lieutenant Lewand had already established wire communications with the 908th and Captain Lysaght sent his wire crew back with wire to the battalion. Colonel Thompson had a wire crew leave from the battalion to lay another line forward. With our communications not completed the battalion started firing into Sainteny in order to soften the area for the infantry. All night long we fired serenades and harrassing fire into the enemy defenses/around Sainteny. During the night the infantry made advances and the order came down for us to take Sainteny on the 9th.

In the morning the infantry jumped off. It was necessary for our liaison sections and forward observer parties to carry all of their equipment by hand as they left the swamps with the infantry. Our howitzers laid down a rolling barrage seventy-five yards in front of the advance. The enemy was throwing in quite a few rounds themselves and we gave up the attempt to lay wire as the enemy fire continued to knock it out. Carrying only their radios, they moved into the town and set up an OP in a building. A German "Tiger" tank rolled into town and stopped just 15 yards from Captain Fleming's and Corporal Bastien's OP. The infantrymen called for bazooka teams as the tank started firing. Captain Fleming grabbed a bazooka and fired at the tank. Both rounds

hit their target but did not explode. Finally the tank backed out of town and the infantry continued their battle. We held the town that day but the next morning the enemy started to shell us and it was necessary to withdraw. Sergeant Richard Miller, Headquarters Battery, Warren Boucher and Raymond Hawkins, both of Able Battery, were coming up the road to Sainteny, laying a line to Lieutenant Reese. They reached the crossroads where they were to meet the lieutenant and, seeing that he was not there, continued laying the wire into town. On the way in they met infantrymen retreating along the roads. Suddenly above the sounds of battle a sharp whine pierced the air, another and another. Then German shells crashed into the road, inflicting many casualties among the doughboys. The three artillerymen continued on under a rain of artillery and mortar fire. Sergeant Miller and Boucher went back to keep our tanks from tearing out the wire. Boucher climbed a pole in an attempt to string an overhead when a crashing shell hit the pole and he dropped to safety in a ditch with Sergeant Miller. The two men stretched the wire across the road and held it down tight so that it would not get caught in the tank tracks. Another shell crashed in the street in front of them. Finally they were able to establish an overhead crossing and then ran to where ^{was set up in town.} When the Captain Fleming ~~had established an overhead crossing~~ enemy fire died down they left the town and Captain Fleming established a CP in a huge bomb crater. The infantry received orders to move around to attack from the left. They got into position and then jumped off across a large open field, successfully accomplishing their mission.

The battalion was preparing to move on the 10th but due to the changing situation the movement was temporarily postponed. Service Battery did not receive the order which postponed the move and displaced for the new positions. Soon the sounds of battle came closer and closer and they could hear German "Burp" guns and other small arms fire. They arrived at the place where the CP was to have been and discovered that there were only two wiremen there. They were informed that, up ahead, the Germans had broken through with tanks and the battery turned around to return to its old position. The road was jammed with our tanks and tank destroyers moving up to the front. The place

road was jammed with our tanks and tank-destroyers moving up to the front. The place was a bee-hive of activity and Service Battery lost no time in returning to its old position. The next day the battalion moved and we took up positions near Culot.

The fighting was still going on at Sainteny when we took up these new positions not far away. A lot of spent bullets were coming into the area from the front and the men formed parties to hunt for snipers, thinking that this was where the bullets were coming from. It was in this position that Private Nayert, from the fire direction crew, was struck by one of these strays while going to the kitchen and was severely wounded in the leg. German and American dead littered the fields in and around the battery positions. In Service Battery's area there was a burned out tank, along side of which lay the hand of one of its crewmen. The roads ~~were~~ were jammed with knocked out German and American tanks. Their crews, burned beyond recognition, lay in grotesque heaps in the ditches along the road. Below Baker Battery's area there was a truck loaded with Germans who had been caught on the road and who had fallen victim to a direct fire weapon. ^{bodies to be} Everywhere you turned there were ~~stray~~ found laying in fox-holes and bushes, ~~where~~ laying where they had fallen at the hands of an enemy. The sight of all of this was saddening and filled our minds with pictures that we will never forget. The usual rubble of clothing, helmets, & ammunition were laying about and the few buildings in the area were battered and burned. Enemy artillery came in close- too close for comfort. Few men in "A" Battery will forget the day that Sergeant Clevenger left a place of shelter, ^{while the} ~~during~~ enemy was throwing all they had into the battery position, and found shelter for the other men in his section. We were cutting our teeth in the ways of combat but we were learning fast.

The fighting continued down toward the Taute River. The Germans were hard pressed but fought for every inch that they gave up. On the morning of the 13th of July the infantry jumped off again, supported by our artillery fire. Lieutenant Reese and his radio operator, Technician Fourth Grade John Kiriakou had moved out

with an assault company, ready to call for fire wherever it may have been needed. The infantry was pinned down by heavy machine gun fire as the action progressed into the afternoon and the advance was slowed down. Captain Griest, who had relieved Captain Lysaght, and Technician Fourth Grade Schisler were contacted by Lieutenant Roese at the third battalion. The four men dug in along a hedgerow and set up with their two radios. The Germans were resisting furiously, determined that we would not advance. They called their tanks into action and it was not long before four enemy tanks had maneuvered to the rear of our troops, cutting them off from the rest of the battalion. The enemy did not seem to realize that the men were cut off as the tanks just sat there and no attempt was made to attack. One hundred and eighteen infantrymen and the four men from the 908th waited in their little pocket for any eventuality that may have arisen. As the batteries in the radios burned low, weakening calls were sent back for aid from the artillery. In the morning the situation had not changed except for the fact that communication with the guns was almost impossible due to the weakening radio sets. Schisler and Kiriakou gathered all the available radio batteries from infantry sets in the area, wiring them together and using them in the place of the BA 40s made for their sets. Communications were maintained and fire was called for to relieve the hard pressed doughboys.

Throughout the fourteenth the men remained in the pocket waiting for relief. Captain Griest and Lieutenant Roese were kept busy calling for fire on all sides of them in an attempt to hold the Germans at bay. The enemy discovered their plight and at about sundown launched an attack in the hope of wiping out the small group. A bitter fight ensued and the attack was finally broken up by machine gun fire from our infantry. Everything was quiet for the rest of the night but as a precaution everyone stood guard in readiness for another attempt by the enemy to break into their position. At about ten o'clock on the morning of the fifteenth the men were delirious with joy when elements of the 329th Infantry broke through and relieved them.

~~weightless as a feather~~
In the sky, fighter planes were constantly flying into enemy ~~territory~~ territory seeking out targets behind the front lines. Now and then the enemy would send out representatives of his Luftwaffe, ME-109s, JU-88s being the more familiar of the enemy aircraft. In the evening of the 14th two ME-109s flew in low over the area. As they flew in ~~low~~ over the tree tops our .50 caliburs opened up on them, spitting red tracers against the sky. The planes circled and roared in again, still followed by our machine gun fire. As they dissappeared over the trees a wisp of smoke was seen coming from the fuselage of one and that was the last ~~sign~~ of them. Our P-47s and P-51s were the most common planes seen in these days but occasionally the trim little P-38 was there, outflying all of the others. One day a P-47, ~~carrying a bomb~~ ^{carrying a bomb} load under its wings, flew on over Battery "A"'s area and ^{accidentally} dropped a bomb. ~~It exploded.~~ Hayes and Hatem of Able Battery were picking up the bodies of some dead Germans in the field and as they reached for one corpse the bomb landed. The men jumped back and hit the dirt - thinking that they had moved one of the many booby-trapped bodies that the Germans were reported to have left as they retreated from our advance. It did not take much time to convince them that they were wrong however, for about seventy-five yards away a huge crater had been ripped into the earth by the exploding bomb. The area had been filled with flying clods of dirt which tore through canvass coverings on vehicles and through a few windshields but other than that there was no damage.

Our Air OP had a big job cut out for it. In this land of hedgerows, where observation was limited in most cases to the far edge of a field, the battalion relied more and more on the far seeing eye of our little liaison planes, which were piloted by Lieutenant Goettke and Staff Sergeant Raether. Between eight and twelve hours a day these air-going artillerymen dodged enemy machine gun and anti-aircraft fire. There was hardly a flight made without them receiving fire from enemy machine guns. When located by an enemy anti-aircraft battery there was quite a bit of excitement.

The pilot would feel the concussion of the burst as it flowered off to the side. The windows of the plane would rattle and shake as the plane rolled over to avoid the deadly fragments. During these days approximately ninety percent of the registrations were adjusted by the observers accompanying the pilots. Lieutenant Reichert who flew with Lieutenant Goettke as the observer and Lieutenant Hicks who observed from Sergeant Raether's plane would squat behind the pilot scanning the terrain seeking out enemy installations. An enemy battery firing from a concealed position would be picked up. The observer would locate the battery's position on his map and in a few minutes he would be radioing in for fire. As our shells landed in the target area the plane would circle and adjust fire until the observer sent out the excited cry, "TARGET! FIRE FOR EFFECT!" These little planes, striped in their invasion war paint, became to be feared by the Germans as much as the hated fighter bombers.

On the nineteenth of July while operating in the area of the LeVarde peninsula, Sergeant Raether and Lieutenant Hicks were attacked by four ME-109s. Their unarmed cub was no match for these enemy fighters and Raether tried every trick in the book to shake the enemy planes. As the hot tracers from the German guns came closer he kicked the plane over and rolled into a power dive. Down to tree top level, he fan-tailed and hopped about in the security of the trees while the enemy zoomed on overhead unable to execute the sharp maneuvers of the smaller craft. No damage had been done except for one enemy bullet hole in the plane. Lieutenant Reichert had a close one once when a machine gun bullet came up through the seat he was sitting on and out through the top of the plane without touching him.

The pilots aided the infantry by flying ahead of their advances, trying to locate strongpoints, and then sending a warning back to the doughboys. If a strongpoint was located they would fly back, swooping low over our advancing columns, and drop a message down to them. Occasionally they would fly in shouting from the windows, waving their hands and then drop a note which had been placed inside of an empty

ows, waving their hands and then dropping a note which had been placed inside of an empty K-Ration box. The doughboys ~~came to appreciate them and~~ relied on their abilities. The assistance that these little planes offered to the infantrymen made them a welcome part of their operations, and the sight of a liaison plane overhead was as ~~much~~ much of a morale booster as any air-blanket that the Air Corps could provide.

The problem of clearing fields and maintaining the aircraft was ever present. in the short fields that dotted Normandy it was not always easy to find a field with a runway large enough for taking off and landing. Bulldozers had to be called in and paths cleared through the hedgerows. The mechanics were kept busy seeing that the planes were kept in the best condition and checks were constantly being made to insure the very best performance from the ~~new~~ cubs when they went into action. The men of the air section deserve the highest praise for the work that they accomplished in aiding the battalion in the destruction of the enemy.

The battle on the LeVarde peninsula was one that will be remembered by the men of the battalion as ranking with the 4th of July in being one of the toughest battles in which our troops were engaged. On the 18th of July the battalion displaced to positions near Bois Grimot and prepared for the attack on the peninsula. General Macon visited the troops who were to participate in the battle and impressed them with the importance of the mission they were to be undertaking. After last minute preparations the troops moved forward to their forward assembly area and from there they set off for the line of departure in long columns of companies. Captain Lysaght and Sergeant Hetrick accompanied "K" Co, ~~settingxxxxxxxx~~ Soon our artillery was laying down a terrific barrage in preparation for the attack. Anti-aircraft guns fired into the trees in order to kill any snipers who might be laying in wait for our doughboys and then the attack was on. Engineers were working on a bridge across the first stream in our path. At the second stream we crossed a small foot bridge

and proceeded on to a third stream where we crawled down the banks and across to the other side. At this point a fire fight broke out and held our troops at bay. After pounding Jerry with all we had, the troops moved on ahead and by eight-thirty the objective was reached. The remainder of the day was devoted in ~~preparation~~ the preparation of positions. 57mm Anti-tank guns were moved up. Entrenchments were dug. The laying of wire was given up as a bad job as the enemy shells continued to knock out all wire. At 1600 hours we received our first fire from enemy tanks. The anti-tank guns which were set up kept the tanks from gerring around to our left flank but the tanks manuevered over to the right and we were seen receiving fire from the front and right flank. It was now the enemy's turn to strike out. Our outer defense line was broken and under the terrific pressure of the enemy attack our troops started to withdraw. In the confusion of the battle, Hetrick became separated from Captain Lysaght. It is beleived that at this time Captain Lysaght was wounded in the head and taken prbisoner by the Germans. No more was heard from him until after the breakthrough and he was overrun in a German hospital.

Lieutenant J hnston, Sergeant Nelson, McCoy and ~~Waples~~ Waples of Baker Battery haddpulled onto the causeway as a forward observer party when the enemy started shell- ing. The men jumped from the jeep and nit the road in an attempt to secure the safety of the ditches. The whine of another incoming shell was heard and the loud explosion that followed was evidence that the shells were coming in too close for comfort. Sergeant Nelson returned to the Jeep and found that the last Jerry shell had landed under the front axel of the vehicle rendering it unservicable. In the meantime, Sergeant Hetrick, who had become separated from Captain Lysaght and had lost his radio, was trying to make his way back to the main body of dtrops. "e kept to the fields so that he would not be discovered by the enemy. When he got about halfway to the tip of the peninsula he found the battered jeep left by Baker battery. He started the vehicle in an attempt to return in it but the ~~motor~~ motor failed and he

was unable to move it. He took the radio off of the vehicle in the hope of contacting the battalion but could find no microphone that he could use. German machine-gunners opened up at him so he abandoned the wrecked equipment and took off for the Infantry battalion. Halfway there he met Lieutenant Williams, the observer from the 331st Cannon Company, who was firing missions into areas where the enemy had penetrated. Finally, after a hectic trip he returned to the Infantry Battalion CP where he visited the Aid Station in search of Captain Lysaght. The withdrawal was completed with the loss of many of our men but the enemy was ~~losing~~ ^{loosing} his grip in Normandy and the breakthrough was soon to come.

Much bitter fighting continued for the area at the Taute River and the battle see-sawed back and forth as both sides clashed together. We were forcing the issue and the Germans were not willing to give way. On the 25th of July one of the greatest spectacles that we have ever seen unfolded before our eyes. Droning through blue summer skies, thousands of our huge bombers came in on the mission of blasting the German Army out of Normandy. Flying in formation in the upper strata of the sky the planes left long, sweeping vapor trails stretch out behind ~~them~~ them in criss-crossed patterns. As the planes approached their objectives the enemy ~~backed~~ ^{Anti-aircraft} batteries started to open up on them and black mushrooms of smoke dotted the sky. The endless caravan continued on and soon the rumbling sound of bursting bombs could be heard. The rumbling increased as bomb-bays opened, dropping their missiles of destruction on the terrified Germans. In our position the ground rolled and rocked as if in the clutches of an earth quake and billows of dust fogged the entire area. Pieces of ~~in-~~ foil, dropped by the planes to disrupt the accuracy of enemy Radar units, fluttered into the position area. We could see one of the huge birds stagger as flack burst under one of its wings. A motor had caught fire and the plane dropped from its formation ~~in~~ in an attempt to quench the fire. It nosed upward and then dropped over on one wing. As two parachutes were seen opening the plane rolled over and

straightened out into a dive and vanished below the tree line. Other planes were hit and some turned and limped back while others continued on after regaining control. The planes droned ~~on into the afternoon and the heavy pounding continued.~~ on into the afternoon and the heavy pounding continued. ~~the Germans were weakening under the pounding inflicted by~~

After the bombardment our doughboys again took up the offensive. They came upon dead and dying, ~~German~~ ^{Germans} and saw ~~the~~ cracking from the mental strain inflicted by the raid. Bodies were found laying in fox-holes and dugouts without a single mark on them, apparently the victims of the tremendous concussion of the bombs. The infantrymen fought on, pushing the Germans back. The breakthrough was at hand. at 0655 on the morning of the 28th we march ordered our positions and followed the doughboys across the Taute River. The roads were lined with the dead of both the Germans and Americans. Our engineers were taping off the minefields on the causeway as we rolled by. We arrived at positions near Marchesleux, the battalion CP being near a small German cemetery which lay at a crossroads. The infantry was in hot pursuit of the Germans but in the afternoon our troops had lost contact with them and our Division was cut out by the flanking divisions. The battle of Normandy was over! The battalion march ordered again that day and we drove down into Brittany, through wide open fields, through clean smelling air. We were moving forward without opposition. The German Armies were on the run before us. We arrived at a position northwest of Cardonniere, France and the battalion rested and made preparations for our next phase of combat.

The battle of Normandy was a tiring ordeal for all of us but we came out of it battle hardened and much wiser in the ways of warfare. It was not pleasant, with its dead and wounded, its 88s and mortars, its endless days of battle, but it was experience. It was experience that would take us ~~through the days to come~~ over hard long trails in the days to come. We were soldiers now, ~~veterans~~ veterans who ~~would look back on a job well done. We had met Hitler's famous SS troops, his panzers,~~

could look back on a job well done. We had met Hitler's famous SS troops, his panzers, and his Luftwaffe but they were no match for us. We had beaten them. We had struck a blow at the outer defenses of Hitler's European fortress and had smashed through to victory. The days ~~gone~~ gone by were days that we would never want to live through again but ~~days~~ they were days of which we were very proud. ~~Max~~ History had been made and we were a vital part in it. The eyes of the world had been focused on us and we had kept our trust.