

Letter from Ed MacNeil

With regards to your letter.

1. Marine Raven docked on the Jersey side of New York Harbor. We were taken there on the subway. It was tough lugging a very heavy duffel bag plus the backpack with close to 60 pounds in it plus our weapons.
2. We landed at Barry Wales, but first the voyage over was no picnic, All of the toilets were mounted on the bow and consisted of a row of about 60 seats along both sides, all out in the open. Water was pumped from one end to the other which served as a flushing. Once in a while when the bow would run high or low while the men were sitting there, the water would race from the high end to the low end. The result was anyone sitting there would be exposed to something like opening a bottle of French wine and a lot of disgruntled combat soldiers.
3. Food was not very bad but not enough. The crew cooks would make sandwiches and would sell them through the mess skylights for five dollars each.
4. Our commanding officer entered his cabin forward. He was seasick the whole way, and never came out one time.
5. I was officer of the deck on several occasions. The duty was to keep the troops below so that lighting of matches or smoking this was not allowed. The German submarines could see a cigarette light almost 3 miles away. On several of my night duties, the destroyers came in right between the troop ships and dropped depth charges. The noise was terrific and we used to listen by the hull to hear the two clicks, underwater, which indicated that the depth charge was about to explode. We were in the largest group of ships to cross over and it took close to three weeks of zigzagging all the way. Upon landing in Bristol, England, the English band was playing and we were off loaded very fast. We were loaded into English buses and taken over the countryside for a short ride. There we stayed for additional training, learning how to assemble the British Bailey bridge. We also did a little of removing bombs from some of the towns close by.

We went through a refresher about our infantry training – yes, we were also trained as infantry as well as being combat engineers. I have films of us in England – not tapes but on the larger reel. Now onto more information

It was because of my German language capability I was taken to OSS (Office of Secret Status) as a possible drop into France, as an agent. A very good and close friend of mine was in charge of agent training, and I actually made three jumps from a British Blenheim Bomber. The last jump was out of the bomber and within a few minutes I was on the ground at night.....I quit.

We did cross over on a British supply ship. The food was terrible especially for the officers. I was invited to breakfast at the ship's captain's breakfast. There was a civilian mess attendant who served us. First was an aluminum plate with a clear hot liquid in it. I called over the mess man and asked what it was and what you do with it. He said, "Sir that's lamb fat and you dip your bread in it." Well that was the end of that! Later in the day I ordered several men into the hold where we broke open the American canned food so we would have something decent to eat.

We arrived at Le Havre, France, down the river toward Paris, and that is where we had our first death due to the Germans. You were right about the camps were at.

We moved up and down the main river to Paris. Germans dead all over the place, along with downed aircraft and armored vehicles.

From there by train and convoy – cold as hell. We wound up in Bastone. It was here that I had a 45 caliber pistol stuck in my face because I had no idea what the current password was. We had been trying to locate a gas dump for our vehicles.

Anyway we finally got together with the advanced party and things became slightly more back to normal.

We built bridges under heavy fire night and day. Captured quite a few of the enemy and we were constantly under enemy fire. Our first casualty was at Camp Lucky Strike in France from enemy fire.

From then on the battalion was split up and your dad was right up to Ahrweiler. You see Ahrweiler was Battalion Headquarters and B Company was up at Remagen some miles away. They were up on the

hill called Kripps. I had gone up here on the morning of seven March, 1945. As the BN motor equipment officer, I had to make sure that the B Company had a replacement for a 1½ ton Dodge truck.

So a driver and I went up there and I drove the Jeep. Upon arrival, I went into the B Company office as usual. I spoke to Capt. Henry who was in charge. Had a shot of booze and spoke to the radioman, the second in charge, and the B Company clerk. Had time to speak to all including a cigar. But as time had it, I had to get back to Ahrweiler to the south of Remagen.

When I returned I went over to the 84th and was greeted with “we thought you were dead”. “B Company has been wiped out with many killed and wounded.” All of the medics from all the companies had been sent to the site.

I immediately, along with the captain of Headquarters Company, went back up there. We had 26 wounded and all in that office. I told you about Capt. Henry he was badly wounded. There were at that time at least eight others killed.

I must tell you that on the way back, the captain and I were caught in an aerial attack. He missed being killed by a 1/8 inch round that just missed him. I was hit across the nose between my eyes and had no idea that I'd been hit. To this very day I have not been able to get my Purple Heart. Everyone I know or knew about it has died long ago.

I had been over the Remagen Bridge on two trips. The first one, was early on doing a recon evaluation of the area on the German side. The second, was pretty much the same reason.

We were shelled by the Germans almost all the time. As a matter of fact, on my last trip, I was soaking wet from the water kicked up by the shell fire.

After the bridge failure, we used bridges we built over the river, they were built of pontoons. Large rubber rafts were fastened together – one bridge to the north side and the other on the south side of the bridge.

After the war, when my wife came over I showed her all these places.

We took an important position when we helped capture some 300,000 Germans in the Rhur pocket. Having been in the middle of this fracas I could tell you many things about this adventure.

I stopped at Lanshut, Germany, having had so many points to go home because I had 10 years of active service. I was the first to leave the 284th because of my points. In a way I felt rather sad about leaving.

Not too soon later I was in Korea. but that's another story

I have lots of material printed and I shall dig it all out and you shall have a complete history of the 284th. So bear with me I shall not let you down.

I've not mentioned too much about our casualties during the war but there were many replacements.

Give me a little time and I will send you so much material written, you will be hours reading it all. I believe you will feel as though you were in the same foxhole with us.

Bless you,
Ed MacNeill.

PS I have been for the last four years been a member of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and am an officer in the local division. Keeps me busy.