

Normandy

(continued from page 1)

"That's the job for me" and learned it."

His high school business courses paid off, for after learning to do payroll, Dad became part of a team which processed all the new recruits' military records, sometimes pounding on a manual typewriter for 12 hours at a stretch.

When he heard that the new 90th General Hospital unit was being formed to serve overseas, he volunteered, convincing the colonel in charge that Corporal Richie would make a fine personnel sergeant major.

Activated October 10, 1942, the 90th General Hospital, consisting of 500 enlisted men, 70 doctors and dentists, 105 nurses, dieticians and therapists and three female Red Cross volunteers, had to ship out twice in order to get to the war in Europe.

They had boarded the troop ship Ile de France in New York Harbor December 22, 1942, for what would have been her maiden voyage as a troop ship, only to be forced to disembark two days later when the galley caught fire before the ship even left the harbor.

During the train trip back to base, appreciative rush hour commuters heading home to New Jersey from their jobs in New York gave the disappointed soldiers candy and bottles of liquor as Christmas presents.

"Our morale hit its lowest point as we arrived back at Camp Kilmer to the sound of Christmas carols blaring out over the loudspeakers," Dad said.

On January 1, 1944, they marched once more to the troop train while a regimental band played World War I songs, and factory workers lined their route, waving flags and signs wishing them well.

From the ferry crossing the harbor to the New York pier they saw two large grey troop ships at anchor and the hulk of the Normandie, once known as the pride of France, which had burned, capsized and sunk during its conversion to a troop ship.

The adrenaline began to flow as we approached the pier and realized that we were about to board one of the greatest ships of our time, the *Queen Elizabeth*," Dad recalled.

When the tugboats escorted "the Queen" out of the harbor, the men crowded the decks for one last look at home.

"As we passed that grand old lady with her right hand and torch held high, our eyes began to fill with tears and our hearts pounded with pride," Dad said. "The one question foremost in our minds was would we ever see her again. Thank God, I have, and every time that I see her, I recall that day."

Life on a troop ship wasn't the luxury that the Queen's civilian passengers had known. Dad was lucky to share a room furnished with two sets of three-tiered bunks with five other men.

Other guys slept three to a bed, each man spending eight hours in the sack and 16 hours elsewhere.

"We stood in what seemed like an endless chow line," Dad said. "Since there wasn't much else to do except play cards and gamble, the guys would finish one meal, wash their mess gear and immediately start a line for the next one."

Not that the food was that great - cold and greasy, served in shifts, the men standing to eat at long,



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARRY J. RICHIE

90TH GENERAL HOSPITAL - Several Army hospitals were clustered around the rail center of Bar le Duc, at one point only 39 miles from the battle front in France. The 90th General Hospital was set up in a former barracks from the Napoleonic Wars.

narrow tables in the mess hall. (Maybe that was why it was called "mess.")

As the ship began to roll in heavy seas, many men became seasick. Those who still could keep food down amused themselves by watching the food-laden mess kits slide up and down the mess hall tables as the ship rolled.

"You never knew if you were getting your own meal back or someone else's when they slid around like that," Dad said.

The troops didn't know where they were going or when they would arrive at their destination, even when they sailed into a narrow bay surrounded by land five days later.

"The sight was awesome," Dad recalled. "Green fields lined the shore, with gray hills and snow-capped peaks rising in the background and the late afternoon sun casting red, yellow and orange ribbons across the water."

The Queen, also affectionately called the Gray Ghost, navigated through an impressive array of naval might - two battleships, an aircraft carrier and numerous cruisers and destroyers anchored in what Dad later learned was the Firth of Clyde in Scotland.

"We didn't know that we were in Scotland, and when we marched off the ship, we asked some children if they were Limeys (English)," Dad chuckled. "They got mad at us."

The 90th set up a temporary facility in Great Malverne, England, where they cared for the first casualties from D-Day.

"One of our litter-bearers got an unpleasant surprise when he opened an ambulance door and found his wounded brother inside," Dad said.

In July, 1944, the 90th headed for France, landing at Omaha Beach and traveling to a bivouac area at Ste. Marie Eglise, among Normandy's hedgerows.

From there they travelled by "forty and eight" cars through St. Lo, levelled by Allied bombs, to the small town of Faines les Sources near the rail center of Bar le Duc, about 39 miles from the front.

Forty and eight cars were old World War I vehicles which could carry either 40 men or eight horses. Dad explained.

Five hospital units and a POW camp of 500 German prisoners were put to work in the hospital set up around Faines les Sources.

The 90th occupied an old stone building once used as a mental hospital and earlier as a barracks for Napoleon's troops. It could handle between 1,000 and 1,500 casualties.

Being behind the front wasn't that easy, Dad said. Although he has showed me a faded photo of a swimming pool which his unit

improvised on the hospital grounds, in another photo he is standing in the snow next to a jeep with oversized tires. He looks very cold.

"I always thought of your Army time as similar to Scout camp, only more disciplined," I said to him. "You made light of many frightening and uncomfortable situations. I know now that there's a lot that you never told us. Until I saw that photo of you in the snow I never thought of you being cold."

"That November we were still sleeping in bivouac tents," he said. "Before we went to sleep, we bundled up in our overcoats, blankets and anything else that we could scrounge, curled up into a ball on our cots and held our feet in our hands to stay warm."

The next month, Dad and his buddies took over a room in the hospital's attic, once used to store seeds by the French farmers.

After pushing several inches of dirt into an adjoining room, they strung telephone wire through the floor for electricity.

"We were lucky we didn't burn the place down," he chuckled.

The attic was warm, but the men soon found that they had to share their new quarters with rats.

Dad's unit earned a unit citation for excellence in performing their duty and two campaign stars for the major battles which took place during its time in France.

"During the Battle of the Bulge we were extremely busy, handling about 1,000 casualties a week, mostly from General Patton's Third Army," Dad said. "They came in with the mud from the battlefield still caked on their boots."

After V-E Day, Dad returned to the United States from Marseilles, landing in Boston and returning to Fort Dix, "where I had first donned the cocky uniform of the American GI"

TSgt Richie officially became civilian Harry J. Richie on October 10, 1945, when he returned to his mother in North Plainfield, NJ. His kid brother, Ray, wasn't so lucky - he was killed at the Battle of Ormoc Bay in the Philippines when his ship, the *Cooper*, went down.

Summing up his Army experience for me, Dad said, "In spite of the dramatic change from civilian to soldier and all of the discomforts and hardships which I encountered during my 44 months in the Army, I never did anything in my life that gave me a greater feeling of pride and satisfaction than those nearly four years in which I served my country."

My father, who now lives in Florida, will read this sometime around the 50th anniversary of D-Day on June 6. Thanks, Dad.

As I was saying...

Memories of Normandy and war in 1944

By JACK HILSHER

A half-century has probably fuzzed up the memories of most WWII participants. I know it has mine. And our recall process seems selective...some incidents stand out; tragic ones have to be nudged out. Not too many stand in line just waiting to be remembered.

As for D-Day itself (what did we know and when did we know it?) well, we certainly knew why we were in England. And we would have had to be deaf and blind not to see the increasing signs everywhere that "something" was up and close, in spite of allies wishes for secrecy. Why else, for example, would we have been trucked to an auditorium in our small British town and lectured to by General Patton himself, complete with stars, shiny helmet and pearl-handled six-shooters?

In that high squeaky voice, the general commanded us to "Kill the Hun!" and if we ran out of ammunition we were to take our helmets and "bash the Hun's skull in!" According to Patton, we were fortunate troops indeed, first since we would have that bashing opportunity shortly, and second, when our grandchildren asked what we did in the big war, "at least you won't have to tell them you shoveled s— in Fort Dix?"

Outside a little old lady came up to us and breathlessly asked, "Was that like?" No, dear, not in a million years.

Soon after that we pulled out of our training quarters and were taken to Tiverton, a coastal town on the English Channel. I was on an advance party to prepare quarters and had the best fish and chips I ever tasted anywhere, except it bothered me to have it wrapped in newspaper. (Didn't the Brits have wax paper?)

After a few days of waiting - we did an awful lot of that, waiting) one day we saw glider troops being towed overhead, headed east, and it didn't seem like they were training. There were always several

soldiers who would stand in the glider's open doorways, hanging on with both hands but waving their boots. We would wave back.

I wondered later when I saw their wrecked gliders in French fields filled with ugly stakes, slanted against landings, I wondered if they knew what awaited them in actuality would be nothing at all like their training.

When our time came - D plus six days - to cross a choppy channel in some kind of nondescript vessel, and the time came to climb down its side on rope nets into landing crafts, and then onto floating pontoons, then onto the beach, then things got fuzzed up again. We went through motions. I don't think we thought anything, certainly nothing about storing up memories, at least I didn't. We just did things, and I guess tried not to think too much.

There was very little shelling by then, and I believed my feet stayed dry. I can't be sure. Any worries at all were about tomorrow - the unknown, and the day after that - also unknown. And how many more, Oh God, after that? All unknown.

There was never any feeling whatsoever of being on a "crusade." And the word invasion was not in our vocabulary, let alone in our experience. To "invade" was to "enter with force" but the first waves had done all that, and the bombers, and the naval guns. Many had lost their lives doing that for us but we knew nothing at all of that at the time. In hindsight, if the Lord was ever with any war-time undertaking he was definitely with the whole cross-channel expedition. To get a foothold and keep it, on a continent so dominated by the German armies, was a miracle of the first order.

Our mission as a medical battalion was running a "clearing station," supplying temporary medical and evac service to an infantry division, the 79th whose insignia oddly enough was a white "Cross of Lorraine" on a blue shield.

(This caused some raised eyebrows later as we confronted French civilians.) But our mission was impossible without our equipment, which was missing somewhere, and furthermore we had no infantry division on the move to follow and do our thing.

It was all sorted out in a few days and we moved inland through the orderly French fields, bordered by those infamous hedgerows. They did indeed make great natural barriers for the enemy to slow the allied breakout.

Broken gliders were everywhere, side by side with dead cattle, bloated with gas and frozen in strange positions in or near shell and bomb craters. A horrible landscape.

When our equipment arrived the 79th had formed up and swung to the right, its mission to press north up the Cherbourg peninsula and free that port for allied supply unloading. That task did not take long...we heard two of the division's infantry regiments had liberated some wine cellars and thus were able to bash the Hun with great vigor, driving him all the way up to Cherbourg where he didn't hold out too long. It probably shouldn't be said they fought half-smashed but they were and certainly fought all the better for it. This was, after all, an unbloodied infantry division, but the Cherbourg peninsula took care of that in a hurry.

We had our first casualty - a quiet, balding ambulance driver from Philadelphia. Not a draftee, a volunteer and family man. Well-liked, he was a shell victim while seated behind the wheel, off-duty and probably napping. One thing we quickly realized - this wasn't Tennessee maneuvers. This was real. None of it was like any movie we ever saw; none of it was like any book we ever read; and none of it is easy to describe.

Maybe it is a good thing that a half century has covered up those memories with brain fuzz. I'd hate to have some of them crystal clear.

Unforgettable characters in war's drama

By JACK HILSHER

Sgt. James N. Mabry, Tenn. A regular army platoon leader whose recruits included many damn Yankees, like Private Anthony Supernowicz from Hazleton, whose vowel and consonant combination completely baffled Sgt. Mabry. At a morning roll call with his new-comer, Sgt. Mabry peered manfully at his roster, gave up, and solved his problem by calling out, "Dat dere new guy!" Whereupon Private Super - as he came to be called - shouted back cheerfully, "Here!" (Bless you, Tony.)

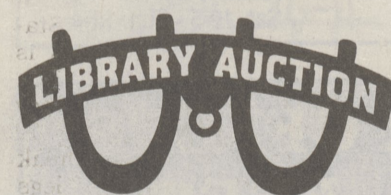
Pvt. Sidney D. Lush, Detroit. Aptly named, Lush was a closet

alcoholic, and although we never caught him stealing ethyl alcohol we were pretty sure he was at least half-smashed all the time. But he did the work of three and kept mostly to himself, studying his Bible which he always carried with him. Once, while Lush was holding forth about Heaven to an off-duty gathering outdoors, someone tipped over a stove, spilling fuel and flame over the area. After the flames were stamped out and everyone settled down, Lush gave a demonic chuckle and announced, "Now! Let's talk about Hell!" (Bless you, Sidney.)

Anton Lechner, Aged 10, Germany. Cute kid, but mooched

constantly. Got to be such a nuisance one night when Anton pointed to a box of ginger snaps and asked "Vos iss dooss?" a surgical tech dipped one in an instrument tray full of ethyl and handed it to Anton. He munched, pronounced "Goot" and wanted more. A few more, and then a few more, all ethyl soaked sent him staggering. Worse, he sang, "Auch du Leiber etc." (I kid you not. How could I make this up?) Well, you can guess the ending. Anton's mutter showed up and told our interpreter it was okay for Anton to hang around, bum candy, smoke our cigaretten, but please, no more "biscuits mitt schnapps!" (Bless you too, Anton.)

Library Auction Corner



July 7-8-9-10

For 47 summers, the people of the Back Mountain have come together to donate their goods, services and time for the auction block of the Back Mountain Memorial Library.

The life of the library is a year-to-year proposition, and the auction is crucial to its operation. Twenty-five percent of the annual budget comes from the auction.

This year's 48th annual auction will be held July 7-10 at the library grounds on Huntsville Road in Dallas.

Any and all donations of cash or saleable items can help assure continued service of the library to our communities. For more information, call the library at 675-1182.

A sampler of items that will be on sale:
3 marble-top tables
\$100 worth of topsoil, Ide's Paving
Antique butter churn
Six dinner certificates, Bonanza Restaurant

Six antique quilts, including a log cabin pattern
Eucalyptus wreath, Carmen's Florist
Silver tea set
Cranberry glass items

Support the Back Mountain Library

One-fourth of the library's annual budget comes from the auction. You can help. Your donation of an item or money will help your library survive and prosper.

Here's my donation to the Back Mountain Memorial Library

Name _____ Phone _____
Address _____ City/State _____ Zip _____

I have an item to donate. Call me for details.
 Here's a cash donation of \$ _____ to help the library.

Mail or bring to: Back Mountain Memorial Library
96 Huntsville Road, Dallas PA 18612

Call 675-1182 if you have any questions. Donations are tax-deductible.

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To life!

1994 Official Event
National Cancer Survivors Day

SUNDAY, JUNE 5, 1994

KIRBY PARK COMES TO LIFE!

WITH WYOMING VALLEY HEALTH CARE SYSTEM'S NATIONAL CANCER SURVIVORS' DAY CELEBRATION!

11:00 A.M. Opening ceremonies and walk

Join cancer survivors, their families, friends, caregivers and others as they celebrate life with a short but symbolic walk through Kirby Park. U.S. Rep. Paul Kanjorski and Wilkes-Barre Mayor, Lee Namey, will serve as honorary starters.

FREE T-SHIRTS FOR SURVIVORS

Noon Annual Summer Picnic

Pavilion #1 (near softball fields) with magician Pat Ward, volleyball, musical entertainment featuring The Anzalone Brothers & Company
Cookout - Noon - 2:00 PM. Bring a blanket and/or lawn chairs and ENJOY THE FESTIVITIES!
Reservations are requested.

For more information or to make reservation, please call 283-7200.

Wyoming Valley Health Care System