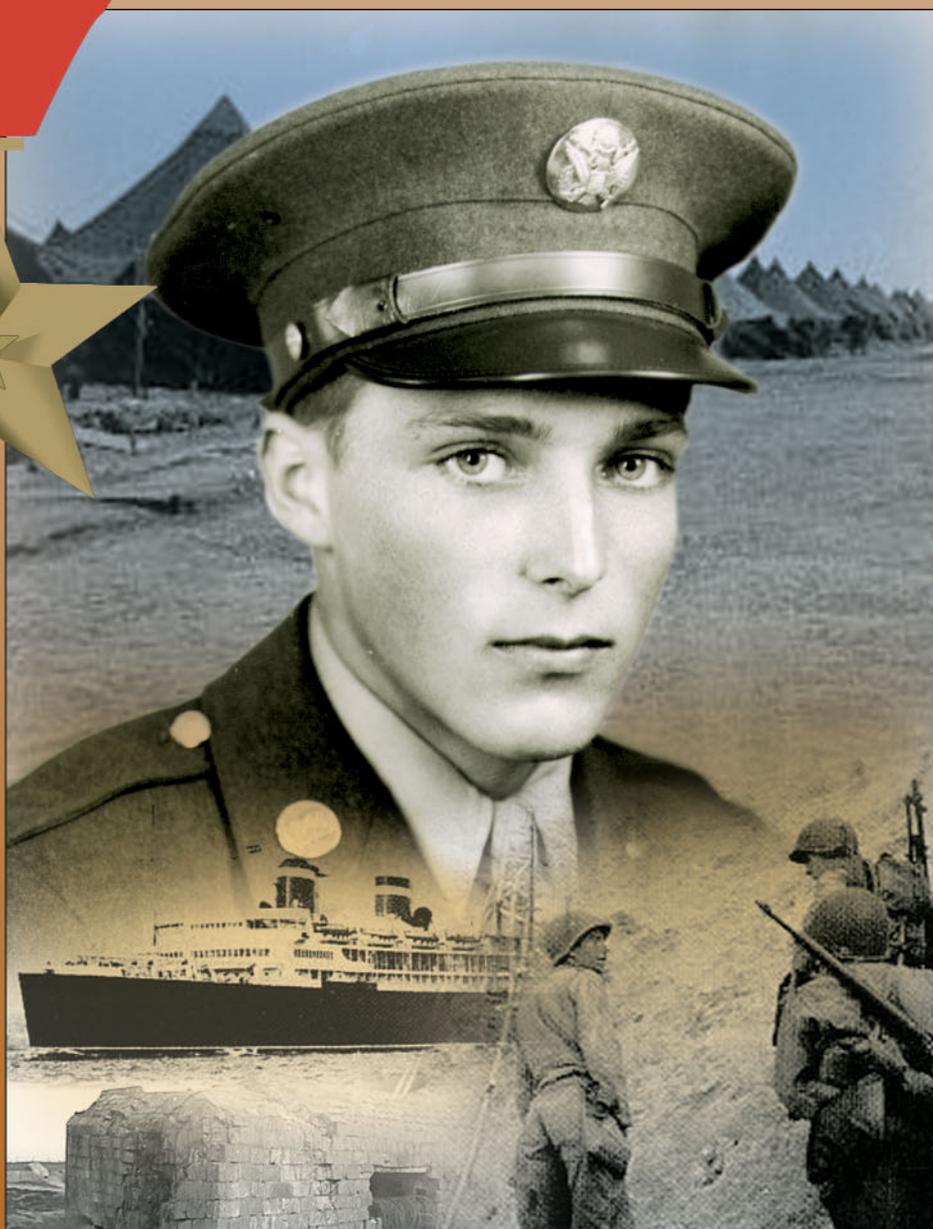


MEMOIRS OF WORLD WAR II



The Story of a Tioga County Soldier

HAROLD F. PLANK

MEMOIRS OF WORLD WAR II



D-day, June 6, 1944



The Story of a Tioga County Soldier

HAROLD F. PLANK

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PUBLISHED AND COMPILED BY JON PLANK, jplank@gbcs.edu
PRINTED BY RON SHEW, REVIVALIST PRESS, CINCINNATI, OHIO, USA
SPECIAL THANKS TO LARRY SMITH AND JAMES PLANK

FIRST PRINTING, MAY, 2002

INTRODUCTION

BY JAMES D. PLANK



No one could be more proud of grandparents than my brothers and I. All sorts of fun were ours on those long summer days that we spent on their Tioga County, Pennsylvania, farm. Across the field was the grave of a Civil War soldier who once had owned these one hundred acres. Up in the corner was the fish pond. Up through the woods were "the gully" and the waterfalls and all sorts of trails for little boys to wander. But better than the beautiful countryside and the farmhouse and barn was the wonderful warmth inside of a man and a lady who loved each other and loved life. As I remember growing up, I thought their life must have always been perfect. Only as we grew older did we learn that the thistles came with the roses. And only as time went on did we understand why the red, white and blue flies day and night all year through. Before Grandpa Plank settled on this farm, he had traveled around the world with thousands of other soldier boys to secure freedom for every generation that would follow. And before we grandsons would be born, their son Jim would also travel to distant shores and give his life in Vietnam. Many stories were too painful to recall. But on one of these later days, my grandfather told some of his adventures. My brother Jon put it all together, and we printed the story in hopes that it will always be a fitting tribute to the man who told it.



Harold & Hazel Plank, October, 2000

This is the story of a Tioga County, Pennsylvania, soldier during World War II. It was December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and thrust the United States into World War II. I was a senior in high school; and on January 13, when I was 18 years old, I signed up for the draft with the Tioga County Selective Service Board in Wellsboro, Pennsylvania.

Upon graduation on June 4, 1942, I continued to work on the family farm until my 19th birthday in '43, when I received notice that I had been drafted. I was to report to the Wellsboro armory on the morning of January 27 to be transported to a Wilkes Barre hospital for the examination. Meanwhile, I learned that three other fellows from my graduating class, Dick Streeter, Robert Miles, and Arnold English, had been asked to join at the same time.

INDUCTED IN THE ARMY

When the day came, we all boarded a bus and went to Wilkes Barre. There were about 56 fellows from Tioga County that day. There was a lot of prodding, examinations, and some written exams; but before the end of the day we were all sworn into the United States Army. We were immediately transferred to inactive service for one week to give us time to return home and get our affairs in order. During that time I decided to get engaged to the girl that I'd been going with for a couple of years in high school. I bought her a ring, and that was accomplished.

On the third of February, all of us guys assembled at the armory in Wellsboro. We were then transported by bus to Williamsport, and then by train to New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, where the induction center was located. After arriving, we had to go through the quartermaster store buildings and be issued all the uniform materials that we were going to need. These included our shoes, socks, underwear, OD uniforms, and the fatigue uniforms that we worked in. Next we went to the infirmary. Wearing nothing but our shoes, we were backed into a doorway where we received three shots. Then it seemed that at every window or desk we passed, we got "stabbed" again. I don't know how many we endured that day; but at chow call in the evening, many guys didn't make it to the mess hall. They were sick from reaction to the shots.

I think Dick was the first one assigned to a training camp and left before the rest of us for Texas. I had to send his civilian clothes home for him by mail. It was only a day or two, and Arnold and I were told that we were going to Camp Croft in South Carolina near Spartanburg.

We arrived in Camp Croft and were assigned barracks. For the first few days we didn't do a whole lot, only clean up around the barracks and that kind of thing; but our training actually started on the 15th of February. It consisted of six weeks of regular basic training. That was mostly close-ordered drill, I guess to get us used to following orders "right now." We also learned to assemble, disassemble, and maintain various weapons that we would be using. Then we were taken out to the firing range, where we fired various weapons—mostly the M-1 rifle. I qualified as marksman there. After the first six weeks of basic training, we were then sent to a different part of the camp for advanced training in intelligence and reconnaissance. This was mostly working with maps,

compasses, and night reconnaissance. We were taught how to identify enemy weapons, uniforms, vehicles, etc. We would need this information if we were sent out on a patrol.

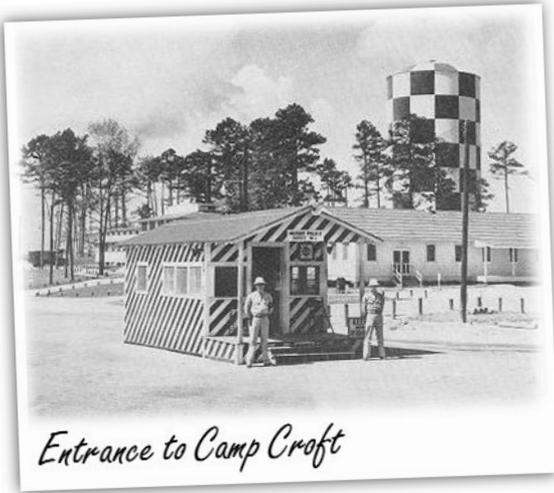
After completing our training about the 18th of May, we were put on a train and sent to a replacement depot north of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. The rumors were that we were probably headed

overseas, and we were doubtful if any of

us would get a furlough. So I got hold of a telephone, called my folks, and told them where I was and what the situation was; and they arranged to come to Camp Shenango to visit me. So they got in Dad's '37 Chevy sedan—my sisters Margie and Eileen, my Mom and Dad, and my fiancée—and they came to Camp Shenango. I was able to get a pass for the rest of the afternoon and evening to be with them. We were able to eat out and do some visiting, and at about 11:00 I went back to my barracks. They left the next morning, and that was the last time that I saw my folks for about two-and-a-half years.

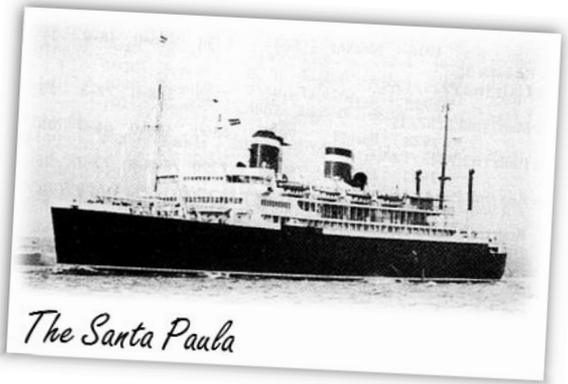
ON THE ATLANTIC

When we left Camp Shenango by train, we went across Pennsylvania into New Jersey and ended up in Camp Kilmer. That was a way sta-



Entrance to Camp Croft

tion for people going overseas. We were given additional uniforms, especially summer uniforms, as well as some different shots; and then on June the 10th, we went into New York harbor and boarded the *Santa Paula*. We left harbor on that day and pulled out into the Atlantic, where we joined several other ships to form a convoy across the Atlantic.



For a guy from Tioga county who had been in the mountains all his life, it was quite a sight—to see the water from horizon to horizon. There were some other ships, of course; and there were destroyers and smaller craft that were diving in and out and circling around the convoy, searching for any enemy submarines that might be in the vicinity.

Something different for me was the sight of porpoises leaping beside the ship, gracing it and diving through the bow wave put up by the ship, as we plowed through the water.

Another thing that we did was learn where our posts would be in case an alarm was sounded to abandon ship. We had to know what lifeboats or life rafts to be by, and so on. Our sleeping quarters beneath the deck consisted of about five-high canvas bunks stretched between two iron pipes. Of course, it wasn't the best place to sleep, because the fellows were often seasick; and being five-high, especially if you were in a lower bunk, wasn't really nice.

We made it across the ocean in good shape. I think there was a time or two an alarm sounded, and we heard depth charges going off in the distance; but as far as I know, nothing was sunk by our escorts.

On the morning of June 21st, we sailed into a harbor and caught sight of quite a few sunken ships, with some capsized and lying on their sides. Some had sunken straight down, and just their superstructures stuck out of the water. We learned that the port was in Oran, Algeria, North Africa, and that the sunken ships had been scuttled by the French navy to keep them from falling into the hands of the Germans and the Italians when they took over that area of North Africa. This was the first war damage we had seen.

From the port, we walked up a hill. They called it "Lion Mountain," but it was just a short distance above the port. There were tents waiting for us, each of which would accommodate 10–14 guys. This was a place



for us to wait for transportation to take us further east. During this time, I got my first sight of some things that were different than I was used to in Tioga County. In fact, instead of a team of horses hitched side by side, most animals hauling farm machinery or carts were hooked in single file; and I didn't see many horses at all. There

were some oxen, steers, donkeys, and an occasional camel hauling their vehicles around. It was just different.

BY RAIL TO TUNISIA

When we finally shipped out of Lion Mountain and headed east, the train consisted of boxcars—the famous French “40 and 8's.” They were made famous during WW I, when it was said they would haul 40 troops or eight horses. We usually travelled with the doors open for ventilation. We didn't make very good time. There were times we would go through melon patches; and the train would be going slow enough that some of the guys would jump off, run into the fields, pick up watermelons and other melons, and heave them to guys aboard the train. Then they would run and jump on the train before the caretakers in the field could catch them with their forks and rakes. We thought that was cute, of course.

One morning bright and early, we looked out the boxcar door; and we were traveling along the edge of a very steep cliff with a gorge and river way down below. Then we'd be in and out of tunnels. We learned later that these were the Atlas Mountains. I also remember going through the outskirts of Algiers on the railroad. We finally ended up in Tunisia at a town called Mateur.

We spent some time in Mateur. It was hot and dry, and most of our water came from lister bags that were hung in the shade. Now these lister bags consisted of canvas bags that were rubberized and held about 20 gallons of water. They sweat quite a bit, and that was supposed to help cool the water. Well, the water was not very cool; and

between the rubber taste and the stuff that was put in the water to make it pure, it was horrible. They knew that we needed to drink a lot of water in that kind of a situation to prevent dehydration, so they insisted that we take salt tablets. They would hand out the salt tablets in the evening at "mess call," and usually an officer would watch to see that you swallowed your salt tablet. Because they tended to make me sick at my stomach, I became pretty proficient at palming it and making believe that I swallowed it while drinking some water and then getting rid of it later.

LIFE IN THE ARMY

It was while we were here in Mateur, too, that a bunch of us went fishing one day. Some of the fellows had picked up some Italian concussion grenades which were smoother and unlike our fragmentation grenades. We would walk on a pier on the Mediterranean, pull the pin on a grenade, and drop it in the water. The concussion from the explosion would stun any fish that were nearby, and they would float to the surface. We would drag them in with tree boughs or anything that we could reach them with. We would dress them and take them to the cook shack and have fish for supper.

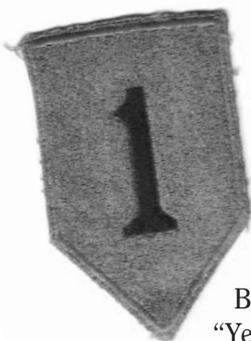
Next, we went into Bizerta and boarded LCI's for a trip to Sicily. Of course, the invasion of Sicily had occurred some time before; and by that time, the fighting pretty well had been taken care of. On August 13th, I boarded LCI #13. It was Friday the 13th. We left the next day, and it took a couple of days to get to our destination. We landed in Palermo, Sicily; and when we left the ship, we took all of our gear with us and marched through the city of Palermo to the outskirts, where we set up camp in an olive grove. It was a sandy place with a lot of red ants, as I remember. We ate our C rations that night and early the next morning took our tents down, packed up our gear, marched back through Palermo, and reboarded LCI's. This time I got on #8 and sailed back down the coast of Sicily to near where the landing had taken place on the invasion. There we got off at a place called Licata and went up on a hillside to an olive grove, where we pitched our tents, and waited for further orders.

When the morning came, an awful din arose but we discovered that it was just a donkey. The donkeys made more noise than any rooster ever did to wake you up, and I think it was even earlier in the morning when they started their braying. We discovered that a lot of the carts that the donkeys were pulling were decorated beautifully.

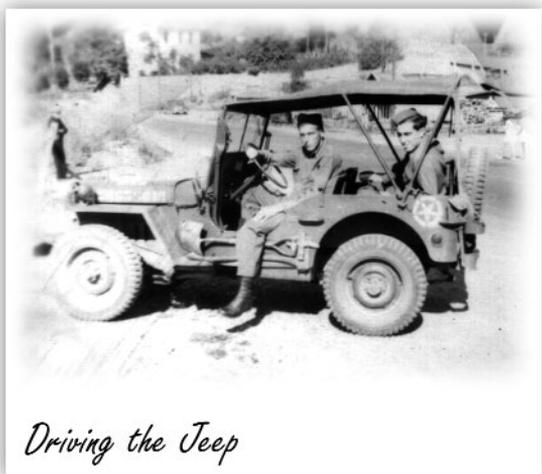
They had hand-carving on the spokes and on the sidewalls. The harnesses were decorated with tassels, colored stones, and bits of glass. They were really colorful outfits. These were high-wheel, two-wheeled carts, and they were used for all kinds of transportation, not only to transport people from place to place, but produce as well.

Occasionally in this situation, we would watch movies in the evening. The screen would be set up in a field near the olive grove, and we would all go to watch the movie. On the way, we would pick our helmets full of almonds and fill our canteens with vino. While watching the movie, we would crack the almonds and sip at the vino. Occasionally an alert was sounded, and they had to shut down, because a plane had been heard in the vicinity; and we didn't know whether it was ours or the enemy's. But all in all, it was kind of a relaxing atmosphere.

DRIVING A JEEP



It was here, too, that I finally got a home. I was assigned to the Company C, 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. I no longer was a replacement, for I had joined an outfit. During this time, I was asked if I could drive a Jeep. Sometimes you hesitated to say “yes,” because they might give you a wheelbarrow to wheel around. But, in this case, I decided it was legitimate and said, “Yes, I have experience driving.” So an officer took me out in a Jeep, and we did some driving around the countryside. When we got back, he issued me a government driver's license for Jeeps and light trucks. From then on, I drove a Jeep with a 37mm cannon behind it. We would go on practice trips up onto a mountainside, unhook the cannon, swing it around, and prepare to fire. We became proficient at it. We had targets on the side of the hill (old junk tanks from the Italian army) that we would shoot at.



It was around this time of the year that Italy had been invaded. We were glad that we weren't involved in that ourselves.

One day we got a notice to move to the airport at Gela and to take up guardpoints and checkpoints. It was rumored that some "big-wigs" from the Italian government were to meet with some of the Allied generals at this airport, and they needed our protection. After about four days, nothing had taken place; and we were relieved and went back to our place at Licata.

We were there until about the 22nd of October, when we were loaded on trucks and trucked by Mt. Etna to the port city of Augusta in Sicily. There we boarded a British transport ship named the *H.M.S. Stratheden*. After boarding and taking on some Sikh troops and Gurkhas from India that belonged to the British army, we left Sicily; and on the 25th we stopped at Algiers. There we left the British troops and took on some more American troops; and on October 27th, we left Algiers and started back through the Mediterranean through the straits of Gibraltar and out into the Atlantic. There we went westward to avoid detection by German planes from France that might alert bombers or submarines. As it turned out, we made it all the way to Scotland and landed November 5th. Then on the 6th, we boarded a train in Glasgow traveled on through Scotland and through England to the channel coast at a village named Swanage. Some of the houses in Swanage had been evacuated so that American troops could use them while preparing for the invasion of Normandy.

Things went along pretty well there. I remember at Thanksgiving time that the turkey was tainted, so our Thanksgiving dinner was postponed. We had C rations or K rations that day.

STUDYING MORSE CODE IN ENGLAND

During this same time, I was taking quite a lot of written tests on Morse Code and radio operation. Lo and behold, on February 7th I was transferred out of the first division to 286 Joint Assault Signal Company in St. Austell, England. A week later, I was transferred to the 293rd Joint Assault Signal Company at Torquay England. There I studied Morse Code, all kinds of signals, flags, radio, lights, etc., and eventually was transported to the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth. There we went into intense training to know the difference between army artillery fire and naval gunfire, and how to spot targets. We were





The Royal Naval College

also taught how to zero in on the target and to fire at will when zeroed in close enough.

During this time, we were formed into various units. We were called the Naval Shore Fire Control Party. It consisted of two officers and 10 or 12 men. Our officers were Captain Jonathan Harwood from the Army Artillery and Lieutenant (jg) Kenneth S.

Norton from the Navy. After our training was completed at Dartmouth, we were sent out to the unit that we would be with during the invasion of Normandy. My particular unit ended up back in Swanage, England, at the place from which the First Division had moved. There we joined the Second Ranger Battalion; and from then on, we were extensively trained in cliff-climbing. Near Swanage there were some cliffs that were said to be similar to where we intended to land in Normandy. To start with, we hung ropes over the edge of the cliff and climbed up and down just for practice. Later on, we got into landing craft; and we would see how long it took us to get off the landing craft and climb the ropes and get to the top.



During this time, somebody came up with the bright idea of putting rocket launchers on the top edge of the boat and hooking grapple hooks and ropes to them, having the rope coiled in a box in back of the rocket launcher. We practiced, and it worked pretty good. They would shoot the grapple hooks up over the top of the cliff; and when we'd grab the ropes and start pulling on them, they'd dig into the surface on top of the cliff and make a good place to start climbing. We had practiced in various places, on various cliff-heights, and on various types of cliffs. We even landed on the Isle of Wight and climbed cliffs there. This was quite rugged work.

When we were coming close to the time that the invasion would take place, our outfit was transported to Portsmouth, England; and it was here that I noticed a sign of a regimental command post that seemed familiar. I looked it up in my address book; and it was a cousin, Layton Miles. I did get to go in and locate his bunk, and eventually I got to visit with him awhile before I went back to my own outfit. My Ranger

Battalion was mostly aboard the S.S. *Amsterdam*, which had been a coastal pleasure boat taking passengers throughout Europe. Here we waited orders for the invasion. The night before the invasion we were fed pancakes and bacon. The weather had been pretty ferocious, and the invasion was postponed for one day; but eventually it was decided that June 6, 1944, would be the day.

D-DAY: WE INVADE NORMANDY

Our ship was put out into the channel, and we bounced around out there. Eventually nets were hung over the side, and landing craft pulled up alongside for us to climb down into. We had to watch our step, because when the ship was going down and the landing craft was coming up, you could get caught between the two and crushed between their hulls. We made it into the landing craft, and they cast loose; and we started circling around. It was about this time that the big ships out in the channels started bombarding the coastline. It was dark, and though we couldn't see the coastline, we knew it was out there in the darkness somewhere. Eventually we formed a straight line and headed for the coast. When daylight came, it was discovered that we were eastward along the coastline much further than we should be for our landing point. So we started going up along the coastline, heading westward. The Germans began to come out on top of the cliffs to fire down on us. Occasionally we would hear a bullet zing off the hull of the landing craft, and so we kept our heads low.

Many of the guys became very seasick during this voyage toward

the shore, because it was mighty rough. They had issued us vomit bags, and many of the guys knew that once wasn't enough, so they hung onto them. The bottoms got kind of soaked, so that when they eventually threw them overboard by the handles, the bottoms came out and spewed vomit all over the guys in the vicinity. That almost made them sick again.



D-Day

Eventually we turned into the shoreline and could see the cliffs that we were supposed to be climbing. We were anxious to get ashore. When our rockets were fired, and the grapple hooks went over the top of the cliff, the landing gates were let down; and I was able to step out on dry land. Many others had to struggle through chest-high water to get ashore. Our first priority was to take our radio to a position under the cliffs. We found a kind of alcove, where we could set the radio up and make contact with the ships. We were supposed to be in contact with the battleship *Texas* and the destroyer *Satterlee*, just to let them know that we were ashore. We had been told previously that if we didn't get our objective accomplished within a certain length of time, there was a great number of bombers headed there; and we would just have to look out for ourselves. There was no way that they could take us away. The colonel decided that we had enough guys on top of the cliff and that we had better send word that we had it. Our code phrase for achieving our objective was "Praise the Lord," and that was sent out over the air, so that the bombers which had been scheduled to drop bombs were diverted to other targets.

It wasn't too long until we were all atop the cliffs, except for those who had been wounded from gunfire, machine gun fire, or hand grenades, which had been dropped on us from above. The first guys up there did manage to push the Germans back; and they went from bunker to bunker, cleaning them out, so that by the time we got to the top of the cliff with our radios, it was fairly safe right there at the edge of the cliffs.

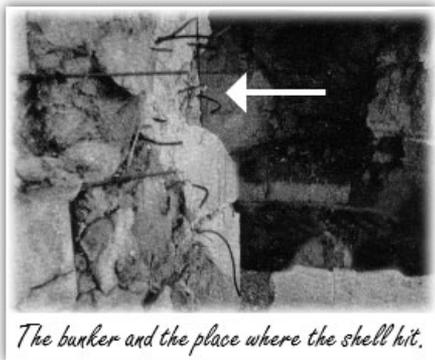
We soon hooked up with Colonel Rudder and started moving inland away from the edge of the cliff and ended up in a bunker farthest from the cliff top. In doing this, the Colonel had been shot through the thigh. He didn't break any bones; but it made a bad wound above his knee, so we stopped right there at that bunker, set our radios up, and started looking for snipers and targets of opportunity. We discovered that the big guns that were supposed to be there were missing. They had been taken further inland. That was kind of a disappointment, but we did set up our radio and start watching for whatever targets might become available. We later learned that the missing big guns had been discovered in an orchard by a patrol of the Rangers. They attached thermite grenades to the breech block or traverse mechanism. When fired, the parts were welded together, so they could no longer be used.

My particular job at the bunker was walking back and forth on top of the apron where the gun barrel would normally have pointed out

toward the channel and keeping watch for snipers or anything suspicious. Eventually Captain Harwood told me that it was time for me to take a break and somebody else would take over looking for snipers. I got down in the bunker by the radio, leaned my back against the outside edge of the wall, leaned my gun up against the wall, and dug out some D ration bars and started munching.

A SHELL HITS OUR BUNKER

All at once, there was a terrible explosion; and to this day, I don't know whether the concussion threw me across the interior of the bunker, or if I was scared enough to jump across. But when I came to my senses and looked back to where I had been, I noticed thick yellow smoke billowing all through the interior of the bunker and the Captain lying on that place where I had been walking back and forth. I went directly to him; and he recognized me and said, "Plank, give me a shot of morphine." I took morphine from my belt and the first aid kit and was going to put it in his right arm, which was nearest to me; but he was lying on his back, and the sleeve was torn up above his elbow



The bunker and the place where the shell hit.

area. I took my knife and cut the sleeve further up, so I could get to his shoulder to find enough flesh to put an injection of morphine in. He also said, "Don't tell my folks how I got it."

Eventually we recovered enough to realize that a shell from one of our own destroyers had hit just above my head, and it was concrete or shrapnel that hit the Captain. I also discovered that it had broken my carbine in two at the pistol grip, so it was no longer any use to me. My left eardrum had been broken, so I didn't hear too well for awhile. We needed to take care of Captain Harwood, so we took clothing from a dead German and used it for padding to put splints on the broken limbs. We then called for some prisoners who had been taken and had them bring a stretcher to carry him back to the edge of the cliff, where Dr. Block had started a hospital-like infirmary. That was the last that I saw Captain Harwood alive. The dead German's body was put outdoors behind the bunker. Soon after, an artillery shell hit nearby and completely buried his body. I've often wondered if it was ever found and identified and properly buried.

Some of the following events which occurred over the next couple of days may not be in sequence, because there were so many things happening in such a jumble that it's hard to recall the order in which they happened.

Colonel Rudder once lost telephone contact with the company C.P. back by the cliff top, so I was asked to follow the telephone line back and see if I could repair it. During our training, we had been instructed in lineman's work also. I took the telephone line in my hand and started running and crouching and jumping from shell hole to shell hole and bomb crater to bomb crater, following it back toward the Company C.P., until I located where it had been blown apart by a mortar shell. After locating the other end, I spliced the wires and taped them. I was near the Company C.P., so I had them call the Colonel at the Battalion Headquarters to be sure that the telephone was again working. After resting up a bit, I made my way back to the battalion headquarters at the bunker where we were staying.



At the time Captain Harwood was hit by that shell, the Lieutenant (jg) from the Navy was also wounded, so he was at the infirmary as well. A Ranger lieutenant gave me a German Mouser to use as a weapon since mine had been destroyed. I don't know why I didn't get another M-1, because there had to be more of them lying around, since we had lost quite a few fellows.

During that day and evening, I accompanied Rangers on several combat patrols further inland. Every time, we ran into larger German contingents than we could handle; and after a brief fire fight, we would disengage and make our way back to our own area again. This happened several times during the course of the day and the evening. One time, I was given a one-man radio; and we had intended to find a place that we could hide out further inland, where we could spot targets when it came daylight the next day. But again, we ran into another German patrol; and since we had been located by them, we knew we couldn't stay there. So we managed to make it back to our own lines again.

During the night, while trying to sleep in this bunker, some guy rolled over and set off a smoke grenade. Someone hollered, "Gas attack!" and if we didn't have a time trying to locate our gas masks and getting set up to repel a counter-attack that we expected at any moment! Luckily it wasn't a gas attack, but a smoke grenade and no

RALPH E. HANDLEY, MO M.M.
U.S.S. Y.M.S. - 381
c/o Fleet P.O., New York, N.Y.

2nd Ranger Battalion
APO 230 U.S. Army

June 22, 1944

Subject: Recommendation for Award
To : Commanding Officer, 2nd Ranger Battalion

1. Under the provisions of AR 600-45
it is recommended that

Harold J. Plank, Private 35761826
Naval Shore Fire Control 2nd Ranger Battalion
be awarded the
Bronze Star Medal for

2. bravely assisting in the direction of
Naval gunfire in support of the 2nd Ranger
Battalion landing at Pte du Hoc on June 6, 1944

Private Plank without thought for his own
safety assisted in the control of radio
communications with Naval fire support
ships at sea. This was done from an
observation point constantly under fire
from enemy small arms, mortars, and artillery.

On the night of June 6th, he volunteered
for outpost duty with members of the Ranger
Battalion. This came when his own duty
would permit him to leave it. He
materially assisted in repelling 3 German
counterattacks on the night of June 6th and
then returned to his post to assist with
further Naval Gunfire support on the following
morning.

His contribution in this capacity made
him outstanding and he carried on until
reinforcements arrived to relieve the Rangers
on the afternoon of June 8th, 1944.

Signed Lt. Kenneth S. Norton

harm was done. These were incidents that later you found to be kind of amusing, although at the time they were not.

We were on the top of Point de Hoc for two-and-one-half days, almost continually under artillery fire, mortar fire, and counter-attacks. During this time, I was recommended for the Bronze Star Medal, which later I did receive. Of the 235 men who had landed with the 2nd Ranger Battalion at the bottom of the cliffs and climbed up, only 87 of us were able to walk out of there when we were finally relieved two-and-one-half days later. We were relieved at Point du Hoc by elements of the 29th Division and 5th Ranger Battalion and the rest of the 2nd Ranger Battalion. For a few days, I stayed with the Ranger Battalion as we went through some small villages nearby. We were heading toward Cherbourg, which would eventually be a primary target that if captured could make the harbor useful for landing supplies.

DIGGING FOXHOLES

After we were no longer useful as Naval Shore Fire Control Party, I was transferred to the 19th Corps Headquarters and did guard duty there. I dug foxholes to stay in whenever artillery fire came too close and lay there lots of times, watching our bombers go over. Man! The sky would be chuck-full of them, mostly heading to bomb St. Lô, so that we could finally break out and head toward Paris. From where we were, we could hear the bombs whistle down and land in and around St. Lô. The ground would just tremble. It was quite an experience; but eventually the breakout did come, and the 19th Corps Headquarters kept following along as closely behind the advancing troops as possible.

I remember riding in the back of a big army truck on a dirt road. We were coming to a curve, where the wheels threw dirt and dust out to one side. I noticed a dead German soldier lying there, and his lower half was almost covered with sand and dust thrown from the wheels of the trucks. His face was looking up at the sky, and his eye sockets and mouth were just literally crawling with maggots. It was not a sight that I like to remember. We kept following the head troops for the next several weeks, coming close to Paris at one time.

Late in the summer of 1945, the Germans deployed their so-called secret weapons. Among these were long-range rockets launched from deep in Germany. They rose very high in the sky and fell without warning on the coastal cities of England. Another weapon was one we called the "buzz bomb." It was shorter range and launched from mobile launch pads close behind enemy lines. An unmanned winged bomb with

a motor to propel it, it could be aimed at railroad yards or villages with highway intersections and would carry just enough fuel to get to the target. It was very inaccurate. The noise from the motor would set up a vibration of the tile roofs on sheds and outbuildings that would make a scary rattle. If you heard one, you looked for a hole, a ditch, or a cellar. If the motor stopped, you knew it would hit close by. If the motor was still running when it passed, you breathed a sigh of relief because it had missed you.

During these stressful times, it wasn't unusual to see small groups of G.I.'s gather together in sheltered spots to dig out their New Testaments or prayer books and engage in Bible studies. The New Testament that I carried was given to my father by his grandmother when he entered the army in World War I. He carried it during his tour of duty, some of which was in the same section of France. He gave it to me when I was drafted in January, 1942; and I carried it during my service in World War II. Years later, I gave that same New Testament to my son, James, to carry into Vietnam. The New Testament returned, but my son gave his life in that war.

Finally, the Allied troops had broken into Germany; and on October 16th, I was taken to the front lines and put into the 99th Infantry Battalion, a Norwegian-American Ski Troop outfit. They had worked with the British Commandos, so they were similar to the Rangers I had been with. At the time I joined them, they were just outside of Würselen, Germany, located on a highway being used as an escape route by the Germans encircled at Aachen. We were sent to secure the roadway and cut off the escape of the Germans from Aachen. The First Infantry Division was closing in from one side and the 30th Infantry Division from the other. For at least five days, we were constantly under artillery fire, tank fire, mortar fire, and bombing by the *Luftwaffe*. It was hard to even get warm food. Because of the battle at Würselen, I was recommended for the Combat Infantry Badge.



“NO LETTER TODAY”

Eventually we were relieved from that post and moved out to Henri-Chapelle, Belgium, where we spent a few days in rest and then went back into training. We then went to Tilff, Belgium, where we were housed in really good apartment buildings. It was a nice respite from

some of the things we had been through. That wasn't going to last forever, because on December 17th, 1944, the blitz started by the Germans in the Ardennes offensive; and we were loaded onto trucks and rode all afternoon and into the night from Tilff, Belgium, into the outskirts of Malmédy. There we took up roadblocks and made some reconnaissance patrols, trying to locate the Germans. We picked up a few engineers who had escaped what would later be known as the "Malmédy massacre."

When we were not scheduled to man the road blocks, we took shelter in an abandoned café nearby. There we discovered a jukebox and a stack of records. Only one record was in English, and it was played over and over. It was very appropriate for the situation we were in. The title on one side was "Worried Mind," the other, "No Letter Today."

We spent December 17th through Christmas in and around Malmédy. Shortly after Christmas, we were on a combat patrol in hopes of at least capturing one German to find out what outfit we were opposing at that time. We were going up a roadway in a ravine and came under fire. We were pinned down for a short time, but eventually we made it through and into a little village. At that time I was ammunitions bearer for a fellow with a bazooka. If we ran into any tanks, we could fire at them with it. He was just a short fellow, and the bazooka was longer than he was. It was comical, keeping up with him pulling that bazooka along.

In this little village, we had had an artillery barrage by our own side to prepare it for entry. We came upon a stable that was on fire. There were live cattle in it that we couldn't rescue, so we stood outside and shot as many as possible to keep them from suffering in the fire. We went on a little ways, and I remember seeing some Germans in overcoats running across a field into a woods. They were too far off for us to even bother to shoot at. When we came back off from this combat patrol, it was said that we had captured one German and killed 30. We did identify the unit that we were opposing there.

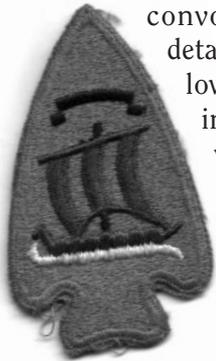
A few days later, in January 1945, we were moved from Malmédy to Stavelot in Belgium; and there we continued doing practically the same things we'd been doing around Malmédy, only it was a little more forested. Lots of times we were near enough to Germans that we could hear them talking but couldn't see them. It was bitter cold with up to two feet of snow, and most of the time was spent in foxholes until January 18th. On the 13th of January, when I turned 21 years old, the captain of the company, knowing it was my birthday, pulled me out of my foxhole; and I spent the day at company headquarters in a barn with a fire in a barrel. That was the only time during 28 days in the Malmédy and Stavelot area that I spent inside.

On January 18th, we were pulled from the line there and went back to Tilff, Belgium, where we'd been stationed before. Not too long after that, it was decided that the 99th was going back into France to be put into a new outfit and trained for the invasion of Norway. I believe it took us 72 hours by train all the way back to Barneville, France, on the west coast, south of Cherbourg. There we started training again and were united with all the remnants of the Ranger Battalions that had been fighting in Italy and France, as well as the remainder of the First Special Service Forces that had been fighting in the mountains in Italy. We were now part of a regiment called the 474th Infantry Regiment (Sep). Of course, the 99th Infantry Battalion also had "(Sep)" after it because we didn't belong to any larger outfit. But now we were



J.L. Christopherson, Leif Larsen, & H.F. Plank in Barneville, France.

with 474th Infantry Regiment (Sep). It was later decided that things were going so well in Europe that we no longer needed to think about invading Norway. The outfit was shipped, partly by rail and partly in convoy, back to Aachen, Germany, where the 99th would detach from the 474th. We went south into Germany and followed closely behind the advancing troops. We were split into company areas, where we searched out wooded areas, villages, farm houses, and anything that could hide either officials that might be wanted for war crimes or soldiers who had dressed in civilian clothes. We were also picking up anything that could be used as a weapon.



I VISIT A CASTLE

During this time, we had moved into the Bavarian Alps. One day I was driving a Jeep with an officer, followed by a couple of armored vehicles. We went into the mountains and up a dirt road that reminded me of a place back home in Pennsylvania, going from Log Cabin Inn up to Colton Point, only it was heavily wooded with more pines and hem-

locks. There we eventually came into a courtyard of a castle. It was just like a storybook castle. We parked in the courtyard, and the officers went inside to talk with the people. The courtyard soon filled with pages in tight black britches and white socks. The britches came to just below their knees and the socks went above, and they were wearing bright red coats with red tails. They just stood around and didn't cause any trouble whatsoever. Also there were maids who wore starched aprons and skirts and bonnets. It was just like something you'd read about in a storybook. That was a nice experience.

It wasn't long until we were in Heroldsbach, about 15 miles north of Nuremberg, and the war had ended in Europe. Occasionally we were still picking up some bypassed bands of Germans and freeing foreign prisoners who had been jailed by the Germans. On May 13th, we started back from Nuremberg to Le Havre, France. We went through many places that had big names during WW I, such as Verdun. We were in a camp near Le Havre for several days until ships came into the harbor to take us to Norway.

On May 29th I boarded an LST. It was loaded mostly with motorized vehicles, armored vehicles, tanks, and military equipment. We set sail for Norway. When we started up the fjord toward Oslo, our LST stopped at Drammen, some distance from Oslo. We unloaded the ships and I got to drive an armored vehicle from there to Oslo. It was six-wheeled and had either a 50 caliber machine gun or a 20 mm anti-tank or anti-aircraft gun in the turret behind me. We didn't have any problems in the convoy into Oslo. There our vehicles were turned into a motor pool, and I was taken to a camp in Smestad, Norway where I would stay.

It was at this camp that I got a "Dear John" letter from my girlfriend in the US, and she said that our engagement was off. It had been off for some time, but she didn't want to notify me for fear that I would be in a war zone at the time of receiving it and I would not react to it properly. I recovered quickly and got acquainted with a Norwegian girl who lived right near the camp we were staying at Smestad. She was a cousin to one of the fellows in the outfit. From where we were camped, it wasn't far by electric train into downtown Oslo and we were able to go there quite often. The Red Cross had set up canteens and places to stay. This young lady from Smestad was a good guide to show me the sights around Oslo.

Most of our time in Oslo was spent guarding warehouses that the Germans had used for storage,



King Haakon VII

Army of the United States



Honorable Discharge

This is to certify that

HAROLD F PLANK 33 461 826 PRIVATE FIRST CLASS
COMPANY C 474TH INFANTRY

Army of the United States

is hereby Honorably Discharged from the military service of the United States of America.

This certificate is awarded as a testimonial of Honest and Faithful Service to this country.

Given at SEPARATION CENTER
INDIANTOWN CAMP MIL RES PA

Date 6 NOVEMBER 1945

B. J. Ambrose
B J AMBROSE
MAJOR AC

K 147-27

ENLISTED RECORD AND REPORT OF SEPARATION HONORABLE DISCHARGE

1. LAST NAME FIRST NAME MIDDLE INITIAL PLANK HAROLD F		2. ARMY SERIAL NO. 33 461 826		3. GRADE PFC		4. JAN OR SERVICE INF		5. COMPONENT AUS	
6. PREVIOUS ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES RFD # WESTFIELD PA		7. DATE OF SEPARATION 6 NOV 45		8. PLACE OF SEPARATION SEP CTR ICMR PA		9. DATE OF BIRTH 13 JAN 24		10. PLACE OF BIRTH WESTFIELD PA	
11. ADDRESS YOUR PRESENT EMPLOYMENT WILL BE ABOUT SEE 9		12. PLACE SEE 9		13. MARITAL STATUS SINGLE (MARRIED OTHER APPROV)		14. U.S. CITIZEN Y		15. COMPLEX OCCUPATION AND SKILL BLUE BROWN 5'9" 140 LBS 0	
16. DATE OF SELECTION 27 JAN 43		17. DATE OF ENLISTMENT 3 FEB 43		18. DIVISION (OR SERVICE) ASSIGNED NEW CUMBERLAND PA		19. PLACE OF POST INTO SERVICE NEW CUMBERLAND PA		20. POSTER ASSIGNED AT TIME OF POST INTO SERVICE SEE 9	
21. MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY AND NO. TRUCK DRIVER LIGHT 345		22. COUNTY AND STATE LUZERNE PA		23. MILITARY HISTORY FARMER GENERAL		24. COMBAT INFANTRY BRIGADE 44		25. PLACE OF POST INTO SERVICE NEW CUMBERLAND PA	
26. THEATRE AND CITATION GO 33 & 40 WD 45 SICILY ARDENNES CENTRAL EUROPE		27. THEATRE AND CITATION NORMANDY NORTHERN FRANCE RHINELAND		28. THEATRE AND CITATION EUROPE AN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN		29. THEATRE AND CITATION AFRICA		30. THEATRE AND CITATION AFRICA	
31. MEDALS AND DECORATIONS UNIT BADGE BRONZE STAR MEDAL BRONZE STARS AND 1 BRONZE ARROWHEAD		32. MEDALS AND DECORATIONS GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL DISTINGUISHED WORLD WAR II VICTORY MEDAL		33. MEDALS AND DECORATIONS NONE		34. MEDALS AND DECORATIONS NONE		35. MEDALS AND DECORATIONS NONE	
36. SERVICE RECORD ESEP 4 20 DEC 44 14 MAR 45 20 SEP 45		37. SERVICE RECORD D 4 12 2 4 22		38. SERVICE RECORD PFC		39. SERVICE RECORD 10 JUN 43		40. SERVICE RECORD 17 OCT 45	
41. SERVICE RECORD NONE		42. SERVICE RECORD NONE		43. SERVICE RECORD NONE		44. SERVICE RECORD NONE		45. SERVICE RECORD NONE	
46. SERVICE RECORD AR 615 265 15 DEC 44 CONVN OF THE GOVT RRI-1 DEMOBILIZA		47. SERVICE RECORD CAMP CROFT SC 1 & F SCHOOL		48. SERVICE RECORD P.A. DATA		49. SERVICE RECORD P.A. DATA		50. SERVICE RECORD P.A. DATA	
51. SERVICE RECORD NONE		52. SERVICE RECORD NONE		53. SERVICE RECORD NONE		54. SERVICE RECORD NONE		55. SERVICE RECORD NONE	
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69. SERVICE RECORD LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE 12 MAY 45-85 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 27 JAN 43		71. SERVICE RECORD LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE 12 MAY 45-85 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 27 JAN 43		72. SERVICE RECORD LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE 12 MAY 45-85 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 27 JAN 43		73. SERVICE RECORD LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE 12 MAY 45-85 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 27 JAN 43		74. SERVICE RECORD LAPEL BUTTON ISSUED ASR SCORE 12 MAY 45-85 INACTIVE SERVICE ERC FROM 27 JAN 43	
75. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED <i>Harold F. Plank</i>		76. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER IN CHARGE R F MAGUIRE CAPT MAC		77. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER IN CHARGE R F MAGUIRE CAPT MAC		78. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER IN CHARGE R F MAGUIRE CAPT MAC		79. SIGNATURE OF OFFICER IN CHARGE R F MAGUIRE CAPT MAC	



guarding some war criminals who had been captured, getting in touch with the German army camps, and preparing those troops to be transferred to Germany by ships. We had a few big parades in Oslo. When King Haakon VII returned from exile in England, we had a parade for him and formed up in the castle grounds. He inspected us, and so I got to see a king.

SAILING HOME

Time went on, but finally the *USS Bienville* docked in Oslo Harbor, our troops were put aboard, and we sailed away on October 16th. We let some British troops off in Southampton, England, and then left the next day and started out through the English Channel into the Atlantic Ocean. We ran into a very severe storm; but we were too far out to go back and take shelter in some harbor, so we rode it out. I believed I was on my way home, so I wasn't too concerned about it.

Finally on October 31st, we landed in Boston harbor and were taken to Camp Miles Standish. There we got rid of some of the equipment, and we were sent by train to Indiantown Gap. We went through a lot of paperwork and were finally discharged on November 7th, after which I went to Harrisburg and took a train to Williamsport.

My honorable discharge shows that I was awarded the Bronze Star Medal, Good Conduct Medal (if you can believe that), Distinguished Unit Badge, Combat Infantry Badge, Europe African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with six bronze stars and bronze arrowhead, and World War II Victory Medal. The six bronze stars represent various battles and campaigns. They were Sicily, Normandy, northern France, Rhineland, and Ardennes, Central Europe.

On the train ride to Williamsport, I was talking with some civilians; and one fellow asked me where I was going. I told him, "The Wellsboro area." Well, he was a salesman headed for Wellsboro, so if I wanted to, I could ride with him from Williamsport to Wellsboro. That was really a godsend, and so I made it into Wellsboro probably around 11:00 at night; and he let me off on the corner by the red light, where the Wellsboro Diner is now. I walked down the sidewalk a little ways toward where Dunkin Donuts is now, and there I sat my duffle bag down and stood there wondering what in the world I was going to do next. I hadn't been there too long, when a car pulled up, and the driver said, "Where are you headed, soldier?" I said "I'd like to get to Westfield." He said, "Well, we're from Elkland and didn't intend to go that way, but we can just as well." He said "Climb in," and I told him after I got in that I

lived between Little Marsh and Westfield and that was OK by him. It was election night, and the driver had taken election returns from Elkland to Wellsboro, and they were now on the way back home. I tried to get him to let me out at the mouth of the road that goes up to where my folks' place was, but he wouldn't have anything of that. He took me right up and parked me in the driveway at home, then left.

A FAMILY REUNION

I took my bag and got onto the front porch, and I could hear a dog in the house just a "yippin'" and "yappin'" away. I didn't know what kind of a dog it was, but I tried the doorknob and it opened. I found the light switch and turned the lights on; and it was only minutes until footsteps were galloping down the steps from the sleeping quarters overhead. My sisters, Margie and Eileen, and my Mom and Dad come "a

barreling" down the steps to greet me. It was after midnight at that time, but I don't think we did anymore sleeping. It was the first time in two-and-a-half years we'd been together. It was quite a homecoming! I think we just sat there and drank coffee



Harold with his parents the day he came home from the Army

and visited. I do remember the next day getting my picture taken outside with my parents. Margie, knowing that I would be home soon, had gotten my old '32 Chevy out and shined it up and had it all ready to go.

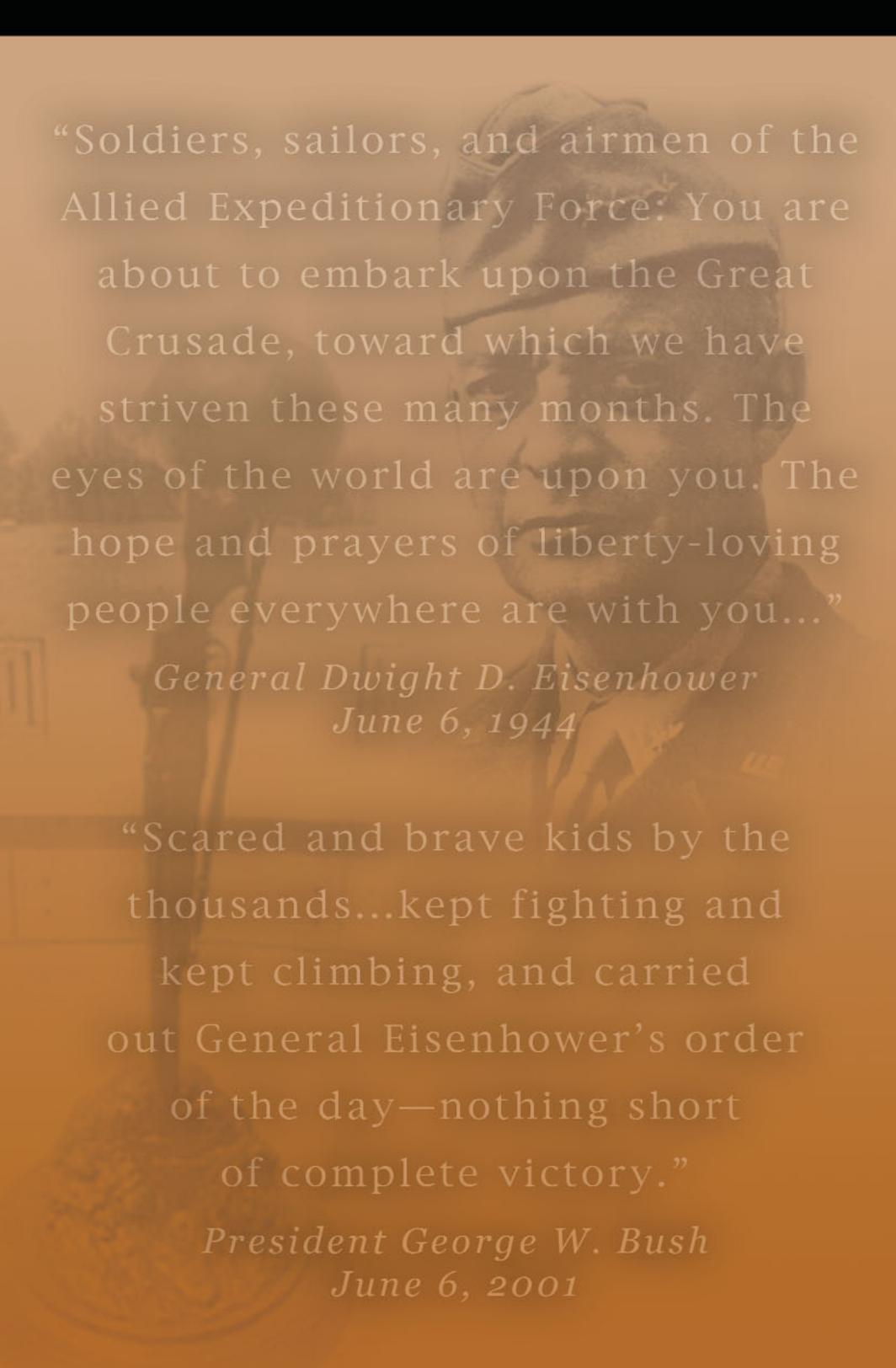
From there on, I was home. Praise the Lord!



Another photo with his sisters and his 1932 Chevy.



June 6, 2001 at the National D-day Memorial dedication, Bedford, Virginia



“Soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force: You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hope and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere are with you...”

General Dwight D. Eisenhower
June 6, 1944

“Scared and brave kids by the thousands...kept fighting and kept climbing, and carried out General Eisenhower’s order of the day—nothing short of complete victory.”

President George W. Bush
June 6, 2001