An Ambulance Driver's Experiences in World War II

From Omaha Beach to the Malmédy Massacre

by

Howard E. Nixon

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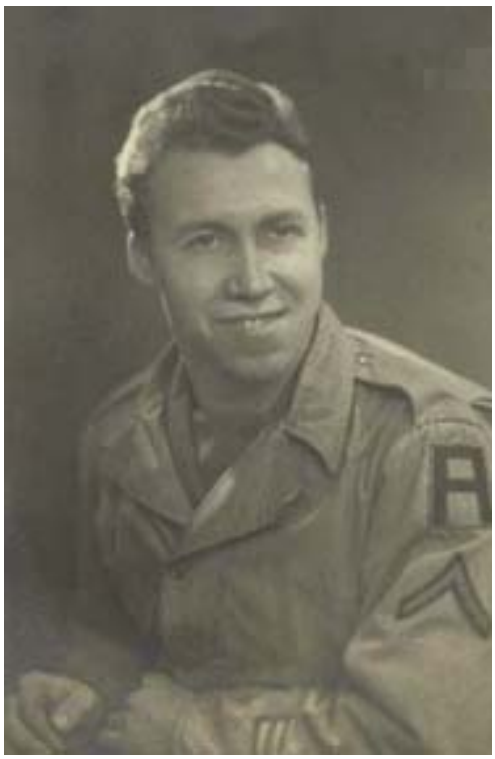

Howard E. Nixon – Picture taken in Belgium in 1944

I and Leo Strom was drafted in January of 1943.

We went down to Fort Custer (near Battle Creek, Michigan) and was examined. They asked us what we would like to get into (like if we had a choice) and we said probably a motor cycle outfit. Well neither of us saw a cycle after that.

We came home from Custer and had to stay in town [Cadillac, Michigan] at Devere Johnson's. The storm was bad. Next day we came home and walked about 1 & 1/2 miles from highway M-55 in waist deep snow to get to our house.

We went back to Custer and was officially in the army. While in the induction center they called our names and I heard them call my cousin Milford Nixon (Bud). So I got with him and we went home to his place on weekend passes. My older brother Bruce and my mother came down to see us.

After the induction center when we were officially at our destination, some of the recruits had long hair very pretty. They cut it off real short. There was enough hair to make a mattress.

We wasn't in Custer long. Leo and I were going to stay together. It didn't work. Leo was soon on K.P. duty and that night they shipped me out without a chance to look him up. That's the last time I saw of him until I got home.

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They shipped me to Camp Grant, Illinois. I was put in the medics. While there we got all of our shots, learned all sorts of medical practice - like bandaging, tourniquets, etc.

We took lots of hikes 5 miles, 10 miles, 15 and 25 miles. It was surprising how out of shape a lot of guys were. We stayed there about two months and they sent me to an ambulance co. in Alabama. I got assigned an ambulance. We had to learn how to change oil, grease, and take care of it. We even painted the grease fitting red.

In Alabama (Camp Rucker) we did all kinds of obstacle courses. I could climb up a rope and through a hole without touching my feet to the rope. I had had plenty of practice on the hay rope in the old barn. Those guys said, "Look at that guy go up that rope." We crawled under machine gun fire too.

We went on maneuvers up in around Bowling Green, KY. We learned how to dig fox holes and put shelter halves together for a tent. Each guy carried 1/2 tent in his fill field pack.

One night I and Ollie P. Becton put our tent outside the area in a pasture. That night a few mules came thundering by on the run and came very close to running over us. Well, we thought that wasn't such a good idea.

We had all our equipment, clothes, mess kits and such. We would line up for chow and when the cook hollered away, everybody went on the dead run. And if you fell down - tough luck. You were trampled on.

Standing in line for chow with a mess kit was something else. You didn't want to get next to a guy that was goosey. If somebody poked him he would swing his mess kit and clobber you. Some fun.

There on maneuvers I saw my first dead man. He had layed down by a half track and during the night it backed over his head, which made it about 3 inches thick. I had the honor to haul him to Nashville, Tenn. There they looked at him and identified him.

While we were on maneuvers we had to learn to set up camp quick like and move quick, and dig a fox hole quick like.

We went back to Camp Rucker for awhile. There was plenty to do; swimming, wrestling, boxing. We had a Master Sgt. Whitacker was his name. And he was a tough one. But so was Charles Courtney, who we called John Deere, because he was off the farm. These two got into a rough and so they put on the gloves and fought, but Whitacker couldn't whip John Deere.

We stood guard at night and it was in the fall I think - November. And that night it was damp and cold. I had all the clothes I could get on, plus an overcoat, and I don't know as I've ever been as cold.

Well there came a time when they said its about time we go overseas. When we were ready to go a couple of guys did something or ate something to be sick so they didn't have to go and they didn't take them, but took someone else. They were mad.

We went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey the last of December, 1943. We were there about a week. By this time we were officially the 575 Ambulance Motor Co. We stayed that way from then on all through the war.

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We had a couple guys in our outfit; the names were Dilashowich and Shriber. One was Italian. The other was Jewish. And what a pair. They were gamblers. They were always in trouble. Finally when we were over seas they sent them to the infantry. But we got a replacement not much better.

Three of us boys went in the Army. My brother Harlan went to Missouri and was Drill Sgt. He was eventually sent to the Pacific - Guam. I think my brother Billy went to Oklahoma first and then he went to Italy as an artillery spotter.

I once got a ride to southern France to see Billy, but couldn't locate him. I was sent to Europe.

During basic training we had to be spic and span. The beds had to be made perfect, the blankets tucked in and tight enough to bounce a quarter off of it. The foot lockers had to be in line also and we had to be clean shaved and our shoes shined and clothes pressed. On K.P. the tables scrubbed and all cups, plates, and tableware had to be lined up with a string. Well all of that changed over seas in combat to dirt, grime, and blood. We were lucky to get a change of clothes in three weeks let alone every other day. So some of those guys stunk to high heaven but we got the job done.

On Leave – July 1943

I went on K.P. in Illinois. I sat there peeling a bushel of potatoes and I got to wondering where they came from. I looked on the sack and it said, "Faye Webster", Tustin, Michigan. Probably some my dad sold him.

I came home on furlough before I went overseas. When I went back my father took it kind of hard - his last son going away to war. I never knew my dad really loved me, but when I left he knew I was going over seas and he cried. Then I knew.

Bruce and Wilbur stayed home and worked the farm. I was 20 years old. I saw 35 year old men that couldn't keep up. The stress was too much.

We stayed in Camp Kilmer about a week. Finally they said, "Boys, its time to go. The ship's waiting." The name of the ship was the Aquatania - an old English ship. It was the same ship that Betty's father (Hugh Gardner - my father-in-law) came home on from World War I. We had our duffle bags packed and that's all we could take. Mess kit, shaving stuff, clothes, and a black cover Bible my sister Helen had sent me earlier. (I'll talk more about that later.)

We got on the ship and I stayed on the gang plank. A officer hollered, "Nixon," and I answered, "Howard E." and went down into the ship. What a ship. And what a ride that was. 9 days of rough sailing.

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So many men were sea sick. They couldn't get out of their bunks. It never bothered me. I was on deck most of the time in fresh air. There was vomit on the floor. Guys lay flat on their back in the latrine. You had to step over them to get to the urinals. Some men never left their bunks.

The ship's mess floor was slippery and wet from everybody spilling their coffee, food, etc. The closest that I came to getting sick was once I had my mess kit full and the ship lurched. I slid across the floor to the other side into a guy heaving into his mess cup. I guess he was trained not to vomit on the floor. Well, I almost lost it, but I sat down and ate my food. We took some of the guys food that couldn't get up. They didn't eat much.

The old ship sounded like it was falling apart. I was down in the bottom by the propeller. Every time the propeller raised up to the top it made one whale of a thumping noise. I saw no other ships, but I did see a school of porpoises swimming alongside.

Me with my ambulance

Once they thought that a German sub was close so they stopped and launched several depth charges. Nothing happened we went on. There was nothing to do on the ship so I stayed on deck most of the time. A lot of men gambled all day long.

Finally we reached our destination called "The Firth of Fourth" in Scotland. A chilly, rainy night and the darn captain had to bring us to attention and march us to our quarters. I think that was the last time I came to attention. I did salute at times though.

After a while we got our new ambulances. Mine was brand new - a four wheel drive (and did I need that later) with 5 miles on it. It was a Dodge Power Wagon. My ambulance was #19. Later I wrote "Cadillac" on the side of that old ambulance.

We had three platoons - 1, 2, 3. I was in the first platoon. We had about 20 ambulances. We did our own simple maintenance - oil, grease, etc. We carried 2 extra 5 gallon cans of gas, one on each side of the ambulance.

We had some trips around the English countryside - on the left hand side of the road too. They sent us from Redding to King wood Commons. We stayed there for a while. We stayed in big tents and slept on cots. Seemed like about 8 to a tent. It wasn't too cold, although we had a stove in there that burned coke.

One night a guy got mad at us and dumped water on the coals and sprayed everyone with hot coals. What a hot head he was.

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They fed us real good while we were there - mashed potatoes, gravy, chicken, etc. The last good meal I had in one long time.

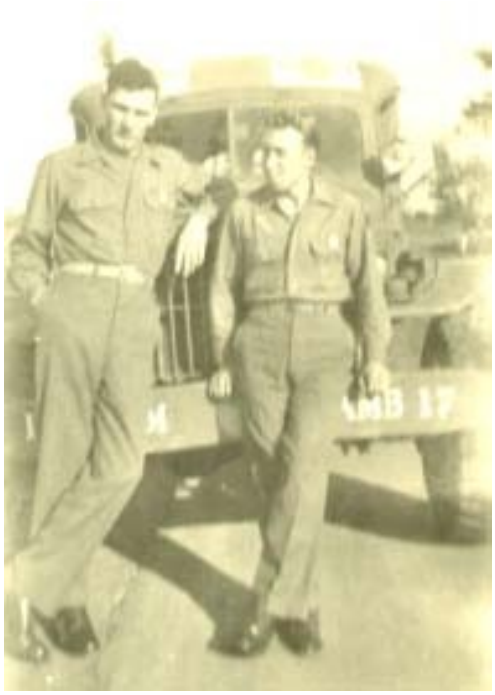
We had been trained as medics and didn't know what war was like (we thought we did) and I was about to find out very soon.

While we were still in the United States we had time on our hands so we did a lot of marching and how to take order double time, running obstacle courses, and bandaging. We learned how to give morphine shots.

On the long marches we had 25 lb. field packs on our back. There was a lot of sore feet blisters for sure and some dropped out at the first pain.

We also had to stand what they called short arm inspection. We all had to line up in the barracks bare naked as jay birds. It would have been better if we could have had women on one side and men on the other, but no such luck. They used a flashlight and looked for crabs, lice, syphilis, gonorrhea, and whatever. They found them too, because there was always guys playing around. If there was embarrassment it didn't do you no good cause we had to do it anyway.

When we got to England the fog came in at night and was so thick you could only see about 50 feet. You could hear a car coming but didn't see it till it was there. They also drove on the left side of the road and it took a little getting used to. We went to a few dances while we were there too.



Joe Robinson and me with his ambulance – No. 17

The Jerry [German] bombers came over every night and bombed. The window rattled and the ground shook. They tried to shoot them down from the search lights. Somehow they seemed to be able to dodge in and out of the search lights. They had air raid shelters and at times we ran for them. All sorts of people in there - soldiers and old women. Some were knitting, reading, and some were pacing back and forth wringing their hands. Some just sat there quietly, others smoked a blue streak. Lots of smoking. Finally the all clear sounded.

They had everything closed up at night so no light could show anywhere. And when the fog came in also it was worse. One guy walked through a big bay window. There was lots of pubs (beer taverns). This was the first part of June, 1944.

One day some girls came and set some tents up and I wondered what they were for. I soon found out. Soon there was men lined up and the line was

getting longer. Well, the colonel came by and it didn't take him long to figure out what was going on. That was all for that.

Finally they sent us outside of the town close to the English Channel and we were there a few days. We picked our ambulances up brand new. Mine had 5 miles on it. We water proofed them with a gun full of waterproofing gook around the spark plugs, battery, distributor cap, and there we left one little hole. We sealed the doors and windows all but the window on the driver's side. And then we put a flexible pipe over the tail pipe so it stuck up about 5 feet above the roof. And I said, "What in the world is this?" I found out.

We had gas masks and had been trained to use them. Also there was gas repellent clothing - even socks. We had all that on before we left and then they said, "Take it off. You won't need it." They said Roosevelt told Hitler that if he used gas we would drown him in it. That was a relief.

Although one night in France we were parked and the gas alarm sounded. On went the masks, but it turned out that it was fresh mown hay, which smells like a certain type of gas. False alarm.

We sat there in the woods a couple of days waiting.

It seemed like everyone had a buddy. Joe Robinson from Indiana and I were close buddies. He was a big guy and me smaller, yet we had much in common - from farm backgrounds, brought up Christian.

On the morning of June 6, 1944 I woke up early to an awful roar. I looked and saw the sky full of planes - thousands of them heading for France. It was just a steady stream. It wasn't long and we could hear booms over 20 miles away across the channel. The invasion had begun.

We were an ambulance outfit so there was nothing we could do so quick until they go inland a few miles.

The 82nd airborne and 101st airborne dropped behind the German lines. It worked to some extent, but not 100%. The Germans had 2 big guns. One on each side of Omaha Beach. They had to be silenced and eventually they were. The beach had to be cleared of mines. So many soldiers got slowed up. There were cliffs on one side of the beach and they had to get to the top of them. They used grappling hooks thrown up 75 to 100 feet and scaled the walls. They got up there and drove the Germans back, but ran out of ammunition. They then used captured German guns. Our soldiers heard the sound of German 88's and fired on one and killed some of our own men. Also, some of our planes missed the target and killed several of our boys.

Omaha Beach was a bloody landing. They died in the water as well as on the beach. It was lucky for us that the Germans didn't think that the landing would be so soon. Therefore they didn't have as many soldiers there at the beach. (Note: also General Patton's "phantom army" did its job well. That was a ruse to make the Germans think that the invasion was coming at Calais instead of Normandy. That trick tied up a whole German panzer army.)

There were five beach heads: Utah, Juno, Omaha, Gold, and Sword. Omaha Beach was the worst by far.

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A few days after the invasion they said, "Boys, we are ready to go." We drove to South Hampton docks and there they proceeded to load our ambulances on the ship. The ambulances consisted of our duffle bag, medical equipment, blankets, litters, and lots of louse powder, and lots of Sulfanilamide for infection.

The ambulance had 2 fold down seats on each side one long and one shorter. We could take 4 litters, or we could take 10 walking wounded, or we could take 2 litters on one side and 5 walking wounded on the other.

When they got to my ambulance to load it, it was about 10:00 in the morning. They picked it up in a net and started to haul it up. Just then one of them Englishmen hollered, "Tea Time." They stopped the hoist and there it hung - halfway up the ship till they finished their tea. I thought that a little strange when a war was going on.

The ship started up. We were headed for France. It was a little choppy, but not too bad. Everybody was quiet - thinking I guess. We got to where we could see land and Joe Robinson said to me, "Well Nick, we're going to France." Then it hit me - this was it. The real thing.

Before we left South Hampton, England they had sent back prisoners from the beach They were on a train and they were smiling. They were out of it.

The 82nd and 101st airborne dropped behind the German lines on June 5th. They were to knock out bridges, communications, etc. One man dropped onto a church steeple of St. Mère Eglise, or St. Marie Eglise, his chute caught, and there he hung. He couldn't get down. Come daylight the Germans were there and saw him hanging there and thought that he was dead. When the clock on the church struck they would look up and he was afraid they would shoot him, but they didn't. He was rescued later by infantrymen.

They sent over gliders as well. They were pulled by a plane and then let go and they glided back of the beach. But that didn't work too well. The Germans had long poles in the ground and the gliders hit them, flipped over and tore off wings. Gliders carried a jeep and 4-6 men.

The beach had all sorts of objects to slow down the troops and loading craft; mines, posts, iron posts pointing out to the sea. By the time we got there most of it had been cleared. Omaha was the hardest landing of the 5. They called it "Bloody Omaha."

War correspondent Ernie Pyle walked the beach and saw a small Bible on the sand. He picked it up, walked a few feet and turned around and put it back where it had lain.

There was a hospital ship anchored by the beach for the wounded. The dead had been cleared away by this time.

It was time to go. They let down the landing gate. My assistant crawled in the driver's window. I crawled in afterward and sealed the window with gook and drove off into the water. Down we went - completely under water for about 75 yards. Old Arkansas the cook, who was with me said, "Keep her going Nick. Keep 'er going." It never missed a lick. I had it in four wheel drive and finally came out of the water and onto the beach. We drove up the hill to an apple orchard and then got out and scraped all of the gook off the plugs, battery, doors, and windows and took the long tail

pipe off and threw it away. Some ambulances caught fire on a battery short, but we didn't have any problems.

I looked around and what I saw gave me a chill. Helmets with holes in them, sergeant stripes, other clothing, and the waste of war. Soldiers had ripped their stripes off because the Germans shot at them first.

We stayed where we were that night about 300 yards from the beach. What a night. They shelled us, bombed us, and the ambulance shook. There were 2 seats that folded down in the ambulance - one short and one long. Henry King slept on the long one and snored all night. He never heard a thing. I slept on the short one and don't believe I slept a wink. I was too scared to crawl out under the ambulance. I just couldn't move.

The next day we moved out. The first human being I saw - other than soldiers - was a young woman at a house very, very pregnant. Probably by the Germans. We moved up to the front at St. Mère Eglise. The 29th and 4th Divisions were there. We were in the 1st Army under Omar Bradley and Courtney Hodges all through the war.

We started to pick up the wounded and haul them back. A 200 pound man is hard to lift on a litter. You put one end in and my assistant gets in, then the guy in back has to lift up the loaded litter, turn your hands, and lift above your head, then hook the straps that hold the litter. You could have 4 litters, or 2 litters and 5 walking wounded, or no litters and 10 walking wounded. Our work had begun.

Most of the time it was night driving with no lights. We had 2 triangle lights on each head light on each side of the vehicle. That was just for the guy coming at you - not for me to see with. We didn't get much sleep. It seemed like we were going night and day.

About the second night they settled us down in a field and then the captain came and whispered, "Move out." So we slipped out quietly.

We would pick up a load of wounded and head back and didn't know how to get where we were going. We just found the tent some way. Darker than pitch. You could look up and see a little light above us between the branches of the trees overhanging the road and know you are on the road.

The 1st Army spearheaded a lot so when we came back to our station which was only a tent we could see the gun flashes, hear the shells, and know we were about there.

There were artillery flashes on both sides of me, which were the flanks. We would get back and another load was ready. So it went day and night.

At the beach there were lots of fortifications like pill boxes. They were about 4 feet thick and slanted in from the front to deflect incoming fire. About the only way they could get the Jerry's out was sneak up on it or rush it and throw a hand grenade in it, which was effective. If it was hit by a bomb on a direct hit it blew some of it apart.

One bomber mission the planes misjudged the target and killed quite a few of our own men.

The hedge rows of Normandy was a hard fight. They were laid out into a field about 2 to 5 acres or so. And they were thick. There was a ditch and then a hump of dirt that the hedges grew on. The

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Germans used these to fight behind. So they fought back and forth. Mortars, German 88's, a small artillery which was easily maneuvered and was deadly.

Our tanks had trouble getting over the hedge rows. They would hit it and rear up over the hump, which exposed the belly of the tank. The Germans would lob a shell under it and it was out of commission.

Finally an old farmer boy figured out a way. They welded a frame like mower teeth on the front and then the tank could cut through and bulldoze the bank down. And finally after weeks of fighting the Germans were routed out - only to stop at another difficult place.

As I write this I can only tell the highlights of what happened because so much went on each day and night. It has been 55 years since I was there. Some of it is clear and other things are a haze.

The Germans stopped us at St. Lô, or St. Lo. It took 11 days of hard fighting with a tremendous loss of life before the battle was won. Gordon Hunt a cousin of mine was killed there with the 29th Division. Also the 28th Division was there too.

During the battle of St. Lô we were at a place where there were dead laying around and among them a woman with a beautiful ring on her finger. One of the guys stooped down and took the ring from her finger. He probably sent it home to his girl friend. I couldn't do that.

We moved up to the front and drove through the dead. Dead men in ditches, fields, and partially out of fox holes. Mixed in with them were dead cattle and horses. The civilians moved back or out to another town.

We dug in. The fox holes were long enough to contain your body and about 3' deep and it took a direct hit to get you, unless you stuck your head out at the wrong time. Sometimes we dug them for 2 guys for warmth.

I never heard of a homosexual over there and didn't know what they were. There was a strange guy now and then, but they had a different name for them.

There was a house where we stopped and the Germans had killed a cow and had been eating a quarter hanging in the shed. We didn't have much to eat, only K rations, which were crackers that when you bit into flew into a thousand pieces. Also, there was a D bar, which was as hard as iron. The Jerry's and civilians loved them. You could get almost anything for a chocolate bar. I didn't sleep in the house that night. I moved away from the dead. They shelled us and bombed us that night coming in and out.

There were so many wounded that we couldn't keep up. The field hospital was full. The doctors and nurses did a whale of a job, but they tried to do to much. The nurses were back behind the front and they did a beautiful job. The 28th Division was so shot up and they had lost so many men that they had to pull them out and put in another division. We had ambulances with wounded backed up 10 - 12 of us. One captain I had was dying. So I went in and told the Doc, "You have to take care of him soon or he is going to die." I got him out. Good luck.

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It's not easy to see a man die. His breathing gets shorter, shallower and farther between breaths - and then he's gone. You've done all you can. Some curse. Some pray. Most lay quiet. A gut shot is the worst. Every jolt hurts them.

Then there was the mud. The road gave out from the heavy equipment. Tanks mostly. I had to use 4 wheel drive and just crawl. They built a corduroy road and it was one bump after another. It was a problem to find where I was to go at times. No maps or nothing. We would move up during the night. Where were we? Where do I take those guys? I've had soldiers say, "Man, how did you ever make it?" I could see then a lot better than I can today. If I could stay in between the flanks I knew I was O.K.

They hammered St. Lô night and day. By this time the dead started to smell. The town was nothing but rubble. I'll never forget one thing. I came by the rubble and debris that had been cleared by bulldozers. There was a woman on a pile of rubble with her head in her hands crying in dispair. Nothing left of her house and family maybe. I couldn't stop. I had wounded with me. I would have liked to have stopped and at least given her a hug. That scene has stayed with me forever.

We couldn't do much for the wounded. Getting them to a field hospital as quick as we could was best. If a medic could get to them quick enough they had a chance. He stopped the bleeding and disinfected the wound. We had to loosen a tourniquet at times or give them a shot of morphine.

I had a pistol - a German P-38 Walther. I never had to use it though. One wounded German that I was hauling told me that we were fighting on the wrong side. That we should be fighting with the Germans against the Russians. I said, "I don't think so."

One time I had a load of wounded Germans and I thought I'd do a little target practice. We got them out and I took a few shots and they turned a little pale. And then I realized that they thought that I was going to shoot them. So I herded them back into the ambulance and they were relieved.

At times we had to stop and hit the ditches. The shells and bombs were too close for comfort. The Germans and I hit the ditch - both huddled together. I don't know whose shells they were - ours or theirs. The Germans said, "Yah, that was close."

It was nothing to lose 200, 300, 500 men in a battle. The replacements were coming in every day. If they lived through the first week and smartened up they had a chance. Smoking at night, lighting a match, getting out of a fox hole to talk to a buddy all were things that had to be learned to hard way.

Finally the Battle of St. Lô was won with great cost on both sides. We had them on the run. Or did we? They stopped again.

They shifted our ambulance company all over the front. We got moved from one division to another. Where the fighting was the hardest - there we were.

All through the war I was with 10 different divisions, including the French; the 82nd Airborne, 101st Airborne, 29th, 28th, 4th, 2nd, 30th, 35th, 9th Armored and the French.

There was a man in the 28th that went A.W.O.L. at St. Lô. Different units tried to get him to go back to no avail. He could of went without penalty, but nothing doing. They caught up with him

and shot him at the stake. His name was Eddie Slovak. As far as I know he was the only man shot for cowardice.

Hitler had a division of top notch men - Super Men - they were supposed to be. Hitler Youth, the S. S. troops. They were supposed to be better than anyone else. They took no prisoners. And I don't believe we took many of them either. But we medics and ambulance drivers were supposed to try to save lives. So we tended them too.

I hauled an S.S. man. I have to tell this part because it's part of war. He was shot between the eyes and still alive. During his ride I heard a squishing noise and all his brains had gushed out on the ambulance floor. I stopped and shoveled them out on the ground and then dropped him off at the aid station. He was still alive. But I doubt that he survived.

One S.S. man I hauled, Helmut Schlegel, was in real bad shape. I doubt that he survived either. I had his records and was supposed to drop them off with him at the aid station. But I was in such a hurry that and forgot to give them to the company commander. I still have them. He was an SS-Sturmmann or Private First Class who either made or was scheduled to make SS-Rotenführer or Corporal on 20 April 1944. He was from Heidersdorf. His mother's name was Alma Fleischer.

The Germans had a new Weapon - the V1 rocket, which they launched on London and terrorized them. I also heard a few fall myself in France.

They also had a buzz bomb. It looked like a tobacco can with short wings. You didn't know where it was going to run out of fuel. When that happened it dropped and exploded. We also had to watch for German planes coming over at low altitudes, which we called "hedge hopping." They would skim over the tree tops and strafe with machine guns. You hit the dirt behind an object if you could.

They weren't supposed to shoot medics. Most of the time they didn't. But sometimes they did. One almost got me. I was driving down a street and I heard a noise and looked in my mirror. I saw a plane swooping down on me - spraying bullets. I turned to the right into an alley real quick like and he missed me. I about took the corner of the building off, but I made it.

Another town hard hit with rockets and bombs was Leiage. I didn't waste no time getting there. Harold Strom, another neighbor from back home, seen me go by and tried to catch me to no avail. He was driving a 2 1/2 ton truck.

After the break-through of Normandy and St. Lô the Germans packed up to Averanches and Argentain [Argentan?]. Our planes and bombs hammered them night and day. General Patton was in on the deal and our armies captured the whole Seventh German Army at the Falaise Pocket, which was a blow to the Germans.

We didn't know what was going on - only in our outfit and not much of that. We moved quite fast on the way to Paris. In fact I lost my outfit for 2 or 3 days. I got hungry and traded chocolate bars and cigarettes to the French for eggs and potatoes. I had a frying pan. So, I dug a hole and dumped gasoline in the hole. Then I had a fire and cooked my meal.

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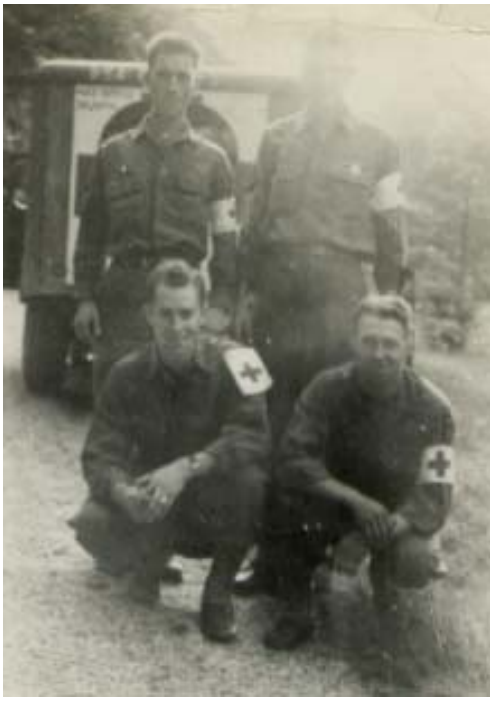
Some of the C rations were OK. There was Spam and cheese in cans with a twist off key. The G.I.s threw those cans away. Unfortunately they stuck in my tires at times and I had to dig them out. At times I stopped at other units for a meal. They didn't know who I was - only that I was a medic, so they paid no attention to me. I saw very little of my headquarters for days. I finally caught up with my unit. We were heading toward Paris, but I didn't know it.

First there was the matter of a battle around Mortain that took about 5 days with the 30th Division. There was a hill that had to be taken, which the Jerry's held. The first bullet I heard I didn't know for sure what it was. I asked an infantryman by me and he said, "Oh, yeah, that was a bullet." When they are close they sound like "ZZZT," or bacon sizzling in a pan - only quick.

I hauled both Germans and Americans at the same time - dirty, grubby, unshaven, beat. G.I.s on one side - Jerry's on the other. They just sat there hardly looking at one another - not saying a word. Both were glad to be out of it.

My ambulance never failed me. Well, only once or twice and then it wasn't to blame. I tried to ford a river. Maybe the Seine - I don't know. It was about 100 yards across. The road went across and showed fresh tracks. I thought that I could make it too. I got out in the middle of the river and the ambulance drowned. It was too deep. Apparently there had been too much rain. I sat there for a while and here comes a Frenchman with a team of horses. He waded out and hooked on and pulled me out. Thanks very much. It took a while to dry out, but finally I got it started and away I went.



The Ambulance Crew in Paris
Standing - Left to Right:
Lawrence King, Ollie P. Becton
Kneeling - Left to Right:
Bill Chasteen, Howard Nixon

A lot of houses had wine cellars and they made good wine. When I came upon one I would grab a case and bring it back to the outfit. One night a lieutenant and I got some and got the wrong directions. We were in German territory. He had his .45 and I had my P-38, but it probably wouldn't have done any good. We made it back though.

Another time I got on the wrong road and was in German territory. It was cloudy, no light, no moon or stars to tell which direction I was going. All at once I saw two guys come out of a ditch. They stopped me. They were Americans. They said, "Do you know where you are going?" I said, "No, I sure don't." They said, "Well, we are on patrol and you are in German territory. You will run right into the Germans very shortly. Turn around and get out of here back the way you came." I followed their advice in a hurry.

An Ambulance Driver’s Experiences in World War II

Once in a while a German or two would surrender to me. They would see their chance to get out of the war and hang back. One time 2 came out of the woods with their hands up. I took them prisoners, but a major came by in a jeep and saw them. He relieved me of the prisoners.

I understand now that the German generals wanted to quit, but Hitler would have no part of it. At the time we didn't know what was going on - only that the Germans were fighting back like Hell.

I have read the book, "Citizen Soldiers," by Steven Ambrose. That book describes the route of the First Army. That was my route from the beach to Czechoslovakia where I met the Russians. After reading that book it brought it out what happened at each place and battle. Then I remembered, "Oh, that's the way it was. I was there."

We were close to Paris now. They put us with the French 2nd Division. They had a few women ambulance drivers with them. They were dirty and unkempt. They just went behind bushes to do their jobs. We dug a slit trench for that for a few days. They had French Moroccans with them and they were wild. We dug fox holes, but they didn't. They asked Old Bruno, "Why do you dig? You afraid to die?" Bruno said, "No, but I don't want to hurry it along any."

They would sleep on the ground with no cover or under an ambulance. One night it rained and I looked out under the ambulance. There were four rows of feet sticking out wetter than sop. One morning I heard a commotion and looked up. Here come a Moroccan with a bayonet in one hand and a calf by the tail going through the field. He finally got him.

We were the first Americans in Paris. We came in on the 25th of August, 1944. The next G.I.s were to come on the 28th. The French took Paris or liberated it and the Americans went around. The Germans were still there and had to be routed out or captured.

When we went into Paris the streets were filled with people. So many that the convoy had to stop. We drove by the Arc D'Triumph where France's unknown soldier was buried. When the people found out that we were Americans, they mobbed us. If you had a watch on your wrist it was about pulled off. They hugged and kissed us. They put us Americans in a park with walls around, but some girls got in and took pictures of us.

The prostitutes that had fraternized with the Germans got their heads shaved and made to walk down the street naked.

While in Paris we had a guy in our outfit that was a preacher's son. He wouldn't say very much. But in Paris some French gal got him in bed and that was the end of the nice guy. After that he went wild. He was out of control. He cussed a blue streak and started smoking. Years later I contacted Ken Weber from Indiana who told me that when the guy got home at the end of the war, he knocked on the family door while he was smoking a big cigar. Guess what happened. His dad wouldn't let him in. "No son of mine is coming into this house smoking a cigar." I don't know what happened after that.

A house was built in the wall of the park where we were at. Bill Chasteen and I discovered that a candy bar to the old lady in the house would let us out at night. We went out to supper with a couple of girls. There was fighting in the streets then. One of the girls was excited about something. We found out that her boss was shot out of the upstairs window. They gave us a good

meal one dish at a time with wine. I was thirsty for water, but the water was not good. I was getting groggy from the wine - so when they weren't looking I drank the water anyway. Then we had to go back to our outfit in the dark. We had to cross the river bridge with bullets spanging off the walls, but we made it.

A couple of guys thought that they would check out the Notre Dame cathedral. They went in, but discovered Germans were behind the altar. The Germans started shooting and our guys dived behind the seats. The Germans were captured. All of the churches had bullet holes in them.

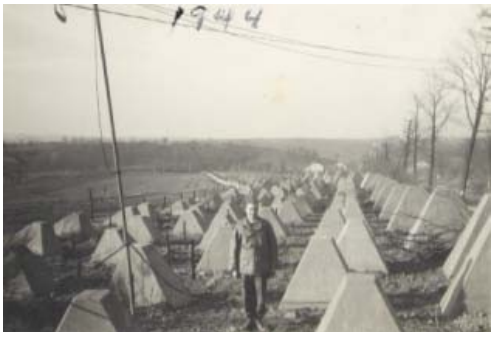
One night we were on an ambulance run and a bomb hit a house right beside me on the street. It blew the house to smithereens. We were in Paris about a week and moved out. It took a week or more for the French to clear out all of the Germans.

The Germans kept backing up a little at a time. We went toward Verdun - a World War I battlefield with its cemeteries. World War I soldiers were buried there and soldiers passed by the graves of their uncles or even fathers. There were more dead horses, cattle, and sheep. Some of the dead horses were still hitched to wagons. The Germans had eaten on some of the horses. The battle raged on and on.

One night we moved to the front in a cold raining night. I was so tired that I couldn't keep awake. Oh for a little sleep. The convoy stopped for a minute. I went to sleep and woke with a start. I thought that they had left me. I threw the ambulance in gear and took off. I slammed right into Wayne Scott's ambulance. Out he come. "What the hell are you doing?" What could I say? I had caved the back end of his ambulance in, but with a little hammering he could shut the doors and lock them.

There were men who got shell shock or battle fatigue. They were like zombies. They just stood and stared. We had to take them by the hand and lead them around. They were out of it for a while. I don't know if they ever came back. Some wounded were treated and sent back to their front line units.

Those missing in action were never found, of course not. Often times there was nothing left of them. Maybe there would be a shoe or helmet, but nothing else. A lot of men missing in action were captured. A whole lot of them died in German prison camps. Their food was horrible and they were cramped in close quarters giving rise to diseases.



Me at the Siegfried Line in 1944

By this time we were getting close to Aachen and the Siegfried Line. It was a line of row upon row of cement pillars set in the ground. It was designed to stop tanks or anything else. It didn't work. They blew a hole in them and bulldozed their way through. I have a picture of me on the line in 1944 and again in 1984 when I went back to visit.

An Ambulance Driver’s Experiences in World War II

The town of Verdun still had evidence of World War I - old fence entanglements, old hand grenades - what they called potato mashers. The old trenches were also there.

They had pill box fortifications on the Siegfried Line too. I remember one of the guys singing, "We will hang our washing on the Seigfired Line." I thought, "You bet."

We went north to Aachen and they fought to take that town, and fought some more. They finally took the town at a great cost to both sides. It was the first city in Germany to fall. There were something like 5000 casualties on each side. And there was nothing left of the town except one cathedral still stood.

A German shot an American rifleman. The German came up to look at him. The G.I. filled the German with bullets. He toppled over and they both died in the same hole.

Some got to the point that they couldn't take it any more. One of the guys said, "I can't take any more. I can't go back. I can't take any more." The lieutenant grabbed him by the shirt and said, "You will go back. You gotta go back. There's nothing more." He went back. He died.

From there (Aachen) I went to the Hürtgen Forest, or Hurtgen Forest - a heavy forest region with hardwood and mostly pine. The nights were cloudy and darker than pitch. You could look up and see just a little light between the tops of the pine and think that you are pretty close to the center of the road. One of the roads was mined, but just the road was cleared. My assistant driver - Sergeant Padget sat on the fender and said, "Right. Left. Right, " but we made it. A jeep wasn't so lucky.

By this time it was well into October and getting colder. There was several battles there, or may I say there was one continuous battle. The Germans backed up now in Luxemburg and Belgium. I was back and forth on the front from North to South even down to Bastogne. November and December came with the cold and rain and a little snow. The mud was thick. It was miserable. The poor guys that dug a fox hole in shallow ground got wet. Then they tried to get dry.

Now it seemed to me that the Germans were getting both younger and older. We saw more 15-17 year olds and 40 year old men and older. Why didn't they just give up? But no, they were on German soil. They still had fight left in them and lots of it.

Our planes tried to keep bombing, but the weather was cloudy and a hindrance. We had more equipment and supplies than the Germans did, but ours had to come from a long distance.

We had what we called the "Red Ball Express." It was a convoy of 2 1/2 ton trucks. Most of the drivers were black, who hauled supplies. I used to hate to meet them on the road, especially at night. They would hog the middle of the road and about drive you into the ditch. The best thing to do was to wait until they went by.

By this time we were in the Ardennes. Gasoline was in short supply. The Americans kind of sat back and built up their replacement. The pine plantations of the Hürtgen Forest and the Ardennes were literally torn apart. About ten foot up on the trees there was nothing left but splinters. It had been bitter fighting there. The 4th Division was there at the Hürtgen Forest and not many of the old soldiers were left. There were mostly new replacements.

An Ambulance Driver’s Experiences in World War II

By this time it was December and they moved us to Malmédy, which we sometimes spell as Malmedy. So we were back and forth around the towns of St. Vith and Stavelot. We were with the 2nd Division. Malmédy is practically on the border of Germany and Belgium. We were in a field just outside the village. There wasn't much going on. The lines were just held. Once in a while a wounded was taken to a field hospital in Malmédy. It was on a hill. We were a couple of miles from the front. One night I was sleeping in my ambulance and I heard a noise. The door opened real quiet. I couldn't reach my gun and so I lay still. They shut the door quietly again. Probably Germans on patrol.

One night Lawrence King and I were invited with some girls to play cards. They took us up to their parents' house - supposedly - up a dark stairs. The old folks were there all right, but also a young man - a big guy about 25 years old. He stood behind the stove with his hands folded behind his back. He just stood there. He never said a word. I thought, "What's a young guy doing here?" I am sure he was a German soldier. We played cards for a few minutes and then Lawrence and I looked at each other and said, "I think it's time to go."

A few days went by and somehow 4 of us got a room in a hotel. Some old folks run it along with a daughter and a young son. They were German. They had a son who was a soldier in the German army. They had hid pictures of Hitler under the mattress. It was around the 14th of December. One night we heard a noise on the stairs. When we investigated we found a pan of cookies. We took them down stairs and thanked them. They set a coffee pot on the stove and we shared the cookies. Then we gathered around the piano and sang Christmas carols, each in his own language. A fun night. They had a young son about 14 years old. I think that he was giving information to the Germans.

The next day, Dec. 15th, they shipped us 6 up to the front. Something was going on. We were in an old house. Whoever had it was German. He had lots of pictures, including his picture taken with Hitler. There was an old World War I sword.

I didn't know what was up, but I was about to find out. Not a single American soldier knew what was about to happen.

Some P-47's that flew over the lines told the commanding officer of a build up, but they wouldn't listen. Hitler figured he could capture supplies and gasoline and he was right. Some supplies were set fire to, but not all.

The 2nd Division had been in continuous combat since June 7th and we had just come from the Hürtgen Forest. So they had more replacements than old soldiers with combat experience.

Bradley and Eisenhower had no idea that an attack would come in the Ardennes. But it did.

By this time I was getting another attack of homesickness. Around 10:00 p.m. all hell broke loose. They started shelling from both ways; 150 millimeter, howitzers, screaming meenies, 88's. There we were in the middle of it. They hit a truck outside the house and it burned.

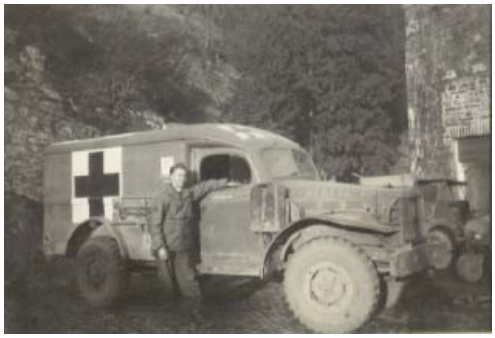
I thought of home and how I'd thought that I hadn't been treated right and maybe a little abused. Well, those thoughts were gone now. They were replaced by with a longing to see Mom and Dad and my girlfriend Betty. I thought of how I'd worked hauling hay, digging potatoes, filling the silo,

fixing fence, going after cows, doing chores, milking 4 or 5 cows morning and night and all of the other things I'd done.

The shelling kept on without let up. "I've had it," I thought. "I can't take any more. I've come clear from the beach in Normandy, the hedge rows, St. Lô, Paris, the Hürtgen Forest, the Battle of Aachen, and now this. I didn't know it but this was the beginning of the Battle of the Bulge.

The tears rolled down my eyes and I prayed, "When will this end?" I dug out the black Bible that was starting to get worn and I said, "What shall I read?" I thumbed through it and it fell open to Psalms. I thought, "Hmm, what does it say?" In the dim light I read the 91st Psalm. It said, "A thousand shall fall by your side and 10,000 at your right hand, but it shall not come near thee." I felt relieved. I went to sleep a little.

Pappy Paden and I slept in the same bed that night. The next day, December 16, 1944, he was dead along with many others of our outfit. The artillery kept at it all night. The first thing in the morning - just daylight - the infantry started coming past us in no orderly fashion. They said, "It's too hot for us up there." We got the heck out of there as soon as we could.



Me and my ambulance in November, 1944, at Manchove Forest in Belgium. You can see "Cadillac" written on the door under my arm.

The Germans had broken through. I stopped at headquarters and evidently they didn't know that the Germans had broken through. They said, "We have to evacuate the field hospital in the old school house on the hill." I went to the field hospital - the battalion aid station - which was an old house on the outskirts of Malmédy. In the aid station a wounded Englishman was singing, "We'll hang our washing on the Siegfreid Line."

I got ready to take my load of wounded when L. M. Burney said, "Nick, I'll take this load." I said, "No it's my turn." But he insisted. I went back to headquarters. He took my load and he got captured and shot at the Malmédy Massacre. It would have been me if I had taken that load. I think of that often.

Just after I left Bill Schupp and Bill Chasteen, a couple of guys from my outfit, pulled up to the same aid station and were captured there. Although I didn't know it then I was just ahead of the Germans.

When I got back to headquarters it seemed as if the captain had discovered a few things. Captain Denzel was in a terrible hurry. There was no saluting. He said, "Just grab some gasoline and get out of here. Meet me in the town of Huy," which was about 20 miles to the west. I sure didn't argue. Away I went.

I went through the town of Malmédy. There on the crossroads directing traffic was an M.P. I thought, "What in the world is he doing here at a time like this?" The M.P. directed me to the left.

We got out a little ways and ran into infantry on the crouch going up the hill. Ken Weber said, "We better turn around," and I thought so too. I headed back where we had come from - past the M.P. and out another road. I made it.

If I had went 300 more yards I would have been captured. It turned out that the Germans had soldiers dressed in American uniforms all behind our lines. They had changed road signs and tried to cause confusion. That M.P. was a German trying to get us into a trap. Later they found him out and shot him where he stood.

Joachim Peiper was the commander of the SS division that had broken through. They were at the crossroads just outside of Malmédy where 4 or 5 roads come together. They had captured 140 or so American prisoners. They herded them into a field. Some of my outfit were there; Burney, Anderson, Monk McKinney, Scott, Samuel Dobbins, and others. The Germans opened up on them with machine guns and killed most of the prisoners. The ones that were still alive they shot with a pistol. Dobbins and Anderson played dead and laid there in the mud and snow until night fall and then crawled away. Anderson was shot through the foot.

Samuel Dobbins later testified at the Nuremberg trials It tells about him in the book, "A Time for Trumpets." Pappy Payden and Lieutenant Gunther were killed in a jeep. Kaley and Carter came through Malmédy at night. They didn't know about the massacre. Carter heard some moaning and groaning of some. He said, "I'll get out. Come back and pick me up." We never saw him again. Some of the other ambulances were somewhere else when the German attack hit and were out of the fighting.

I was somewhere around the outside of Malmédy the next day. I was filling my ambulance with gas and Joe Robinson told me what happened and who got killed. I got a little sick. I don't remember where it was, but shells were dropping because stones and shrapnel hit my ambulance.

They had imposters like the M.P. all over to cause confusion and they did. No one knew what was going on. Small groups here and there fighting and not knowing where to go or turn.

The Germans captured the hospital on the hill just after I left. Chasteen and Schupp were there and were captured. The Germans weren't watching them too close. So Chasteen and Schupp sauntered over to their ambulance, which was parked on a hill. They got in and let it roll downhill. Then they gave it the gas and escaped.

They met a colonel in a half track. They told him about the Germans and he said, "I'll fix those S.O.B's" They went up and captured the Germans and freed the American prisoners. Chasteen got the Silver Star for that.

As I evacuated the road away from the German M.P. the road was clear. Years later when I studied maps of the Battle of the Bulge it was apparent that I slipped through the German spearheads to safety. Looking back, I still don't know how they missed us in that house on December 16th.

The 9th Armored held out against the German drive at St. Vith about 9 days, but did not get as much recognition as the men at Bastogne did. The 9th Armored were ordinary Joes. At Bastogne they were surrounded. When the Germans came under a flag of truce to request the surrender of

General A. C. McAullife and his men, General McAullife said, "Nuts." That was his one word response to the Germans.

Now I felt better on the other side of the line. The powers that be finally got a division together and formed a line and began to drive the Germans back. The retreating Americans had set fire to some ammo dumps and gasoline supplies, but not all. The Germans did capture some American supplies.

I noticed that the Germans were getting both younger and older. Kids 15-17 were in the S.S. Hitler's young men. Brain washed. Older men of 40 or more. His army was getting smaller. Some of the older men didn't want to fight any more.

By this time there was snow and it was cold. Little by little we drove the Germans back over the ground we had come over before and retreated from.

The dead lay where they had fallen everywhere. German and American - their helmets sticking out of the snow. What a sight. They threw frozen bodies in the 2 1/2 ton truck like cord wood. Some were dumped in shallow graves and dug up later.

It got colder and colder. We were near the Elsenborn Ridge and there was a hard battle there. I broke a spring on the ambulance. They brought it to Elsenborn and said, "Here's your spring." No help. I changed springs myself laying on the cold, bitter snow.

There was no place to get shelter. We ate outside and the syrup froze on the pancakes. The coffee was cold, but the rim of the mess cup was too hot to touch. The foot wear wasn't the best. Just shoes and you were lucky to get a pair of overshoes. So many men got frozen feet. They just had to cut off a foot and sometimes both. So many men froze feet that they had to have a steady stream of replacement men. At least I got warm in the ambulance. I felt so sorry for those guys.

Some I had trouble with. One wounded soldier said, "I got to go back." Although he was wounded he wanted to go back to help a buddy of his. I told him I'd be back to help him. He kept repeating, "I've got to go back." I said, "No. I can't let you go back. You are wounded." That didn't matter to him, "I've got to go back." "No," I said, "You are not going back," and he didn't.

Slowly we gained ground, but Hitler still wouldn't admit defeat.

Lt. Col. Joachim Peiper of the S.S. Panzer unit was sentenced at the Nuremberg Trial. He spent some time in prison, but was let go later. He came back to Belgium and was living there. Someone found out about it and blew his house up with him in it. The end of the S.S. colonel.

Samuel Dobbins who came out of the Malmédy Massacre alive testified at the Nuremberg Trials. After the massacre there weren't many prisoners taken. News travels fast and there were mad soldiers. Five or six Germans in a bunch would be found dead. I know what happened. Sorry, but that's the way it was. They paid a full price.

There was no let up of snow and cold. One night in a place where snow banks were higher than the ambulance - it was blowing terrible. The snow blew in on the spark plugs and the ambulance stalled on me. I cut up a blanket and covered all of the holes. It finally dried out and started. The motor got a little hot, but it was better than stalling.

An Ambulance Driver’s Experiences in World War II

Before it got awfully cold there was mud, snow and ice. It was a lot better on the west side of the line after I escaped. It took a couple days before Ike and Bradley could get things organized. They sent other divisions for reinforcements - mostly all new men. The replacements were young men that hadn't had any experience and some didn't last long. There were very few infantry men that made it all the way from Omaha Beach to meet the Russians. They were either wounded or killed. During the breakthrough there were a lot of little outfits that held ground and fought. People like artillery men and engineers fought and slowed the Germans down. I'm not sure how far the Germans pushed. Maybe 35 miles or so. They sent us back up to the front after a line was organized and slowly they started pushing the Germans back.

The Germans were amazed at all of our supplies; gasoline, vehicles, ammunition, artillery. They captured some food and were glad for something good to eat - even if it were only K rations.

We kept pushing the Germans back over the same ground that we had come. The dead lay all over and some were run over with trucks and tanks. It got colder and more frozen feet. They were lucky if they had a pair of overshoes. By December 29th they had driven the Germans back about 10 miles. By Jan. 16, 1945 they had gained most of the ground back and we again were at Elsenborn, which was a high plateau. There was a full battle going on again.

We then crossed the Roer River about February. Then it was 30 miles to the Rhine. The Germans fell back for another stand at the Rhine. There was a battle at the Rhine at Remagen Bridge. The Germans tried to hold there. Then they tried every way to blow up the bridge, but the Americans finally were able to cross before it caved in. Hitler had 5 officers shot for letting that happen.

I didn't cross that bridge, but crossed a pontoon bridge right beside it. During the Bulge it was such cold and nasty weather that our planes couldn't fly. But when they did get up, the Germans caught it. The American airplanes just hammered the Germans.

By the end of March we had gained several miles across the Rhine. We were back and forth on the line from North to South with different outfits. Three or four ambulances here and others somewhere else. We were all separated.

When we got into Germany there were a lot of hungry people. If they were lucky they cut off a steak from a dead cow or horse if it hadn't been dead too long. At one place the people had a big kettle on the stove and one of the guys said, "I wonder what's in that kettle?" He took the lid off and there was a horse's head in there - teeth and eye balls showing. Yuk! I suppose it made good soup, but I didn't stick around to find out.

When we got into Germany a couple of us guys came upon an underground machine shop. There were all kinds of machines there; drills, presses, and other machines. There was a German officer there in charge. We thought that we would have some fun. We started machines running and the officer about went nuts. We would run one for a while then start another and have that running. The officer would come behind us and shut them off. We had several going at once. We didn't pay any attention to him. We finally tired of that and left him alone. Then we went on to another place.

The war would have been over sooner but the Hitler Youth - the young S.S. wanted to fight. They held on in small groups here and there. There was nothing else we could do but take care of them.

The older men saw the futility of fighting and a lot surrendered, but not the youth. The older men hurried to surrender to the Americans. They didn't want to be a prisoner of the Russians.

I drove by the ovens that they had used to kill the Jews, but I didn't go in.

I was lucky not to have to carry a gun on the front lines. We dug fox holes, but not all of the time because I was on the move transporting wounded and sometimes prisoners back. We were not far from the front most of the time, close to the artillery and subject to shelling.

There's a lot that I can't remember about it and this is just the highlights. We were trained physically, but not mentally. Letters came in spurts. Sometimes for weeks there would be no mail. Then when they caught up with us we got 3 or 4 or more. And we couldn't write much. And we couldn't say anything about the war. They censored every letter.

What I remember most is the dead, the living wounded, the dying, and you couldn't help them. The driving, driving in the dark - not being able to see. I'd take a load back to a field hospital, but where was it? Somehow I found it. And there would be so many wounded that they couldn't take care of them. Sometimes the docs tried to do too much. They should have sent them on. There were a few women in the field hospitals and they did a wonderful job. Sometimes they were hit with artillery shells and bombs too. I've had those infantry guys ask, "How did you ever make it? How did you find the hospital?"

I don't remember eating much or sleeping much. At times I'd stop in to an artillery outfit or engineer outfit around dinner and got a meal. They always fed a medic. Other times there was a break in the action. Then we got a little rest, but not for long. Very little time was I with my own outfit. We were attached to infantry divisions from one end to the other and I seen a lot of territory. Some towns were untouched, but an awful lot were in shambles.

There was talk of women on the front lines. OK, if women fight women. They are not strong enough to take the hard going. Back in field hospitals yes. For one thing a man didn't get to change his clothes for weeks. And there's the problem of going potty too. They would be raped before they were shot. Maybe in a different kind of war, yes.

Shell or shrapnel. There was no way a man could use pressure points. You didn't have enough time or hands. A tourniquet was the only way most of the time.

In some of the battles over 1,000 men were wounded, killed, or out of commission.

The medics had a time keeping the morphine warm. Most kept it in their underpants or under their arms. The blood plasma was another thing. One medic put it on the jeep engine since he had no antifreeze. He would run his jeep every half hour. He finally fell asleep. His jeep stalled and froze the plasma. And so it goes.

By this time we were liberating prison camps. What a sight. Those still alive could barely walk they were so starved. Eating pea soup with maggots is not very appetizing. Although the prisoners said that there was some protein in the maggots.

When the Germans took prisoners they took away their shoes and clothes and other valuables. Only one time I took anything from the Germans. It was a watch. It happened to be a French watch

and he got it off a Frenchman. He kind of smiled a little. Then I discovered it needed a key to wind it and he didn't have that.

After the Rhine the Germans kept backing up. About April 6 - I was 22 years old then - we were half way across Germany. Some Germans started surrendering when they got a chance. Others were captured. There were long lines of prisoners going back to the rear. Still Hitler wouldn't admit defeat. We kept going. The Germans came out of the woods by the thousands. Young men and old men mostly.

We finally reached the Russians and shook hands with them on May 7th. They were a surly bunch. The next day, May 8th, 1945, the war was over. That night lights went on for the first time since landing on the beach. How bright. We breathed a sigh of relief. That night I slept like a baby. At that time I was in Pilzen, Czechoslovakia. The Russians set up road blocks and said, "This is as far as you are going."

After the war I and a doctor went into Russian territory to deliver medicine to displaced persons. They were in a fenced in enclosure and what a pathetic sight. Arms gone. One leg gone. Others hobbling around on crutches.

Then I hauled patients to Nuremberg. There was a good highway called the Autobahn. I didn't need 4 wheel drive any more. So I removed the front drive shaft. Then I could just sail smoothly without any vibration.

There wasn't a lot to do. We were waiting to go home, but there was talk of sending us to Japan. I didn't like that, but then we heard of the atomic bomb.

I don't know how many wounded I hauled, but it was steady for a year. (June '44 to June '45).

Ambulance #19 had 5 miles on it when I got it in England and it had about 20,000 miles on it when I turned it in. We left the ambulances in a field along with hundreds of other vehicles. I said good bye to old #19.

We sat around for a while and then finally shipped us to Marseille, France. We got on a Liberty Ship and sailed out of the harbor, past the Rock of Gibraltar and on the way home.

We came to New York and the Statue of Liberty showed up. What a beautiful sight. From there we went to Indiana. And then on my way home on a train.

We started getting closer to home. I started walking back and forth. I recognized going by Tustin, then Hobart. Some old guy wanted to know about the war, but I was so hyped up that I couldn't talk to him.

We came to Cadillac and Betty met me at the train. How nice. And so glad to see her. She took me home and dropped me off in the driveway. I looked around and then said, "Thanks Lord."

My parents were glad to see me, also Harlan and Billy. All three of us made it back home.

As I look back on that ordeal where so many were wounded and so many died I wonder, "Why?"

I was glad to be part of it. When some of those guys breathed their last breath I wonder if I could have done more, but under the circumstances I guess not.

An Ambulance Driver’s Experiences in World War II

Betty and I married. Forty years went by. I read about the North Star Invasion Tour that covered the route that I took in the war. Besides Betty and I wanted to see her relation in Sweden. We took the tour.

We flew from Chicago to Amsterdam. They met us there, put us on a bus, and got us rooms. Everything was arranged; meals, hotels, and tours from day to day.

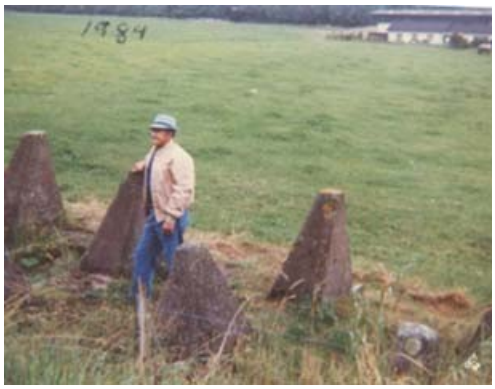
We saw the beach at Omaha. From the bus I saw again the town of St. Lô. And I thought again of the woman at the corner sitting on the pile of rubble with her head in her arms crying. The bus stopped at a red light and I realized that I was at the very same place that I had seen that woman forty years before. From an upstairs apartment a dark haired woman opened a window and watered the flowers enjoying the peace of the day. She would have been the right age. Could it have been the same one? Probably not. The light changed and we moved on.

We went to Paris and again I saw the Eiffel Tower. From there we went to Luxembourg and then the Hürtgen Forest - back to the fox holes. I had come through that battle without a scratch. When we went back through the Forest, Betty stepped on something and hurt her foot. She had to have surgery on it when we got home.

We went on to Malmédy and the Battle of the Bulge. We went to where the Malmédy Massacre [Malmedy Massacre] was. There is a monument there now with the names of the soldiers who died there.

I knew what had happened to L. M. Burney the one who took my place when he took a load of wounded for me. I saw his name there I shed a tear and said a silent prayer for the ones who died there.

We went down the road and came on the place where I had turned the ambulance around and went a different direction. It was raining that day in 1984. From the bus window I saw a rainbow at the very spot where I had turned around. I thought again of Psalm 91 and said, "Thanks again Lord."



Me at the Siegfried Line in 1984 reflecting back on all that happened forty years before

We went by the corner where the M.P. was directing traffic (The German). I had my picture taken there. A few years later I got information on the same invasion tour. The tour guides said that whenever they had a tour and went by Malmédy where the M.P. was they tell that story about me.

We went on to the Rhine and the Remagen Bridge, but we didn't go across there. We turned and went back to Amsterdam. There they had a celebration in the city honoring all soldiers. You could have heard a pin drop it was so quiet. It was a beautful tour. It brought back memories.

We went from Amsterdam by train to Sweden. We were confused where to get on and what train to take. A young lady came up to us and said, "Follow

me. I'm going part way. Just carry my suitcase," which I was glad to do. She got us to the right train. We switched trains and she was gone.

Some of the trip was by boat across Denmark. We saw Betty's relation and went to Lapland and saw reindeer. Then back to Sweden and then flew home.

So many years have gone by since the war and I had almost forgotten some of the horrible things I had seen. Writing about my experiences brought back some memories. I have awakened up at night and I hear the bombs, the mortar and artillery. I see the destruction of houses, and towns, the dead men, horses and cattle, and the burning vehicles. I see the wounded and feel the pain. I see the shell shocked men out of their mind. And I wonder why did this have to happen. I breath a prayer for those who gave their lives and a prayer for peace that will last. Amen.

Postscript - On 29 December 2001 Howard E. Nixon died unexpectedly near his home in Cherry Grove Twp., Wexford Co., Michigan, at the end of a successful day of deer hunting with a neighbor. He had bagged his deer and had started cleaning it. Suddenly he stood up, said he didn't feel well, and stepped away to sit down. Soon afterward he passed away. It was just about three months after his story was first posted on the Internet.