

Robert A. Vachon

I was a member of the Machine Gun Platoon of Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment when I parachuted into Normandy, France June 6, 1944 (D-Day). Sergeant Paul Sands was my Squad Leader and Staff Sergeant Robert S. Brand was my Platoon Sergeant. My Regiment was stationed at Wollaton Park in Nottingham, England when we were moved to Saltby Air Base a few days before the Normandy drop. At Saltby we slept on canvas folding cots in airplane hangars and ate our meals there. And then, late at night on June 5, we loaded into our C-47 jump planes with full combat gear and jumped about 0215 hours June 6 onto French soil.

June 6, 1944 is a day I will never forget. After landing in a small field I moved close to a hedgerow looking for other paratroopers I had jumped with but saw no one. Then I heard a machine gun firing and knew the Germans were close by. As daylight came I was joined by a trooper from Company D. He also said he saw no one. As we looked around we finally saw Germans everywhere. We were surrounded by the Germans and captured, and were soon joined by other troopers who had also been captured. One of the other prisoners I saw was Herb Schultz, who I recognized as a member of the 81mm Mortar Platoon of my Company. There were many other captured troopers in the group.

We were loaded into trucks and were traveling to the rear when we were strafed by our own planes. At least three of the prisoners in my truck were killed instantly by the strafing but Herb and I never got a scratch. We were taken to a prison camp where British soldiers were being held. They had been captured in Africa. After a few days there, we were put on a train and taken to the Sudetenland, a border region of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, in Czechoslovakia to work in a coal mine. Herb worked underground in the mine and I worked on top dumping coal cars. The Red Cross packages we received once a month sure helped us survive. A German Sergeant, who was in charge of the camp, was fairly good to us because he had two brothers who were captured in Africa and said they had been treated real good.

I spent time in the hospital, I believe the town was Ager, where the Germans were flying the new jet planes. The area was bombed by our planes with one bomb hitting the hospital. We were in an air-raid shelter so no one got hurt. They then sent me back to my group. The first part of May 1945 we were freed after 11 months of captivity. I tried to look for Herb but just couldn't find him.

I was put on a plane and taken to Camp Lucky Strike in France. I was then put on a Liberty Ship to come back to the good old USA. I finally ended up in Fort Benning, Georgia waiting for my discharge. While at Fort Benning I saw Steve Mauro in the hospital. Steve was also a member of the Machine Gun Platoon in my Company. I was later sent to Camp McPherson in Alabama where I was discharged from the Army. After I was home about a year I got the surprise of my life when Herb Shultz came walking into my house. We kept in touch after that meeting and got together every year until he passed away.

When I returned home I took carpentry training under the GI Bill. When I completed my training I started building houses and later formed my own construction company, and have been building ever since -- until I retired at 65. After 59 years of marriage and two children, a boy and a girl, I am relaxing. My son served with the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. I am proud to have served with everyone in Headquarters Company, 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment and I wish them all well.