

Two Weeks Of Celebrating The Fourth Of July 1944

After the Pretot engagement on the 19th and 20th of June, the 3rd Battalion of the 508th Parachute Regiment prepared for a move to the Regimental bivouac area - 903915- and were joined by the battalion Mess Section, and packs and bed rolls were distributed to the troops. Patrols were active and because of several officer losses, some of the companies had to reassign those that they had left.

Patrols-rest-clean up-preparation for possible moves were in order. A switch was mentioned. There were casualties on patrols, some accidental injuries, some sickness and several evacuations to aid and clearing stations. Some troops that had been injured or sick or lost came back to the companies that they were assigned to.

A switch move to a new location -253893 from 2144890 was made on the 24,25-26 of June, under enemy fire. Patrols moved towards LaDauderie. There was action near 244890 and 244387. Several men were hit and evacuated-mortar and artillery fire came in, Lt Grabbe was shot through his lungs on June 26. Psychological Warfare teams broadcast from the battalion area to the enemy in four languages (Czech, Russian, Polish, and German).

On the 29-30 June the 2nd Bn 507th PIR took our position as we pushed forward to positions behind the line of departure that we were to use on a big push on or about the morning of 3 July.

At this time the Bn received three officer replacements-Capt. Schofield went to G Co., to take command after the push forward; Lt Southall was to be a platoon leader in G Co, and Lt. Pogg was to join H Co.

On 2 July, the night before we were to push forward Col. Mendez was sick with high fever and diarrhea and after checking, all companies came back to the Bn CP and as I had dug a trench for protection since we were getting a lot of artillery and mortar fire, I prevailed upon Col. Mendez to use my hole in the ground so that he could rest

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for a few minutes before he made his rounds again. I covered the Col with a blanket and kept his face and head cool by pouring water on them and sort of bathed him with a bandage that I got from the first aid man there. In less than an hour he felt a bit better and was up and out to check the positions.

On the 3rd of July the Bn moved from the line of departure by 0500 hrs under heavy enemy fire --artillery, mortar and automatic weapons, While we were at the LD, many troopers that had moved forward and were hit by enemy fire came back through our lines to the aid station. One Officer I remember was Lt. Hoyt Goodale from the second Bn. He was bleeding profusely from the face and arms and his trousers were torn by flying shrapnel. About 615 hrs a friendly concentration of heavy weapons fire helped us as we pushed forward.

G Co and H Co captured La Dauderirie, after G Co had taken Cotellerie.

Capt. Dress was shot through the thigh, Lt. Scudder was wounded, and later died of these wounds and the new Lt. Southall was wounded and evacuated.

On 3 July at 1800 hrs at 201867 and at 2000 hrs we departed for a new location-217863 and were in the area before dark. On this march as I was leading the CP group and 3rd Bn Headquarters Co. towards the location for the new CP. I heard a "SNAP" and immediately heard one of my communication men, Eric Stott, yell, and as he was right behind me, saw him nearly fall and grasp his right shoulder. At the time we were going downhill, and if I had been taller and had not been going downhill I probably would have caught that bullet. And, on this date Troy Newman, not in my company but familiar, an enlisted man from I Co. was also wounded--I'll mention this man later. We finally got into the apple orchard and set up our CP and prepared to take off in the morning of the

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fourth of July. About 1830 hrs on the 3rd there were three prisoners brought into the Cp.

The 4th of July dawned bright and early and very clear. About 0800 hrs a 10-15 minute artillery barrage direct hit the CP and the I Co area. Exploding shells sent ragged steel fragments throughout the area.

One shell hit the radio of Lt. Gary, forward observer for the 319th Glider Field Artillery. The radio was demolished and Lt. Gary was killed instantly. One of his assistants was also killed instantly, while the other two enlisted men were torn apart and died shortly.

The battery in the radio was knocked into the air and came down on me, hitting my chest, which was protected by a pair of field glasses hanging from my neck, thus causing no harm except my being pushed over onto the ground. While I was on the ground another shell burst in the vicinity and a piece of steel hit my left, inside, thigh, causing a wound which gushed blood all over my right foot, just like a hose with water coming out of it. Instinctively I grabbed my leg and stopped the spurting blood as Capt. Bell, 3rd Battalion Executive Officer rushed to help me. Capt. Bell looked at [my] bloody right foot and said to the others around the immediate vicinity, "Brannen's foot has been cut off". I told Capt. Bell that it wasn't my foot that was hurt, and to prove it I released the pressure from the wound and right away-the [blood] gushed out again. I then placed my fingers on the wound and shut off the spray of blood. Then Capt. Bell realized where I was wounded.

The Battalion Medics came as soon as they had taken care of Lt. Gary and his team of forward observers, and bandaged my leg and got some of our Mess personnel to help me walk about 100 yards to a collecting point that had been established because of the many casualties in the area at this time. It was difficult to walk, but it was not necessary to be carried so I was furnished with a

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stick, and used it to aid my movement to the collecting point, mentioned above, that the 82nd Division had set up.

Just before I left the CP for the collecting point I heard someone say "Brannen has been wounded." I then heard Lt. John Daly remark that it was "too bad." I yelled at John and he came over to the place I was preparing to evacuate and [he] said, "Mal, I'm sorry." I said, "It's OK, John, now be careful." He went his way, and I never saw him again--he was killed just a few moments after we talked.

Later while we were at Nottingham preparing for another mission, his wife, Doris* wrote me and asked me if he really was dead--or could he possibly have been captured. I hated the answer that I had to send, to her --He was actually dead and there was no chance that he was a POW.

To get back to my trip to the collecting point--the area where other wounded were waiting to be treated or taken further back to the division collecting point to be either treated there or to be taken to a hospital ship for treatment and transportation back to England to a station hospital.

There were ten or twelve men with various types of wounds waiting at this point. Some were in pain and were all worn out, and all of them were anxious to get on with what they had to do. The area was hot and dusty. The sun was bright, and there was no air circulating -- only when a heavy shell exploded in the area. This happened every few minutes and all the wounded had a few inches of dust on them, and all did their best to keep the dust and dirt from their wounds. More casualties constantly arrived and within a few hours there were 25 more or less, and only a few had been released and sent back to their units to rejoin the attack,

The particular area of the collecting point was a French farm house, yard and barn. The house was a little bit the worse, after having taken many shell explosions, and the yard was just dust and holes. The barn was a fairly large

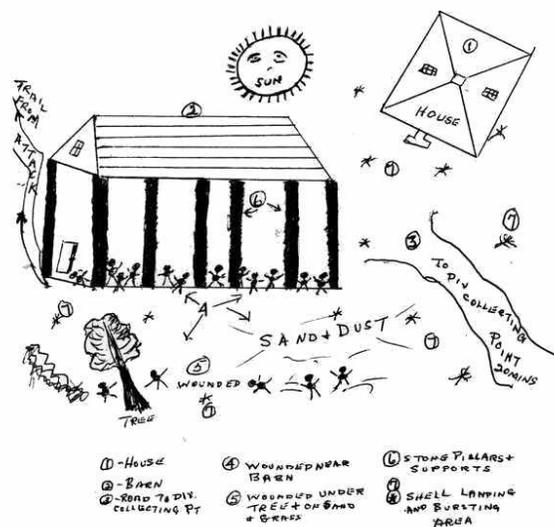
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structure, well built, with stone braces every five or so feet. These braces were part of the structure and were 20 or 25 feet into the air. They supported the barn walls and its roof at the same time, and very well, They were made of stone and cement.

Between these braces the wounded would crouch, or lie, as their condition would permit, and use these pillar-like parts of the barn for protection from the bursting shells and the resultant shrapnel, dirt, dust, pieces of wood and rocks that flew around right after each explosion.

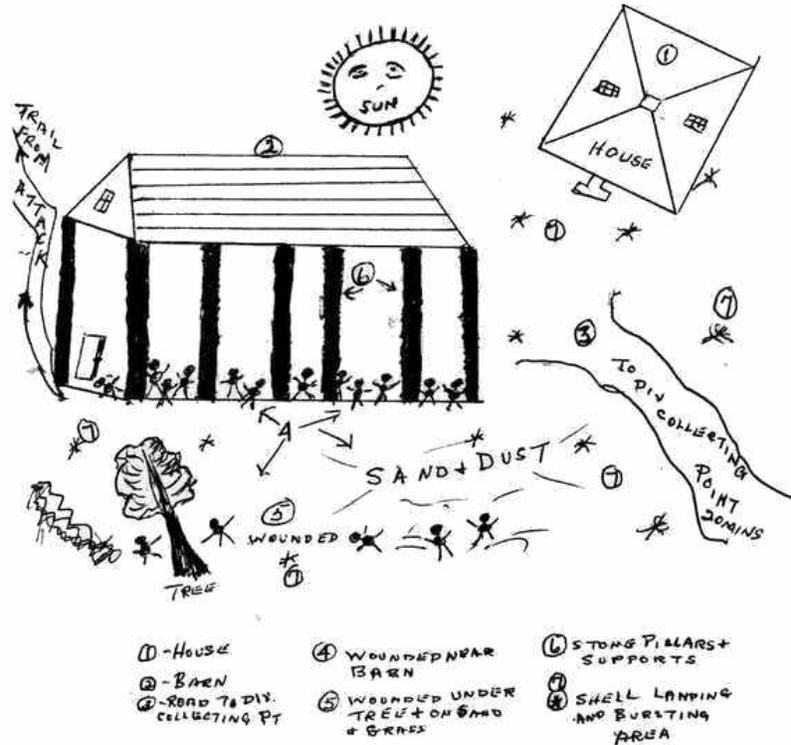
Some of the wounded were covered with inches and pounds of dust, dirt, and other debris. Between some supports would be two or three wounded, and between others there would be as many as five or six, all trying to protect themselves as well as protect each other as best they could.

A crude drawing of the barn, showing the supports, braces or pillars, and the house, road to the division collecting point, trail from whence the wounded arrived, and the positions of the wounded and places where the incoming shells landed, is attached [below].



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Also [attached, below] is a crude sketch of the CP where we spent the night of 3rd July 1944 and where we were shelled at about 0730-0800 hrs, 4 July 1944.



It was in this area where I was hit by the radio battery and where Lt. Carey and his assistants were killed by an incoming shell.

It was the area where I received my leg wound, and then moved off to the left to the division collecting point, and from there to England on the Fourth of July 1944.

Time passed slowly and the incoming shells visibly annoyed the wounded who wanted to get out of range of more bursting shells and explosions. But, even those that could walk or

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navigate with the aid of crude walking sticks stayed put—right between the protecting stone pillars.

About 1600 hrs a couple of ambulances drove into the barn yard and took as many wounded as they could comfortably transport to the division clearing point.

I had been there long enough to find out who were the most critically wounded so I informed the Medics and in most cases they accepted my word. There were one or two who had internal injuries that I could not determine to what extent that they were hurting and of course the Medics did what they thought was the proper move.

After the ambulances made a couple of trips with their wounded to the division collecting point and returned with empty ambulances I found it was my turn to take the trip.

Once in the ambulance I sat in the middle, between two bunks (two high) because I didn't need to lie down and my legs were short enough not to be in the way of the attendants. I was feeling well —just a bit hungry and real dusty and dirty and was wondering just what the rest of the battalion were doing—if they were ok and if there were any more casualties and if they were running into more troubles while I was safe —apparently.

While riding I looked at one of the wounded and found him to be a member of I Co. whom I had seen in the regimental area and battalion area many times. I did not know his name but found out by asking him. He said he was TROY NEWMAN (it might be NEUMAN) and he was apparently in much pain. When I asked what his trouble was he told me that he had been wounded the day before and had been at that collecting point nearly 18 hours. He said his trouble was that the wound had prevented him from urinating and that the pain was intense and he did not know if he could stand it anymore.

I couldn't treat him medically but I thought that if I used a bit of psychology I might be able to comfort him until he could get some medical treatment. SO--I told him to think of something else besides his problem and when he couldn't

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do that I started to talk to him and for about 20 minutes or a half an hour I told him about my experiences since I boarded my plane in England to make the jump into France. I told him that the name of the plane I was in was the "PAGLIACCI", and I told him all that I had been through since we left England including my descent, meeting other paratroopers, killing the commander of the 91st German Division and how the group that I was with were chased, were separated and how with two enlisted troopers, one from the 505th and one from the 507th and my three or four days all alone in the midst of German troops. I also told him all about the engagements that he and I had participated in after we had reorganized and started fighting the enemy. He listened and took in every word and when we got to the division collecting point I told a doctor there about what his trouble was and what I had done. The doctor complimented me on my action and went directly to Newman, taking him to his place of operation and began immediately to administer treatment.

When Newman mentioned our conversation on the ambulance, the doctor told him what he had already told me, that trying to divert Newman from thinking of his problems and injuries was the right action and probably saved him from more trouble and pain.

The doctor mentioned his relating these facts to Newman when he assisted me onto the hospital ship that carried us to the U.S. Hospital in England.

While I was talking to Newman in the ambulance, I was also trying to comfort another "I" Co. man that I had seen in our Battalion area during the past few months, and had also seen him in the Regimental Collecting Point earlier in the day. I have always thought his name was Gladstone, but am not sure. He was wounded in one arm and also in one leg, and was in great pain. He was uncomfortable lying or sitting and he was too tall to be standing in the vehicle-so-while we were being transported to the Division Collecting Point, prior to boarding the hospital ship, we agreed that Gladstone would lay his head on my shoulder-giving him as much

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comfort as he could possibly get during the slow, hot, bumpy and painful ride. I thought at that time, "Wasn't I the luckiest Paratrooper in the world-with all the trouble-pain and anguish, I was helping comfort, not one, but two injured Troopers who were injured, hurting and disillusioned."

After we left the ambulance, we were screened by the medical personnel on the scene and treated as our wounds dictated and then guided or carried aboard the hospital ship to a bed where we would spend the time before disembarking in England and thence transported to a Station Hospital.

Please let me digress for a moment, while I was being guided to my bed on the hospital ship, I passed through areas where I saw several of our 508th troopers. Among these was an officer that I had mentioned as having seen come back through our lines, with his face and hands all bloody, and his uniform torn and in shreds, as the Third Battalion was waiting on the Third of July (yesterday-though it seemed like years) for word to move forward from the line of departure -Lt. Hoyt Goodale, from Spartanburg, South Carolina. He was in pretty good spirits, hurting from his numerous wounds, painful, but none were devastating, but he became unhappy when I mentioned our large number of recent casualties. Lt. Goodale rejoined our Regiment, participated in the Holland Campaign in September --- November, and Ardennes in the Battle of the Bulge. In St. Vith, he was killed during an offensive movement. I saw him as he passed through our positions, heard the fire fight he was in, went forward to check and assist him if I could--and saw him, among other paratroopers, lying in the snow-DEAD!

To get back to the time at hand, I spent nearly two weeks as a patient in the 316th Station Hospital, after which several Airborne Enlisted Men and I were released and ordered to a Replacement Depot for reassignment, to any requesting Infantry Unit, not only to our Airborne units!

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I told the Enlisted Men my name and organization and told them to stay with me, or within sight and hearing of me, as an Officer assigned to the Hospital Personnel Section took us to a Railroad Station where two trains were waiting to depart. One, scheduled to go to the Replacement Depot and one going to the vicinity where the Airborne Troops were based, Nottingham.

I put the Enlisted Men, all Troopers, on the Nottingham train, and the Hospital Officer tried to get them off. He called to me to get them on the other train, and then demanded my name and Army Serial Number. When I declined to reply, he yelled at me and said, "I have never seen an Officer who would not give his name and serial number when asked".

At this time the Nottingham Train began to huff and puff and started to move. I jumped aboard, told the Enlisted Men to disperse, hide under anything or behind someone larger than they were--anywhere just to keep out of sight until I called with the signal- "GERONIMO". They hid until we had passed the last stop before arriving at Nottingham. The train stopped, and the Troopers moved out separately, to places with which they were familiar. I reported to the 508th Headquarters, and, since no one ever called me for assistance, I assumed all were back to their own units. We missed any official welcome home celebration, but we did accomplish our purpose of returning to the unit of our choice--mine --the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment!

Later, when Troy Newman and I saw each other again at Wollaton Park, he told me about his hospitalization and the doctor that we met at the ship that took us to the 316th Station Hospital. He repeated the fact that the doctor said that we had handled the situation in the best way possible for all concerned.

He also thanked me and said he was grateful-- and so was I.

Later, while still at Wollaton Park I visited "I" Co. again looking for Gladstone. I was informed that Gladstone had not returned from the hospital.

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Sometime later, maybe at Sissone, in the Bulge, or at Dreux Air Force Base- I have a feeling that I talked to Fred Gladstone -but I am not certain. It may have been in Frankfurt A/M while we were Honor Guards for General Eisenhower at Supreme, Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force---- I just don't know --maybe it was fantasy??? I remember the name by my first thought when I heard it - Prime Minister of England-- was Fred a descendant of the famous man?

I saw Troy Newman in Columbia, SC when I was an advisor to the Reserve in 1947 and he was a member of a Reserve Unit. We enjoyed the meeting. The unit was in Columbia and I was assigned to Greenville, SC.

Again, in 1980 I met Troy and his wife, Olive, at the Sixth Annual Reunion of the 508th P.I.R. Association at Indianapolis, Indiana. We had a short conversation, far less then we would liked to have had. We never did get together again much to my dismay. Troy and Olive now live in Columbia, MISSOURI.

/s/ Malcolm G. Brannon
1st Lt. Infantry