

**1st LIEUTENANT EDWARD V. OTT
508 P.I.R. 82nd AIRBORNE
HEADQUARTERS COMPANY, 2ND BATTALION**

NORMANDY

Ed Ott was born in Butler, Pennsylvania on February 16, 1915 of Croatian immigrant parents. At age three, his family moved to Detroit, Michigan. He was drafted into the Army in 1940 after completing a BS degree at Detroit Institute of Technology and two years of law school. In November of 1941 he was given leave to return to the Detroit College of Law, finish his last semester, and pass the bar. The day after he passed the Michigan Bar, he was back in the Army. He was sent to OCS and in a letter to Major Samuel Calhoun, USA Retired, dated March 18, 1997, he wrote:

“As for myself, my army career was short, and varied. Briefly, I spent 8 weeks after [OCS] graduation at Fort Meade, MD and Washington D.C. I was informed my mission was aborted and after signing an 'oath of silence,' I was returned to Benning and assigned to the 515th Training Regiment. [When the 'oath of silence' was lifted, Ed revealed that one of his main assignments at Fort Meade was to learn how to run a narrow gauge railroad and the reason he was given the assignment was because he could speak and understand Croatian. Plans had been made for an Allied operation in Yugoslavia and there was a need for officers who could speak the language.] At the 515 I held such assignments as mess officer, and machine gun and mortar platoon leader. I joined the 508 in Ireland in January '44 The Regiment was assigned to Nottingham, England, but due to an Army snafu, I remained at Camp Clandyboy [as a Provost Marshall] and rejoined the 508 in Nottingham on 4-1-44. I was assigned to Hdq. Company 2nd Battalion as a machine gun platoon leader and led the platoon into Normandy on 5 June, '44 at 12:15 hours. About two weeks later I became leader of the mortar platoon and in July, was made acting Company Commander.”

In July 1992, at the request of Lew Milkovics, who was writing a book about members of the 508 using their first-person recollections, Ed wrote the following:

“The experts in the field of the 'aging process' contend it is not uncommon for one to have 'memory lapses' as one gets older. This might be so, but there is one thing I will always remember, even if I live to 102, and that is the night drop before June 6, 1944, 'H' Hour.

“The drop was doomed to be a disaster when the C-47 pilot began to take evasive action to avoid heavy flak. He gave us the green light when the plane was in a climbing attitude as the engines roared at top speed. When I jumped, the prop blast was so severe that it tore off my pack and equipment so when I hit the ground, the only weapon I had was my jump knife.

“I didn't see any other member of my stick. I had dropped in a field and could see a farmhouse and a road. I started toward them. As I neared the farmhouse I could hear German voices coming from the second floor so I reversed my field, hugged the hedgerow and thankfully noted the 'blue light,' designating the assembly area, and made my way toward the light. I met three troopers who were reluctant to take orders from an officer they didn't know, but were persuaded to follow me. Before we reached the assembly area I

found a carbine, grenade launcher, and a dozen grenades. I also picked up two more troopers. As we came abreast of the 'blue light,' I got the 'jitters' and could not think of the password, and as a matter of fact, neither could any of the five troopers accompanying me. It took an exchange of conversation and some good old-fashioned GI 'jive' before we felt comfortable enough to cross the field. On the other side of the field we met Colonel Tom Shanley with about 20 men and a light caliber machine gun. I cannot explain my feeling of relief when we found Colonel Tom. At first light, Shanley sent out patrols to search for men and equipment bundles. Before going on patrol, I placed a light machinegun in what I thought would be the most effective position. We returned an hour later and noticed the machine gunner advancing the gun to another position. We heard a shot and saw the gunner had been hit, dropping the machine gun where he lay. The officer in charge was Lt. Tibbetts and I remember saying to him 'Stay here, you have a wife and a couple of kids and I'm single.' Tibbetts replied, 'I ordered the gun moved so I am going after it.' Before I could reply, Tibbetts started across the field. As he neared the gunner, Tibbetts was hit in the left leg. He threw himself forward, apparently out of the sniper's view, and was not shot at again.

"I started out for the gun and was abreast of the machine gunner when I was hit in the helmet. I could feel the bullet buzzing around between my helmet and my head cover and then exiting the rear of my helmet. I passed out. I have no way of knowing how long I was out, but when I came to, I picked up the machine gun and dove into the ditch and ran about twenty-five yards west of where I had been shot, crossed the field and handed the gun to one of our men. I then went back and retrieved the gunner, clearing the way for Lt. Tibbetts to get back safely. For this John Wayne type of action I was awarded the Bronze Star for Heroic Action; the Citation, published in General Order No. 36, Hdq 82nd Abn Division, 16 July 44 and reads as follows:

"Edward V. Ott, 01311199, First Lieutenant, 508th Parachute Infantry, for heroic conduct in action on 6 June 44, near Picauville, France. On the morning of D-Day, a group of about thirty officers and men had assembled near Picauville and were engaged by the enemy and was forced to set up a small defensive position. The single LMG in their possession was set up about thirty yards forward of their position. Just as it was placed in action, the gunner was severely wounded. One officer attempted to reach the gunner and was shot. Lieutenant Ott then left his cover and crawled toward the gun, but a shot through his helmet knocked him unconscious. When he revived, he continued forward a second time, secured the gun and brought it back to the group. He then went forward and brought back the wounded men. He was under fire and in the open during the entire time. His recovery of the LMG enabled the group to stave off the hostile attack. Entered military service from Ohio."

"Believe me when I say my account of the matter is the more accurate one, besides I entered the military service from Michigan."

"Four days later we joined the rest of the Battalion and Colonel Shanley assigned me to be the Mortar Platoon Leader of Hq. Company. On July 2nd, Colonel Tom ordered me to zero in on a mortar in preparation of our attack on Hill 131. We did not have a radio but

did have a roll of telephone wire and a field phone. A volunteer and I proceeded to lay the wire only to find it did not reach the line of departure which was located at the beginning of the woods. I noticed a couple of troopers behind a barricade and crawled up to them and asked what was going on when I looked down, saw a mortar fin sticking out of my leg. I reached down, pulled the fin out, applied sulfa and tied up my wound, saying to the men 'this is how an officer takes a wound.' I took two steps and passed out.

"When I came to, I found myself in a field hospital and my wound cleaned. A surgeon asked me if I wanted the wound repaired or just closed, as is. I asked him what the difference would be and he explained that there was powdery shrapnel under a muscle and if I left it in, the shrapnel would gradually work itself out into my body. If I chose to have it repaired, they would have to cut a muscle in order to get the shrapnel out and I would walk with a limp for about two years until the muscle was able to 're-shape' itself. I chose to have him close the wound. [For about 20 year afterward, my wife would pick shrapnel from my back.]

"On July 8th I heard a rumor to the effect that the Regiment was returning to England I talked the hospital commander into giving me a release. I drew new fatigues from the Quartermaster Compound as well as a new sub-machine gun and ammunition. With the machine gun I was able to persuade a jeep driver to take me to the 2nd Battalion CP. Our Regiment returned to Nottingham, England and a week later, wearing my Eisenhower jacket with a battle star, my Combat Infantry Badge, my Bronze Star and Purple Heart, went on a five day combat leave in London.

THE HOLLAND MISSION

"After the Battalion settled down following our return from combat leave and began to prepare for the next mission, some meaningful changes took place. Major Otto Holmes replaced Colonel Tom Shanley, who was assigned to the Regimental Staff. Captain Chester Graham was replaced and assigned to liaison duty between Battalion and Regiment and Headquarters Company received a Captain as Company Commander. This is one of those 'memory lapses,' because for the life of me I cannot remember the Captain's name. I do remember that he was a Reserve Officer from a seminary and that he was strictly GI to the degree that after several days, I requested permission to ask Major Holmes for a transfer to a rifle company. This request was refused on the grounds that Colonel Shanley had left word with Holmes that 'this is an all-around officer who can follow orders.' At the time I was the only visible combat-tested officer in the Company.

"Compared to Normandy, the Holland jump was a pleasant Sunday afternoon walk in the park. The day, Sunday, September 17, 1944, was beautiful, sunny, and windless. [After the drop] the mortar platoon assembled very quickly and began to gather its equipment, bundles, and ammunition. In a nearby meadow I noticed a farmer with a horse and wagon. I commandeered the horse and wagon and gave the farmer a receipt. We loaded the guns and ammunition in the wagon and started for the Company CP. I often wondered if the [Dutch] farmer was able to be reimbursed with a receipt that was signed by a Lt. Nice Guy, 1st Allied Airborne Army, Company XYZ.

“I know that we landed in a meadow about a mile and a half south of Nijmegen in an area identified as Groesbeek Heights and that a section of my platoon and myself, the horse and wagon, were in Nijmegen later in the afternoon where we assisted an element of the 504 in capturing a bridge. I reported to Battalion and was immediately ordered to return to the Company CP. “

“After being held in reserve for awhile, the Battalion was ordered to relieve the 3rd Battalion. This occurred on or about September 28, 1944. I was pleasantly surprised how accommodating the 3rd Battalion Platoon Leader was. He showed me the entire area, the gun emplacements, and the forward observation post. He showed me how spacious and deep his foxhole was; it even had room for his radio operator. While he was doing this, his noncoms were conning my platoon into exchanging their guns with ours, which were still loaded on the wagon. The exchange was made. That night we were shelled for about an hour and a half; the shells bouncing and exploding on the side of the hill where the platoon was dug in. The theory that shells do not explode in enfilade was proved to be wrong. The next morning I called the Company Commander and asked for permission to find another mortar position. He denied this request because ‘Your guns haven't been zeroed in yet.’ I was also told to maintain radio silence. That night, at about the same time [10 pm to midnight), we were shelled again. This time we suffered three casualties. I broke radio silence and called for medical relief and evacuation of my casualties. After being chewed out for breaking radio silence, I was informed that relief would be sent after the shelling stopped. We made our wounded comfortable and in about four hours after the shelling ceased, they were evacuated. “

“On September 30th, the Company Commander and a delegation from Headquarters ordered us to zero in our guns. Three of the guns were on target but the fourth was about 250 degrees off. Now I knew why the 3rd Battalion Platoon Leader was so accommodating; right after the zeroing in, the Headquarters group left and shortly afterward, we were shelled again in apparent response to our fire. The shelling continued at the same time, night and day. “

“On October 2nd, two officers came into the area and advised me they were investigating the claim that the shells would not only land on the side of the hill, but that they would also explode. We were near the emplacement of the faulty gun when I heard an incoming shell. I literally threw the two men into the gun emplacement and hit the ground. Something hit me and knocked me out. When I came to I heard Sergeant George Fairman asking someone for bandages. I could not see Fairman and remembered saying to him ‘I'm blind. Let me die.’ Fairman said, ‘You're not blind, your scalp is covering your eyes.’ He then put my scalp back on my head. [Whenever I see Fairman at Regimental reunions, I remind him of our conversation that day.] “

“I was evacuated to Brussels and treated at the 8th British General Hospital which described me as ‘conscious and rational but suffering from aphasia and numbness of the right hand and weakness of that hand.’ Later I was transferred to the 160th General Hospital in England where it was found that I had ‘A depressed skull fracture with foreign bodies extra cranially.’ Treatment at the 160th consisted of an operation ‘...in which foreign bodies and loose bone fragments were removed and a skull defect covered by a tantalum plate.’ I was ZI'ed [editors note: the term ‘ZI’ stood for Zone of the Interior, a euphemism

for the U.S.A.] and eventually arrived at Wakeman General Convalescent Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana on February 1st, 1945. “

“While I suffered from the wound my parents suffered more. Toward the end of October 1944, they received a telegram notifying them I was ‘missing in action.’ The middle of November they received the report that I was ‘killed in action.’ When I arrived at Wakeman on February 1st, the Red Cross made arrangements for me to call home and when my mother answered the phone and heard my voice, she fainted. My dad could not believe I was calling and the reason for his disbelief was that some unscrupulous con men had been soliciting money from parents of wounded and deceased servicemen, claiming to have served with them. I finally convinced them I was alive. I was granted sick leave in May of 1945, spent 30 days at home and gained twenty-five pounds. When I returned to the hospital, the Ward Doctor sent me right back home explaining ‘He’s getting better treatment than we can give him.’ I returned to Wakeman in July and was retired [for combat disability] on September 10, 1945.”

On August 9, 1994, in reply to a letter from Jack P. Carroll, who also was a patient at Wakeman at the same time, Ed wrote:

“...I was there [Wakeman] in 1945. I must confess the passage of time has dimmed my memory...you’ll have to give me more information in order to refresh my memory.

“In my view, the 508 is still the best outfit, even though some of the 505 guys tried to convince me otherwise during the 50th Anniversary trip to Normandy and Holland this past June... “

“A brief update of the past 50 years is as follows: After I was retired, I went to work for the VA as a field attorney from 1945-1950 in Michigan; got bored and went to work as a labor relations attorney in private industry [in the Detroit area] until 1959. I went into private practice in 1960, specializing in labor law and labor arbitration. I retired from law practice in 1989 but still hear 3-4 arbitration cases a year. “

“I married in 1948 and my wife died in 1978. We had one child, a daughter, and I have two grandchildren. I remarried in 1980. We moved to Naples on a permanent basis in 1991, after coming here since 1984. We now live on a golf course and I’m trying to beat my wife at the game.”

EPILOGUE

I would like to add something to this biography of my late husband. I first met Ed in 1979 and married him in 1980. For us, love was “lovelier the second time around,” and we had over eighteen wonderful years together. When Ed was jumping out of an airplane on D-Day, I was still in school and remember vividly my civics teacher spending days explaining to my class what was going on “over there” in Normandy. I never dreamed I would grow up and some 35 years later, marry one of those heroes. Sgt. Zane Schlemmer wrote to Ed in 1982, telling him about the 508 PIR Association and urged him to join. From that moment, the 508 became a very important part of his life. He cherished the renewed friendships and when asked, served the Association well as President and Parliamentarian.

I'll never forget his reunion with Captain Chester Graham in 1982. We were going to vacation in San Francisco for a few days so Ed wrote Chet and made plans to meet at our hotel. I wish I had taken a picture of their embrace and their tears, after 38 years.

Another unforgettable moment took place when we arrived in Ste. Mere Eglise in June 1984, for the 40th Anniversary of D-Day. As Ed stepped off the bus from Cherbourg, standing at attention and saluting him, was Sgt. Zane Schlemmer. His words were, "Sgt, Schlemmer reporting for duty, sir." The tears flowed and I am fortunate enough to have a videotape of that reunion.

This narrative was Ed's, along with some input from me. He was kind, honest, and straightforward; a good, God-fearing man whose only wish while fighting in Normandy and Holland was to "get this war over with and become Edward V. Ott, civilian." My hero died February 19, 1999.

**Patricia F. Ott [Mrs. Edward V.]
Naples, FL
January 2003**