Prologue

"I was there..." The Battle of the Bulge

By Col. Lee Farrell

As told to MacAllister Merritt

The Battle of the Bulge was the Allies' most hard fought battle of World War 2. It only lasted two days, but at an enormous cost in lives and materials to the Allies and to the Germans. The Allies won this battle and because they did win it, the tide of war ebbed. The German army was exhausted by the great effort it put into this fight, and was unable to stem the onrushing Allied tide.

There were many heroes in this battle, not only individuals but entire fighting units such as The 106th Infantry Division, and the 3rd Army. History will long remember General McCauliffe's terse reply to German surrender demands: "*NUTS*". General George S. Patton was highly praised for his brilliant strategy in "breaking" the bulge in a two day assault with tanks and infantry.

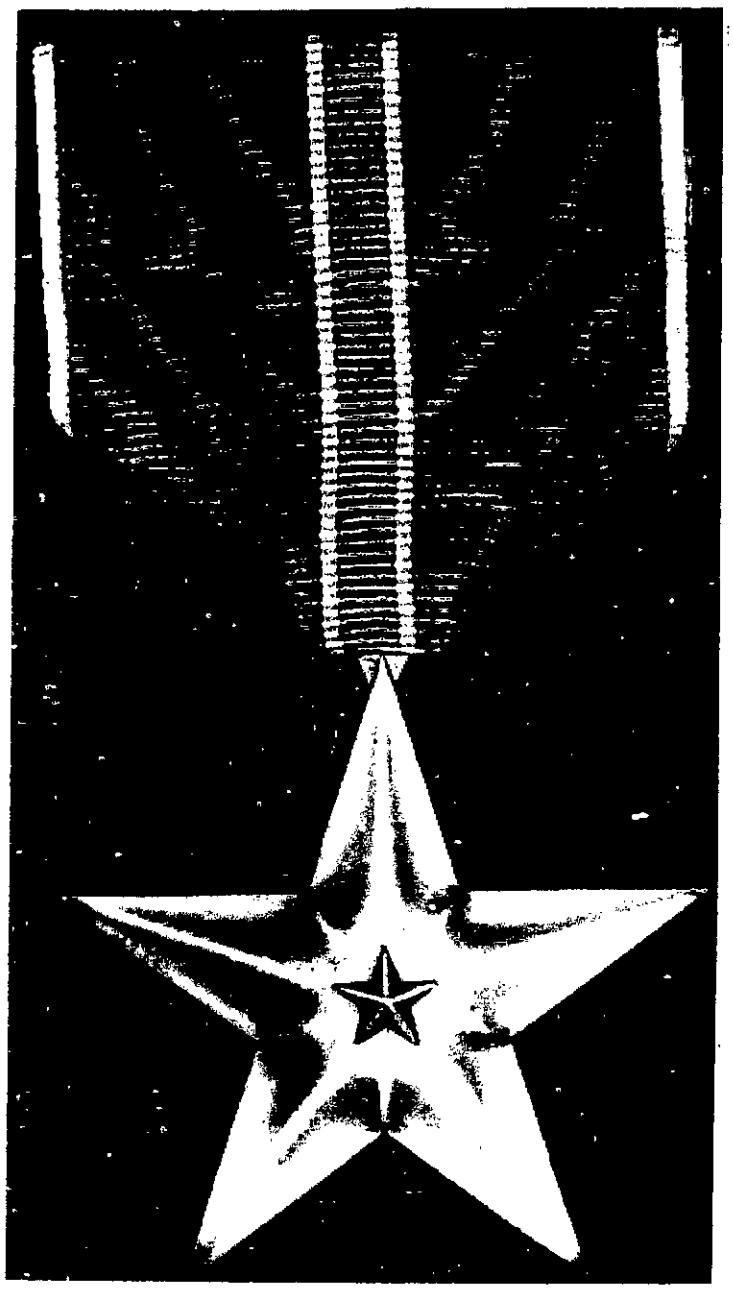
The route I took to get to the Battle of the Bulge was educational, uncomfortable, and very dangerous. It involved the Soldier School at Fort Benning, a grim and rainy stay on the coast of England, crossing the English Channel, landing on the beach at Normandy, and fighting our way into Germany.

Death was always there as the fighting became more and more intense. From the moment I moved off of that Landing Craft on D-Day I saw it everywhere: in the water, on the beach, and certainly on the battlefields. Thousands of our young men lay there, their bodies in grotesque, twisted shapes.

And the German machine guns chattered on, adding to the death list.

Finally, the Allies broke through the murderous German defenses. The job then was to assemble all of the units and get on with battlefield warfare.

Those were especially sad times, because so many men were missing and either dead or wounded.



BRONZE STAR

The Bronze Star is awarded to any person in any branch of military service who, while serving in any capacity with the armed forces of the United States on or after December 7, 1941, who distinguishes himself by heroic or meritorious achievement or service (although not for aerial flight).
This decoration was authorized in February, 1944.

Chapter 1

Fort Benning, Georgia, was possibly the noisiest place on earth. I heard the big booming guns miles away. And they only got louder the nearer we got to the Fort. It was hard to imagine that anyone actually gets used to those big booms. How do you sleep with a perpetual booming headache?

I was traveling with a group of new officers, fresh out of Officer Candidate School. All of us were wearing the shiny new gold bars of a Second Lieutenant. None of us knew for sure why we had been assigned to Field Artillery, but that's where we were, getting ready to nurse the big 105mm Howitzers that made the center of our WW2 fighting hardware. I never felt I actually asked for this duty, just put a few Xs in the wrong places, maybe, and so there I was.

All of us new guys (second Louies, or "Shavetails" we were called) started right off on the Fort firing range with the big guns. I must have paid enough attention to make the promotion lists, or my marksmanship was pretty good, or something. Anyway I suddenly found myself wearing the silver bars of a first Lieutenant. That move was good and bad. Good, in that I drew a bigger paycheck. Then again it was bad, because the Army was looking hard for bright, eager 1st Louies to go "over there". I qualified, I guess. Qualified to head for Europe and try to deal with German Panzer tanks and whatever the Germans could throw at us including Blitzkreig, or lightning warfare. Blitzkreig warfare was a greatly feared German battle strategy where Stuka dive bombers, tanks, motorized infantry and artillery all attacked a single city or area in a coordinated attack.

I had never faced the Germans or anyone else in a real battle...only simulated ones made for us at Fort Benning. I had a comfortable bed, good food, lots of free time. All that good living didn't last. One day in May I was called into the Commandant's office and given the word "Get ready, son, you're headed to where they're doing the real fighting! And you might want to pin these double bars on, Captain Farrell".

"Yes sir. Thank you sir", I said, sensing that my good, cozy life was about to get an overhaul.

I had been at Fort Benning for several months, absorbing all the fighting things they told me I'd need to help win the war...and survive. The training was thorough and never stopped. We spent hours, days, on the practice firing line shooting those 105mm guns at targets 500 to 1000 yards off in the distance. It was the job of the Range Officer to observe our techniques and keep track of our shooting records. When your group missed a target, the R.O. let everybody know about it. A missed target got red flags waved at them. Those flags picked up the nickname "Maggies' Drawers" and the other shooters really put it on any shooting team that earned too many "Maggies' Drawers". It made us just a bit more precise in our work.

Ordnance instructors made sure we could handle M16 rifles and other relatively light weight firearms. Officers had to become familiar with the old Cold 45s. The .45s weren't much on long distance shots...that was for rifles. But up close you never wanted to get on the wrong side of a .45. You really needed help to know how to fire the .45. The firing "kick" was enough to jerk the gun right out of your hand. If you held it too near your face with your arms bent even little bit, that kick could be painful, maybe a broken nose.

We learned all there was to know about keeping our 105s in good shooting shape. If we couldn't manage it, at least we learned enough to get somebody who did. They weren't terribly

complex machines to deal with, but they were deadly. If you lost a single 105 you were cutting your chances of surviving, of winning the battle. If you lost two or more you created a weak area in your battle line. It was vital that we be able to strip a 105...and put it back in working order.

Those guns got so hot after firing one or two rounds that the firing crew frequently burned their hands and arms. We also needed to know how to care for the 105 carriers. That was a much more difficult task. You needed to be a first class mechanic to fix a 105 carrier in the field. The complete M37 package (tracks and gun) weighed 40,000 pounds, or approximately 20.5 tons. The model we had at the Battle of the Bulge was called the Sexton, and was the latest edition of self-propelled Howitzers. It could travel over the open road at speeds up to 35 MPH. Cross country speed was near 15 MPH. It could ford a four foot stream, or roll over a seven foot trench. Its armor averaged between 5/10ths to 7/8ths of an inch. Actually the M37s were dependable pieces of machinery.

If something did go wrong, like a burned out engine, or torn up tracks, we quickly got in touch with our nearest maintenance shop. They knew how important the M37s were to us and always responded quickly. In no time one of the monster tank retrievers was dispatched to us and the crippled unit was hauled off to the maintenance shop. Those guys were good! I saw one of our beaten up units with a burned out engine hauled off one day and returned with a new engine in 2 days! I doubt if those great mechanics ever got the recognition they deserved. But they were real heroes to me and my crews and to a lot of others who needed the impossible done as soon as possible or sooner.

The 105 Howitzers were kings of the hill. You never, ever, wanted to be around when one of those 80 pound monster shells whistled an incoming greeting. You needed to be aware

that the Germans had 105s too! And they knew how to use them. But 105s...ours or theirs...were not what you'd call highly maneuverable. They usually were carried into battle on twin -track units.

As a matter of fact, the German supply logistics had its own aches and pains. We often saw horses and mules pulling wooden wagons loaded with ordinance into battle scenes. Sometimes they pulled their 105s and occasionally small infantry units or Red Cross carts for the wounded. The use of horses and mules made me think of World War 1, when the use of horses and mules and wagons was said to be a common sight. At least there was no concern about fuel for the wagons, and the horses and mules ate whatever local farms could provide.

There were bigger guns. The 105s were big, but the .240s were bigger. The .240s could throw a 360 pound projectile as far as 15 miles, with great accuracy. They were the largest field pieces in the US Army. They were hard to move around, and had to be dissembled into two sections for travel. The barrel was attached to a special transport wagon frame and pulled by a tank-like half track. The rest of the .240 was carried on another transport and was also hauled by a half track. It took a 25 ton crane to dismantle and reassemble a .240.

The .240 was developed at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and was the latest innovation in heavy ground artillery. For obvious reasons of difficulty with mobility, there were never many .240s in action. The .240s functioned under the authority of Corps Headquarters, and operated as the 896th Field Artillery Battalion. The 896th was not a part of a regular division.

The real deadly pieces of work were the German Panzer tanks. There were numerous flip up ports through which machine guns blazed away. The Panzer armor was thick, and that whole fighting machine was capped off with a monstrous 88mm cannon that was fired from inside the tank. I have always assumed that tank people were all a little hard of hearing as a

Chapter 2

It looked so easy.

All we had to do was find our way across the English Channel, move rapidly along with our M37s, which carried our 105MM Howitzers over the soft sands of Normandy, then the rest of France. Finally we would push the Germans into surrender, back behind their lines. Why not? The Allied armies had been pushing the Germans around all through Africa, Italy, Sicily, and points east and West. One more push should do it.

It should have.

Only, things didn't work out that way. Nature came up with high seas, a continuing icy rain, and a solid cloud cover. Not great conditions for our invasion forces.

The real invasion shooting actually began as our Navy ships bombarded the coastline with a continuous barrage of heavy firepower. The Navy firepower kept coming until the Allies secured a foothold on the beach. Heavy cloud cover effectively discouraged Allied air cover, and long support lines slowed the advance as the troops waited for everything to catch up.

I was a Captain then a Light Colonel during the early fighting. I commanded a battalion of 126 men, and a score of 105 Howitzers. We were the 440th Armored Field Artillery. Our 105s came to us self propelled, mounted on full twin tracks. Formally, they were called M37s and carried a 50 caliber

machine gun in the right front quadrant, representing the culmination of 105mm carrier development in 1944. The Sexton model carrier came along just after the Normandy invasion and soon became the 105 mm carrier for the Allies. The Sexton carriers were faster and slightly bigger than 105mm carriers up until that point. The carriers required a commander, driver, and a gun crew of three. They had great mobility and firepower.

Anytime you talked about tracks, half tracks, and especially tanks, you talked about the hard core center of the army. Air cover was important, and you couldn't do anything without the infantry. But the fighting machines that "kept on rolling" in any kind of weather wore tracks! It followed that whoever had the tanks and used them well usually won the serious battles.

Lucky for us we had General George S. Patton on our side! In my opinion he was the greatest warrior in history. In fact General Marshall called Patton's battle strategy at the Bulge the greatest piece of tank fighting in military history.

The Germans thought so too and considered Patton their #1 foe. They even assumed falsely that the big invasion was to come south of Normandy, because that was where Eisenhower placed Patton as a decoy!

I saw General Patton up close as he made his way to battle. He pumped his fist at us. We all cheered.

He was called some pretty crude names, like "Blood and Guts", but clearly he saved thousands of Allied lives with his brilliant leadership.

The Germans saw that Allied airpower was all but shut down due to the pervasive cloud cover. They knew that Allied supply lines were stretched to the

point of inefficiency. These observations prompted the Germans to muster and maintain a massive counterattack right out of the Ardennes forest, in the Belgian Highlands: this led to the bulge in our battleline. The fighting there became known as "The Battle of the Bulge".

It was the last German initiative of the war.

I was there.

Chapter 3

The weather in and about the British Isles is fairly predictable: usually cool, usually raining, not too many warm, sunny days. Certainly this was true in the first week of June, 1944. The Allied forces had packed themselves into every nook and cranny along the British waterfront waiting for the word to begin the great invasion of German-held Europe. I found shelter in an old army barracks named Tidewater. Even the name made me uncomfortable. The rain continually came down in torrents, it was cold, and all of us were miserable.

Maybe the most grim thing about it all was knowing that the German soldiers were just a short distance away across the English Channel, and were ready and waiting to blow us all to Kingdom Come. We tried not to dwell on the subject of Kingdom Come, but it was hard to think about much else. A lot of the guys got away from it all by playing cards, or shooting dice. There was no liquor around, at least not so you knew. Most of the men sat around or just lay there on their bunks, or in their hammocks, looking over those great letters and pictures from home. Some stared through those continuing sheets of water, and drifted off into space, wondering about things. They might get up and go take a walk in the rain. Many wrote letters. Sometimes the letter would be the last one a soldier wrote and all of them knew this was possible, if not probable. Most of the writing was profound, reflecting those deep feelings soldiers have at times like these. I remember one letter I wrote my Grandmother thanking her after all these years for the great Christmas dinners we enjoyed at her house. There doesn't seem to be anything more enjoyable than a Grandmother-cooked Christmas dinner! The thought brought tears to my eyes.

With all the anxiety and just plain fear that was everywhere, the Chaplains stayed busy! I spent a good bit of time talking to our Chaplain. I had a terrible time trying to understand why God permitted wars in the first place. It always seemed to me that it would have been a lot easier on God and the Chaplains if there were no wars. I never heard a good answer for that except that God does appear to act in mysterious ways.

The first scheduled day for the invasion to commence came and went...far too stormy. But the next day was significantly better, even though the Channel water was very rough. Eisenhower gave the word to go June 6.. The next best weather and tidal break would not happen for another month and it would be very difficult to hold the invasion force of thousands of men cooped up in close quarters aboard ships and in every imaginable place near the waterfront. It was easy to see that the men's nerves were strained, just waiting and fretting. So the big push was set for the small hours in the morning of June 6, 1944.

There had been a lot of false information intentionally slipped to the Germans, so that they weren't really sure where or when the invasion would take place. One of the things that pleased us, as the scuttlebutt sifted down to the troops, was the word that Hitler had recalled his Panzer forces, primarily Panzer 4s, to do battle with the Russians. Panzer 4s weighed approximately 17.5 tons. At least during the time of the invasion we wouldn't have to deal with those monsters. The rumors turned out to be true. The German Panther tank, which was successor to the Panzer 4, began to show later against our invasion forces. It fired a 75MM gun with an enormous muzzle velocity capable of tearing up almost any other tank in action.

The landing at Normandy was pure hell. Too often the men steering the landing craft got antsy and discharged their cargo of soldiers in water that was much too deep. Each soldier

carried nearly 100 pounds of clothing, food, and ordnance. I saw too many men just sink right down into the too deep water.

Coming ashore in an open-topped landing craft to face certain enemy fire was terrifying. You knew that when that ramp fell your number was up. Whether it got called was another matter. Those LCs were sitting ducks the moment they left the haven of the mother ship and started their runs to the beach.

The LCs were all iron and steel. The incessant pinging of machine gun bullets against the metal made grown men cower in fear- dreading that sooner or later that protective ramp would fall.

Then suddenly it did fall and we heard real, live bullets ripping into guys we knew. The machine gun bullets splashed along from the beach area leaving a trail behind them. The individual splashes weren't too close together coming from one machine gun, but when you considered there were dozens of the guns up above us in the pillboxes, the splashes came much closer together! You had to get up and go. You would get ushered off the LC bodily if you didn't. If the water were reasonably shallow, you could make it to shore and the protection of bunkers others had dug.

Often enemy shells or mortars dropped near the LCs as a near miss. But sometimes they would land in the middle of an LC for a complete disaster. Those of us who made it ashore saw the real horror story. There were bodies bobbing up and down in the water, others half buried in the sand from wave action. All the while machine guns were blazing away at those of us on the beach. The machinegun fire was a steady thing coming from the concrete pillboxes the Germans had located up on the cliff above the beach. It was a sobering sight to see men get hit and go face down in the surf or sand. There were so many calls for medics, and they always responded

quickly. They were magnificent. Nobody knows how many lives those medics saved. They were so courageous, darting about here and there in the thick of the fighting, applying tourniquets and bandages and managing to stop the deadly bleeding in countless hundreds of men. They did their dangerous jobs with no attention to their own safety. They hardly ever carried guns.

There were coils and coils of barbed wire partially buried in the sand. You had to be very careful where you ran, or jumped. When some of those barbs caught your clothing and then dug deeper into your skin, it hurt! You just hoped and prayed the hurt wasn't coming from a .50 caliber German machine gun bullet, although those barbed wire cuts mixed with the sand and salt water hurt plenty. The combination of wind, water, and sand made for poor visibility as the men charged up the booby-trapped beach. There were mines and other rigged explosives to contend with everywhere. Land mines lay almost completely covered with sand, making it nearly impossible to see them even a few feet away. Those wonderful medics of ours did what they could, but the number of lower body wounds was overwhelming.

One of the problems was the difficulty of getting a good foothold when you needed to maneuver...dodge side to side. The sloshy sand and water combination was definitely not conducive to fancy footwork. The 100 pounds each man carried made things even more difficult.

Sometimes you could see machinegun bullets marching in explosive tufts of sand right toward you, similar to what we saw from the LCs out in the water. If you were lucky, you shouted a warning to others then dove for cover before the bullets marched across your path.

Getting men ashore was one thing. Getting tanks and other tracked vehicles including our own M37s ashore was another. M37s weighed about 20.5 tons. The M37 could negotiate about 4

feet of calm water. So when they were let go in four to five feet of rough water, dozens of them plunged to the sandy bottom of Normandy Bay as the rubberized support structures for them failed to support. The American M4 Sherman tanks, the standard American tank used in WW2, weighed nearly 37 tons and carried a 75mm main gun. The rough wave action caused the floating supports to dip and permit water to rush in. Many of the men in tanks were hopelessly trapped. We lost dozens of our 105mm carriers (mostly M37s) the same way.

Chapter 4

The weather around the Ardennes area of the Belgian Highlands in the fall of 1944 was bitterly, freezing cold. I wore as much of my cold weather gear as I could squeeze into, but my hands were like ice. My face was a frosty coating that made my stubby beard stand out like a field of icicles. Our only relief came from the glorious warmth of camp stoves whenever we got the chance.

I was a Captain at that time, in charge of a battalion of 125 artillerymen and their eight 105mm Howitzers. We placed the big guns where it appeared they could do the most damage. We even located one in a farmer's front yard, and others in a broad semicircle that represented a segment of our fighting front. The old farmer sat on his porch watching the action from the security of his rocking chair, pipe clinched in his teeth. All of our yelling and calling to him, our warnings went for zero. He paid no attention to us. It was as if he were watching some form of entertainment, like a soccer game.

Across the dirt road from his house was a wide field, probably for cattle, although we never saw any while we were there on the farmer's land. It was surrounded by a substantial fieldstone wall, which was to play a significant role in a battlefield drama very soon. I think he made it through the war OK. I saw his farmhouse...still intact...as we passed nearby on several occasions. With the Germans and Americans continually on the go, the old fellow had probably learned how to stay far enough out of harm's way to survive.

Unfortunately, we were running very short of ordnance for our big 105s , as well as gas to move their big double track M37 carriers .

The situation was serious. The American forces held a several mile long front running south to north and had the German army stopped. But our lines of supply were excessive, too long to service appropriately. It was then that the shortages of gas and ordnance caught up with us and our smoothly performing fighting front ground to a stop.

At about this point in the fighting one day I thought I heard my number called up loud and clear. I felt my time had come. It was early in the Battle of the Bulge and the Germans were advancing with their infantry and tanks. Our position was not a very safe place. We were facing three powerful German armies and they were on the move and taking prisoners.

Suddenly, in the midst of all the other war sounds, I heard one of our infantry soldiers calling for help. I looked out across the old dirt road into the fighting field beyond and saw the man lying there, apparently unable to move. I had to act quickly. The battle was raging all around us and our troops were effectively tied down.

But somebody had to do something!

I moved across the old road and on in to the field where the soldier lay, watching me. Both he and I were aware that the Germans were not above shooting prisoners. We had all heard about the recent massacre of more than 80 American soldiers at the small Belgian town of Malmedy, on December 17, 1944.

The Germans herded their American prisoners into one large group and then methodically gunned them down. Some were killed with machinegun fire, others by close to the head pistol shots. Enough Americans escaped the murderous German guns to secure credibility as to the massacre details. Some of the prisoners made a run for the nearby woods, as the shooting began. A few managed to reach the forest as bullets followed them in among the trees, tearing off chunks of bark and limbs. The few who made it into the forest kept running hard,

Chapter 6

Word of our logistics predicament soon reached the German command, and almost immediately they brought from the Russian front several dozen Panzer and Panther tanks firing 88MM Howitzers from their mounted cannon. While we did manage to stop some Panzers through firepower, the facts were that more of the new Panthers were lost due to mechanical failure than to enemy action.

We returned fire from our 105s from just across an old country lane, but the Panzer's spectacular maneuverability plus a bountiful supply of ammunition forced us to withdraw. The version of the Panzer tank we faced toward the end of the war was the Panther. It was highly maneuverable and capable of groundspeed near 25 miles per hour. It was, however beset with excessive mechanical problems which made infantrymen out of tank crewmen.

The Russian Stalin tank was lower in profile, faster, and had thicker armor which was better sloped to help deflect firepower. The Germans always seemed to have new and often innovative tank designs on their drawing boards. They used the Stalin as a guide for future tank production. Speed is an essential ingredient of tank efficiency. Given good speed, fast tanks can avoid dangerous targeted situations.

The Germans pressed on. Our entire front sagged toward the West and finally formed the famous "Bulge" in our battlefront. The Panzers were so near to us at times I could easily reach out and touch one with a five foot pole.

The Germans put three armies (29 divisions) into the campaign against three American armies (31 Divisions).

Things looked bad. The German counteroffensive was brilliantly executed and it appeared our battlefront was about to give way. It also appeared likely the Germans would capture several thousands of our troops. They did! Over 4,000 American troops surrendered in one day during the height of the Bulge fighting. Allied POWs were forced to walk many miles to German prisons. John Kline, of the 106th Infantry, and a Battle of the Bulge historian, walked over 525 miles to the German prison where he was held for four months. He lost fifty pounds as a prisoner and was in a sheltered camp only five weeks. Kline was a 19 year old Sergeant and a heavy machine gun squad leader. The average age of 106th Division troops was 22.

The 106th played an extremely important role in significantly delaying the German movement around the St. Vith area. As a result of this delaying action, the Germans lost valuable time from their proposed march toward Antwerp and final glory. The 106TH Division was forced to cover a 21 mile battlefront, which they did heroically, instead of the normal Division cover of five miles. This critical fighting caused the Germans to sacrifice too many men, tanks, and other materials of war. They were never able to recoup their losses to the 106th, and were never again the fighting force they had been.

The Germans launched their "Bulge" offensive from the hill country around the Ardennes area of the Belgian Highlands, near the German border. The Germans referred to this campaign as the" Ardennes Offensive". The goal was to split the Allied forces (British in the North,

Americans in the south) and drive to take the very important seaport of Antwerp, in Belgium. The Germans drove the Allies back 31 miles, down the middle. This was the "Bulge". It was about eight to ten miles north and south, and reached the 31 mile extension in late December.

As the Allies were being pushed back, General George Smith Patton was ordered by General Eisenhower to break off his easterly drive across southern Europe with his 3rd army and move to the North to break the "Bulge".

Patton broke off his 3rd Army's eastern advance and promptly attacked to the north. He was at the site of the "Bulge" quickly, and went into action. Two days later, General Patton broke the German line and threatened to capture the bulk of the German troops in action there. Unfortunately, the Allied command to the north did not act on General Patton's orders to close a giant pincers movement about the German forces, and the bulk of the German troops escaped. .

The Germans suffered about 100,000 casualties at the Battle of the Bulge, the Americans 81,000, and the British 14,000 (these casualties included those killed, wounded, or captured). The size of the armies during the Bulge fighting was huge: 500,000 Germans, 600,000 Americans, and 55,000 British. Well over one million men. The two sides lost 800 tanks. Altogether, the Battle of the Bulge goes down in history as the worst battle in WW2, considering losses to the American forces. Our 105mm ordnance was seriously rationed at times to less than 20 rounds per gun. Each 105 round weighed 80 pounds. They were stored tail-down (powder end down) in the vehicle (to avoid enemy small arms fire). The 3rd Army averaged firing 2726 rounds of all types per day, but more than that during the Battle of the Bulge.

Chapter 7

General Patton and his 3rd Army completed the encirclement of the German forces and drove them back within the German border. Tank warfare became the powerful fighting force it is for America largely due to the persistence of Patton in doing battle with the US Congress for funds to support an armored force. He failed to get Congress to act in the 1920s, largely because there was no war at the time, and the government saw no need for wartime expenditures. Patton went back to the still active horse-drawn Cavalry, where he earned career points.

It was at about this time of the 1920s that he met Dwight D. Eisenhower. The two became good friends, personally and professionally. Eisenhower was to play a significant role in Patton's advancement up the military ladder.

In the 1930s, Germany's war machine went into high gear, featuring the notorious "Blitzkrieg" attacks. Because of the onset of German hostility and its potential threat to the USA, Patton was finally able to convince the US Congress of the need for "Armored Brigades". He was named brigadier general in charge. The brigade blossomed into the US 2nd Armored Division with Patton named as major general.

During his fighting years, General Patton was awarded twenty-four combat medals, including the Purple Heart for machine gun wounds he sustained on the field of battle in WW1. He was machine gunned as he went to the rescue of a fallen soldier who was trying to free up a vehicle stuck in the mud. He was awarded many other medals of the "display" type, not worn on uniforms.

General Patton attended the Virginia Military Institute for one year then transferred to West Point where he completed his basic military training. He served on the staff of General John J. Pershing in WW1 and was active in the pursuit of Pancho Villa in Mexico. He learned to fly after WW1 and took up sailing.

Perhaps the most significant contribution Patton made to the art of warfare was his very early devotion to the tank and its potential in land fighting. He was an early expert with the strategical use of tanks on the battlefield.

General Patton never lost his love of horses. He regarded the shift from horse drawn vehicles to motorized units, and subsequently tanks as critical elements for a fighting force such as the US Army. I always thought he harbored a real appreciation of horses because of the mobility they provided in WW1, and to some extent in WW2.

One day, in the area around the Meuse River, near where the Bulge fighting raged, the General noticed a group of Leipzig stallions in an open field, exposed to fire from both sides. He stopped what he was doing and had the stallions moved into the keep of a nearby castle.

"Hell", he said," the Germans would eat every one of those horses".

That was the truth. German rations were poor and they would think nothing of a horsemeat feast.

General Patton believed in reincarnation. He saw himself to be a reincarnation of several historic military figures, including the Carthaginian General Hannibal, a Napoleonic field marshal, and others. I never believed in reincarnation, but I certainly thought of General Patton as belonging in anybody's list of great warriors. If he chose to carry things a bit further, that was OK with me and my men. He earned the right, and held our admiration.

Few people are aware that Patton was an Olympic star, finishing fifth in the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm in the Modern Pentathlon. The Pentathlon included riding, pistol shooting, fencing, swimming, and running.

Following the end of WW2 hostilities in Europe, Patton campaigned hard to get a command in the Pacific, but was turned down. This rejection upset him terribly. He was in an auto accident near Manheim, Germany, on the 9th of December, 1945, and died from the complications involved on December 21, 1945.

A film, "Patton", was made in 1970 starring George C. Scott. The production won an Academy Award for Scott, as well as one for the film writers.

I had many close calls during the Battle of the Bulge, and the fighting that led up to it. I believe most of us did, whether we were aware of them or not.

Sometimes a monster 80 pound shell would land with a whopping thud just far enough from our bunker to give us a scare, but no Purple Hearts. But I remember one experience with a German 80 pounder that made believers out of a group of my men, including myself.

We were all sitting around in our staff tent talking about the day's action, and maybe our next move, when one of those "thuds" ripped through our tent and dug a fairly deep hole for itself in the dirt under the floor of the tent. We could see the rear of the shell down in the hole.

We all expected to get blown to bits...but the shell failed to explode. We were petrified. To make any moves on that dirt floor around the shell might be all it took

We waited, hardly daring to breathe. Still, it didn't go.

Finally, I felt I had to at least try and get us out of this situation. I ordered the men (there were seven of them) to follow in my footsteps as closely and as easily as they could. I made my first move, then another, and another.

No explosion! The men followed me through the doorway and out to safety. I managed to get off a radio call to our headquarters asking for appropriate help. It arrived in minutes. They managed to defuse the shell and carted it away for a more secure detonation. I didn't envy those "defusers" their jobs. Nobody did. But did we appreciate them? You bet!

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Our rations were good. We had plenty of Spam, turkey, and C rations. I never saw one of our men without his hot coffee on those freezing cold mornings. The cooks were proud of their work, and rightly so. We had a full course Thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings, even with fighting raging nearby.

But some of our men didn't fare so well. For example , while our men were getting the good dinners, our soldiers of the 106th Division who had been captured by the Germans ate what the Germans gave them. One member of the 106th, John Kline, reported he lost 50 pounds during captivity.

Every once in a while I dispatched a few men to area farms to negotiate for fresh vegetables. We were successful in this bartering and the taste of the fresh vegetables was appreciated.

But even these visits to area farms were not always simple.

One day our food-search party was preparing to pay a visit to one of the farms, and in fact had emerged from the woods and was headed for a visit with the friendly old farmer.

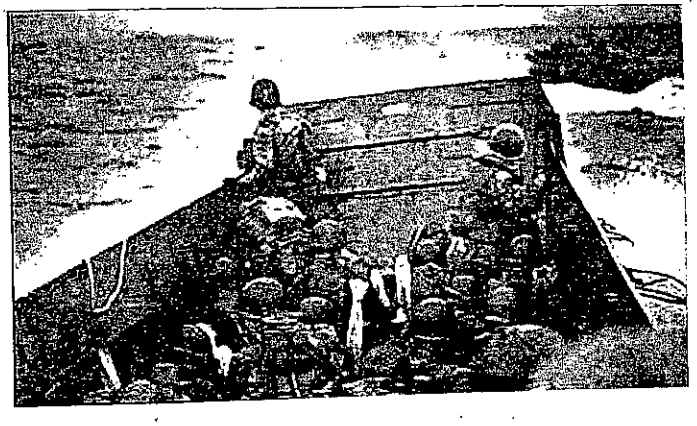
We didn't go much further. One of our men spotted three Germans leaving the farmer's place. They were loaded down with things from the farm and moved on away from us toward their line.

We all exhaled at the same time. Close call.

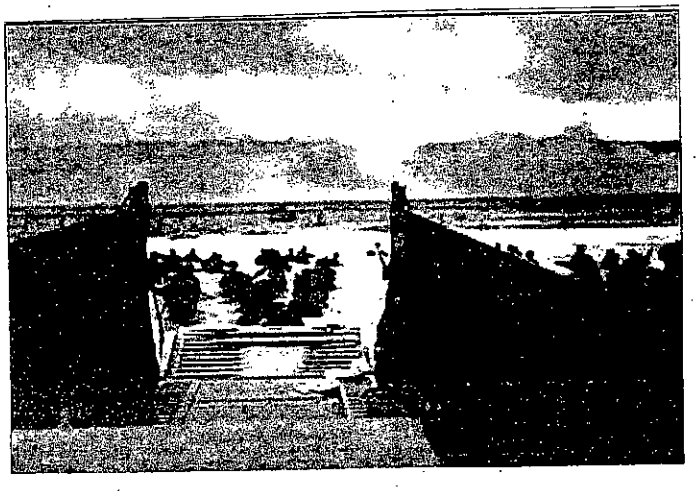
We waited a few more minutes, then ran to the farm and got our fresh vegetables.

We were much more careful on our trips to the farm after that.

INVASION : NORMANDY

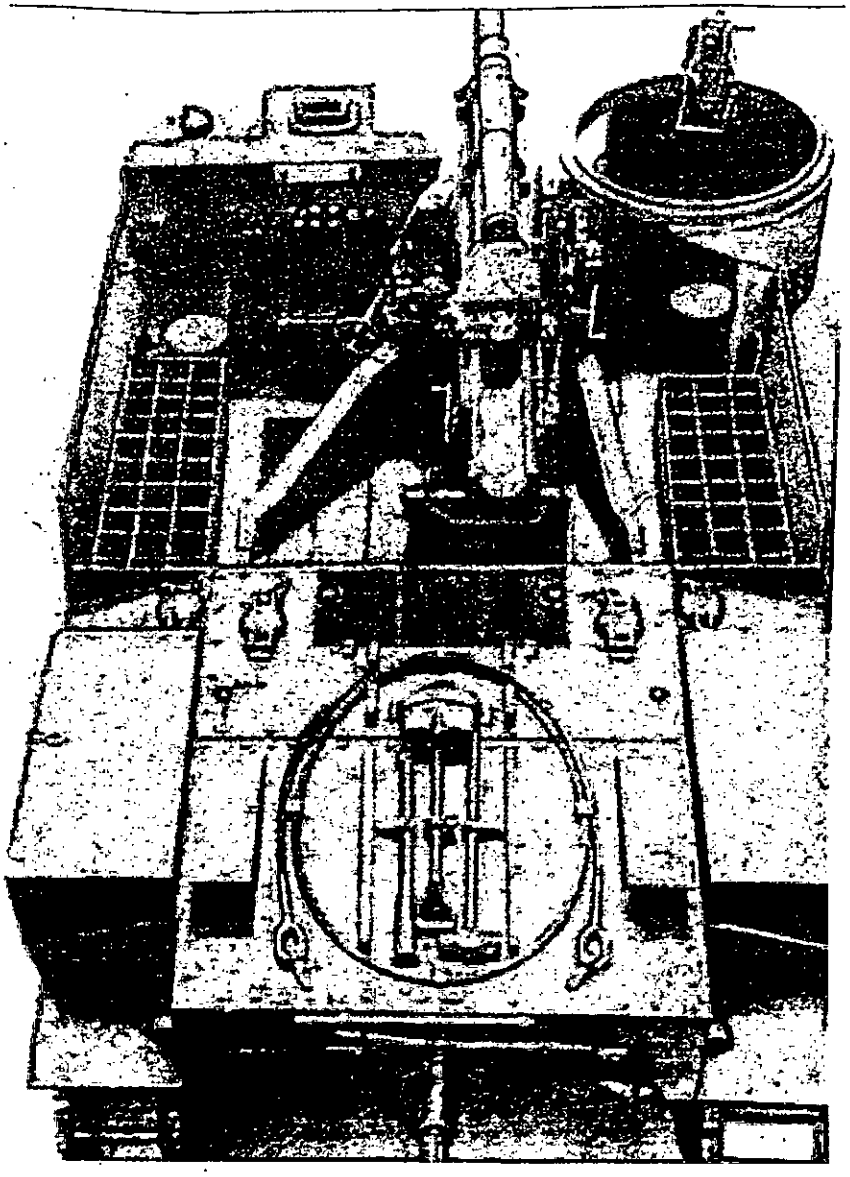


Landing Craft..with the gate up…



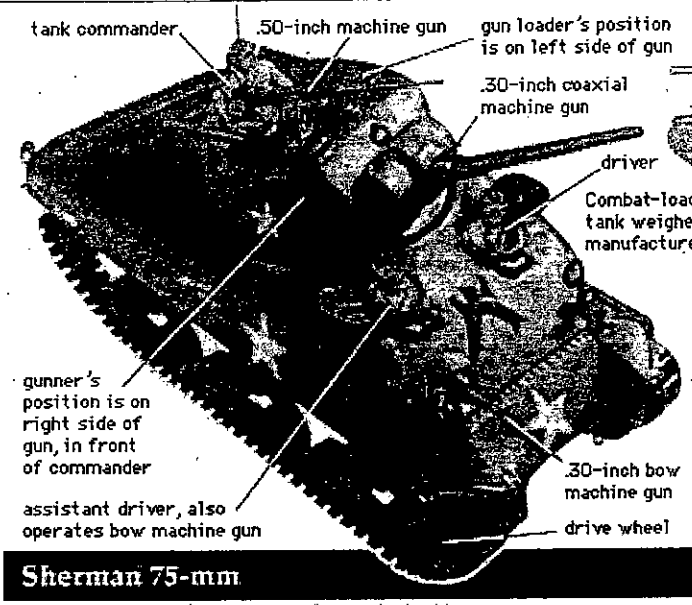
Gate down !

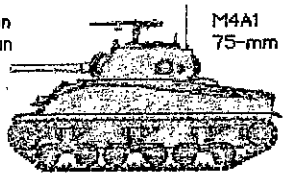
M37



M37s carried our 105 Howitzers into battle. Early versions of carriers were half tracks, but all of ours were full tracked, like tanks. In fact, from a distance our carriers looked like tanks. We carried the big 105 Howitzers plus a mounted .50 caliber machine gun on the carrier's right front quarter.

THE SHERMAN TANK





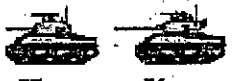
Combat-loaded, the Sherman medium tank weighed about 34 tons. It was manufactured under these designations:

M4, M4A1, M4A2,
M4A3, M4A4, M4A6

The designations depended on the tanks' engines and on whether they had rounded, cast hulls or flat-sided, welded hulls. Close to 50,000 Shermans were built in 1942-46.

The Sherman Tank

Sherman main guns:



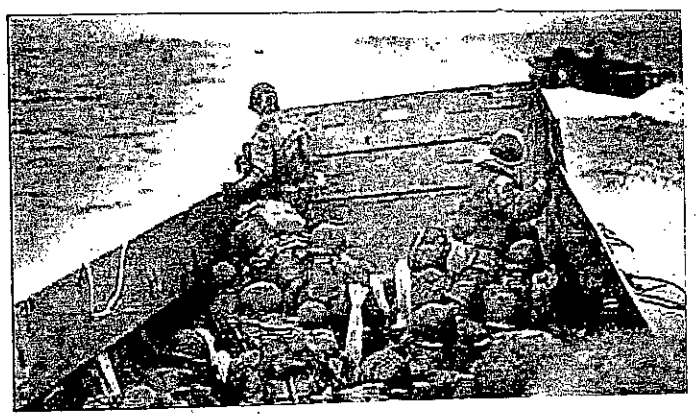
75-mm 76-mm

Sherman 75-mm

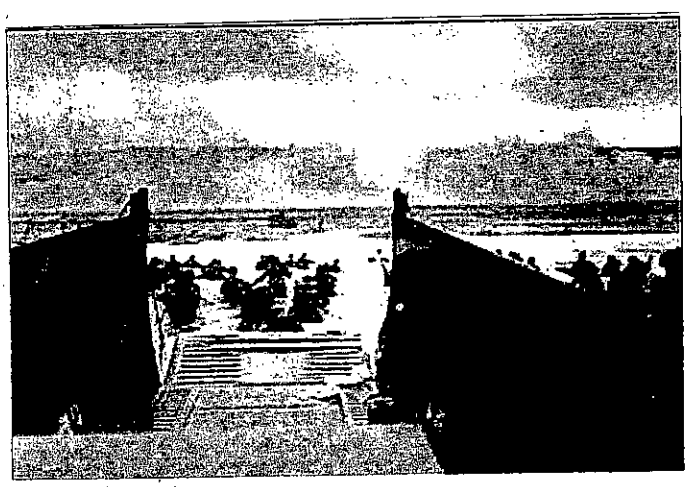
The Sherman 75-mm was the most common tank used by the Anglo-American Allies in Europe.

By D-Day the Sherman was becoming obsolete. Compared to the German Panther and Tiger tanks, it had a high, vulnerable profile and weak armour, and its 75-mm gun was incapable of penetrating the frontal armour of either of these German tanks. It became common for Sherman crews to attach additional armour and sandbags onto their tanks.

INVASION : NORMANDY



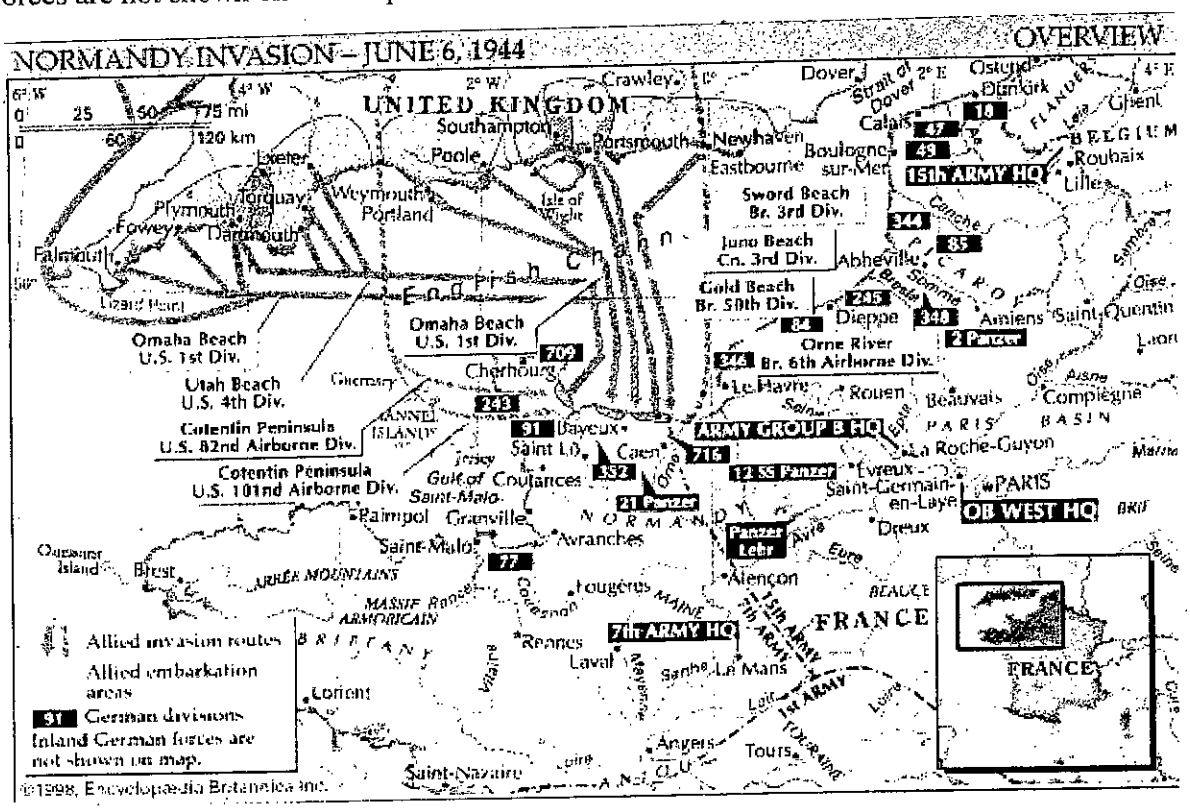
Landing Craft..with the gate up…



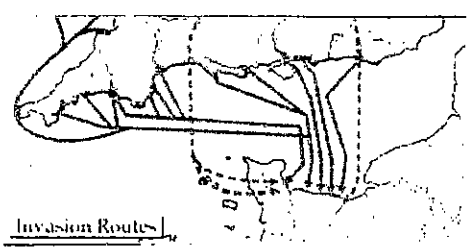
Gate down !

THE NORMANDY INVASION

The Normandy Invasion took place June 6, 1944. The map below shows Allied Invasion routes, and Allied embarkation areas. It also shows the locations of German divisions. Inland German forces are not shown on this map.



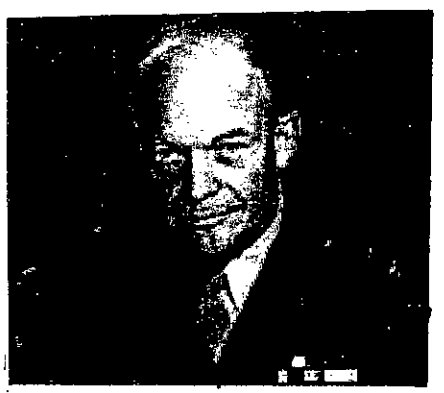
Invasion Routes



General George Smith Patton Jr (pictured before his promotion to full General)

Generals Bradley, Eisenhower, and Patton

General Dwight David Eisenhower



General Eisenhower was the supreme commander of the Allies in Europe during WW2. He commanded the invasion of Normandy, and was involved in the strategy used to defeat the Germans in the Battle of the Bulge, Germany's last offensive.

With the troops.

Then & Now

EPILOGUE

Lee Farrell died just before Christmas, on December 18, 2004.

We didn't get to finish his "Battle of the Bulge" story, but we did manage to record a great deal of his military adventure.

He smiled when we talked about the "arm pumping" encounter with General Patton. He was very proud of his Bronze Star and of the life he saved on the battlefield.

He wanted his family to have some real feeling about that war, and about that particular battle.

I hope "I Was There..." made Lee's life just a little more interesting, just a little more challenging. He was a bonafide hero.

MacAllister Merritt

December 21, 2004