

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE 90th DIVISION

358th ANTI TANK CO. WW 2

EARNEST LE ROY FOUDRAY

The story begins at Camp Barkley, Abilene, Texas. I arrived at Camp March 25, 1942.

I was from the original 20th Infantry cadre. from Fort Lenardwood, Mo. I was a 1st Sergeant from the regular army. from FT. Warren, Cheyene, Wy. Our recruits (fresh from civilian life) went into vigorous training. We did day and night maneuvers, 25 mile marches, under all conditions. After 11 months on Jan. 26, 1943 we were a tough motorized unit. 3 more months in the Desert from Needles, Ca. to Yuma, Az. we were physically hardened, skilled and tougher and wiser.

On New Years day my outfit went by Railroad to Fort Dix, New Jersey. I drove by car, accompanied by my wife and two children. We found living quarters in a small town, New Egypt , New Jersey. A sign just outside our Apt. said 40 mim. to Broadway. New York City. Since I had a car, and was allowed to live off quarters, we went into the city every night. Run out of gas once in a blackout, but that is another story.. The upper most thought in our minds was we may not return from this war. A lot of my friends did not. On March 14th we slipped quietly out of Fort Dix to Camp Kilmer, N.J. where we prepared for overseas movement(POM) for a secret destination somewhere in the (ETO). On March 22 under cover of darkness we boarded the M.S. Erickson , after two days at sea our ship was forced to return to port for engine repairs, after three days we again put out to sea, this time with a naval escort.

On Easter Sunday, April 8th. our Regiment looked out on Liverpool harbor in England. It was a rough crossing, a lot of the men had never been in any kind of boat, so there was lot of sea sickness, what a mess.

Special Units were billeted at Camp Strut Common near Birmingham. We carried full combat equipment on fast marches to get us back into condition.. We enjoyed the local atmosphere as well as their ALE. On May 12, we moved again, as a Regiment at Llanmartin near Newport, Wales. where we were "SEALED" in camp. even the windows were boarded up. On June 14 the Regiment moved with the closest secrecy to dockside,at Newport, Wales.

Our vehicles and heavy equipment was loaded on Liberty ships. When loaded we slipped from Newport, to rendezvous off Cardiff, Wales. with several other ships. It was obvious the big event was about to happen. On the second day it was no longer a secret. The ships radio announced that this was D-DAY. Maps and detailed plans appeared from everywhere. Church services were well attended that day. At 11 O'clock on June 8th in the midst of great display of Naval power, we dropped anchor off "Utah" beach on the Cherbourg Peninsula. What a sight!! As far as you could see, were landing craft of all types and description, allied aircraft maintained constant patrol of the skys on the look out for enemy aircraft. The sea was rough . Landing craft pulled to the sides of the ship to unload the troops. 11:58 our crafts began to ram the beach. we unloaded and waded through waist-deep water to dry sand. Signs of hard fighting was everywhere, and we did some of our own. The area near Azeville where we had planed to occupy was still in enemy hands, so we moved along a dirt road south of St Martin de Varreville, it was very hot, this was our first impression of Normandy. Roads lined with discarded invasion

equipment every where, dead horses, dead Germans stared at us from the ditches. We needed to organize our heavy equipment into the hands of the Battalions and the Company's. All the while the Long-Toms in the area sent artillery shells whistling into enemy lines. That first night- Bed Check Charlie the low flying German reconnaissance plane, introduced himself, he received a hot reception. We met fierce resistance every where and were often forced to dig in. Some of the bloodiest battles were fought in the famous hedgerow country of Normandy. Each hedge was another battle line, the roads were sunken and made it hard to set our guns to be effective. I'll always remember the odor of the dank Normandy soil. The German "88" Burp guns, this was indeed a new type of fighting. We soon learned how to overcome this obstacle but it took it's bloody toll. On the 12 of June we captured Point L'Abbe, mopped up a completely destroyed village, secured an important crossroad. We hated the hedges but the open fields were just as bad. After June 14, meager comforts were made available, some of us were able to use a blanket in our fox holes, some of us got hot "chow". All night would be the drone of Bed-Check-Charlie, screaming artillery, explosions that shook the very earth. Then the rains came, with the roads being what they were, we had our problems. On July 3rd , it was the Battle of France, where we first met enemy fanatical paratroopers, and SS men. This was my most unforgettable battle. The rains , the Casualties shelling, no communications, few supply's we moved up to Les Sablons. to clean out a town. This is where i picked up my German Luger pistol and several other things from the SS troops. We thought the fighting would never stop, some men called it courage, we were just trying to stay alive. On 11 and 12 we engaged in hand to hand fighting trying to take hill 122. We were in a forest which again made it impossible for heavy equipment. WE took the enemy main supply line, this was called the Mahlman Line, one of their greatest defensive lines. we were again looking at the very beach we first set foot on. We were told we had broken their back, but from where we sat, it was just another day of heavy Casualties, where every thing was wet and covered with mud. I would have sold the farm for a dry pair of socks. Then we hit the Seves river and was given a few days rest in Gorges. On July 22 the attack of the Island of the Seves river, we encountered unusually large concentration of enemy artillery and tank fire. We drove back this attack but had heavy losses This was the last encounter of the hedgerow country, but we were now known, as the 358th with a bloody past. The Normandy defense had been cracked, Jerry was on the run, or so we were told. From then on it was a race across France. There was some fighting but now we were just moving. Jerrys were being surprised and captured. Then on Aug. 20, 1944 all hell broke loose. The Germans were caught in a trap, they ran around crazily, in tanks, horse back on any means of transportation, trying to escape. The fighting was great, but now and then a truce was called to allow great numbers of Krauts to surrender. Sometimes we would pick up as many as 800 POW's at a time. Doves were being herded along the roads to POW camps in the rear. It was welcome news that American forces had entered Paris.

We took some much needed rest at this time in Paris , it was called R and R but we mostly just took the R. as this was the first time we'd had a chance to have a good bath and clean clothes then we waited for further orders.

Aug. we hit the road again. 170 miles to the Seine river. We had a severe gasoline shortage, that bogged us down, Transport planes flew gas into us. In the news papers I guess, they called this the Battle of the Bulge.

On Sept. 7 we encountered a surprise attack. My Company knocked out seven tanks and blew more than 48 armored vehicles to kingdomcome. We received our Bronze Stars for this Battle Again we got to spend a few days in Gay Paree.

Early Nov. 1 we crossed the Moselle river. Crossings were always hard because the bridges were always blown. It took us 8 days to take and hold this river.

The Anti-Tank Battalion left wrecked tanks and armored cars every where. This opened the gate to the Siegfried line. The Sarr another river crossing, but we were getting better at it if they would just stop shooting at us. This was near Wallerfangen, Germany. We were now on their home land, and they were serious about giving up any thing.

We celebrated Christmas in this area, and it was not very Merry. The guns of the Anti-Tank and tank TDs had to be ferried across this river, because of a flood and the heavy shelling.

We had to blow Jerry out of his Pill Box's. took us 16 days and nights. We had the streets named like Purple Heart Ave. 88th mil St.. A surprise came when we learned the Germans had withdrawn at the Ardennes, we spent the Holidays patrolling and constant alert for enemy activity.

Jan. 7 th 1945 we blacked all identification and took to the snow covered roads thru Luxembourg, Bastogne, Bavigne, into Belgium. Thru Sonlez, Doncoles, and Bras. I have no Idea what these towns are called today. Every inch of frozen ground had to be fought for. They were using the Railroad tunnels for shelter we surprised them and again knocked out 14 of their tanks, this was near Oberwampach.

I'll say this about the weather, your hands were always cold, sore and bleeding. you can't be efficent at doing anything, no matter what. Firing a weapon, opening a can or wiping your butt. you just don't do it well with sore hands. Your lips are always sore and cracked. There is no privacy anywhere, hygiene becomes of little concern, you can't get clean in an army helmet, so when one gets the flu, we all got the flu. We were all fighting frost bite. When you had a bowel movement, that was something else. We were men of 18-20-25 years old and after a while we moved like old men, from the cold,damp, and tiredness.

On Jan. 29th the rains came, supply lines, roads became impassable with melting snow and mud. We were back in the Pill Box area A soldiers best home was in a Pill Box, in those days; otherwise we stayed out in the cold and mud- so no time was lost in taking the Pill Box's. We fought there until Feb. 22 1945.

We then raced to the Rhine River. then the Maine, always with the company of the Luftwaffe or what was left of the German air force. We continued across Germany through Stockheim Schliz , Vacha, Merker on to Bad Salzungen.

This was now April 3rd.

When we captured the salt mines at Merkers we found a fortune in the form of Gold reserve and priceless art that had been stolen from occupied countries.

News spread like fire on the 18 of April when the 358th Infantry was the first to reach Czechoslovakia. We were the first of the Western Allies to cross from border to border.

On April 23rd. my Regiment liberated a large Concentration Camp with a capacity of eight thousand inmates, rescued over a thousand Poles, Russians and French in a disease infested prison.

On May 8th we were ordered to stop offensive action. THE WAR WAS OVER. at least in Europe.

The things you never forget is the smell of war, of the concentration camps, the smell and sight of the thousands of bodies, piled like cord wood waiting to be burned. The suffering of the people and their fear of the Germans, how grateful they were when we would liberate their town, how willing they were to share anything they had left after the Germans had taken everything of value. Most of them were just glad to be alive ,to look for other members of their family. I think the Jew must have suffered the most.

How lonely we were for our own family's.

I remember my good friend, and Co. Clerk Loomas was killed by a sniper, while we were having a conversation at the door of an old root cellar where we had set up our command post.

1st Serg. Ben Sherall from G Co. was killed by shrapnel while in his sleeping bag.

While waiting, time was also an enemy. Their was always a poker game going, and I got darn good at cards. Mail call was best of all. but you always felt bad for the kids that never heard from anyone , or when they would get a Dear John.

After a while you tried not to get too close to the replacements as it was painful to keep losing your friends.

We went over with over 200 men and 15 Officers, only 34 came back alive or uninjured. .

With the fighting over we were to corral the wandering soldiers of the German army, they were just as tired as we.

We were soon released. a point system was in place, to send us home. Since I was one of the high point men I was on the first boat home. we arrived in Boston and sent by rail to FT Leavenworth Ka.

We were so glad to be home, we would get a LITTLE out line now and then. A Young Shave tail (LT) tried to bring some order to our waiting line. one of our non coms, "Crouse" another friend ,told him that for the last 24 months we'd had LTs like him for lunch.

The young man left and we never saw him again. On fathers day 1945 I arrived in McCook Ne. by this time I had almost 10 years of service. So I resigned from the service. I've never talked much about the war, because it was not a very pleasant part of my life, and now I really find it hard to remember. Who ever said old men start wars, for young men to fight. I think we should turn that around.

A lot of people like to go to Europe on Holiday, not me, I never want to go back. Never.

Ernest L Foudray

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