

On the 20th anniversary of D-Day in 1964, my wife and I were having breakfast and watching one of the anniversary programs of the occasion being shown on television. Eva turned to me and said, "If you are going to write about your wartime experiences as a paratrooper, you'd better get with it before you forget all the details."

That was enough to get me going. I had kept a diary from the time an aunt sent me a little five-year diary while I was a freshman in college. I started recording some thoughts on the four lines allotted for each day. I continued doing that jotting down for five years. During combat I did not carry the actual diary into combat but as a radioman assigned to the 101st Airborne Signal Company I used onion skin sheets from message books (4" x 6") on which to record thoughts which might be useful in recalling incidents later on. My lady friend (now my wife) saved all my letters and filed them time-wise as a good teacher-librarian would do.

Shortly after re-enrolling as a college student on return home, I received a letter from the research team assigned to write the history of the 101st Airborne Division (**Rendezvous With Destiny** which was recently reprinted for the 4th time) asking if they could borrow my diary--one of my friends must have blabbed that I kept such a diary (which in wartime is not to be done by soldiers in combat situations). I sent it to Washington little realizing quotes from it would be used to introduce each new operation in which we were involved.

As mentioned earlier I transcribed the onion-skin written notes into the regular diary on return to rear or home base in England or France. At Bastogne during the time we were surrounded by elements of seven German divisions I entered the cellar of the building housing General McAuliffe's headquarters and the division message center with a radio message I had just received. It was shortly after noon on December 22nd. I noted the concern and quietness of my

Signal Company buddies. I asked, "Why the glum looks?" I became aware of the surrender ultimatum the general had just received and responded to with his now famous "Nuts" statement. Headquarters was now waiting for the German reply which was a promised barrage by all available enemy artillery in the area which was supposed to wipe us off the map.

I returned to my makeshift air raid shelter where I had my diary notes and put them in my jacket pocket in case I had to destroy them by eating them. Incidentally, the shelling did not take place although we continued to be bombed and shelled for the next two weeks.

In the back of my mind I had been playing with the idea of correcting a misconception I had read in Cornelius Ryan's book, **The Longest Day** which came out in the 1950's. I was with a group of 101st veterans gathered with Gen. S.L.A. Marshall whose book **Night Drop** had just been released. I told General Marshall I was upset at the description of an action in which I was one of three participants. I had met the other two who had parachuted from the same plane. We set out to locate the assembly area for our group. At the corner of a field bordered by hedgerows topped with bushes our threesome was challenged by a German patrol. Our leader responded in French that he had been visiting a sick cousin and then we hit the dirt. Members of the patrol fired machine pistols (burp guns) through the hedge and over our back sides. The officer lobbed a grenade over the hedgerow and we raced back in the direction ^{FROM WHICH} we had come from. In the story I was upset about the remark made that we scattered to the four winds-- well at least three winds. That wasn't true. After running for several hundred yards we stopped to catch our ^{BREATHS} winds. It was then the officer realized his map case was missing. He was from the ^{PLANS AND OPERATIONS} G-3 section. I had the least rank and I was elected to go back and retrieve the map case. That was an extremely scary situation -- within the first hour of our initial baptism by fire. In a situation like that your special senses are at top pitch and magnified. Every time I

stepped on a dry blade of grass or a dry twig the resulting noise to me was almost like the sound of a window shattering. From time to time the moon would come out from behind a cloud and I felt completely exposed even slinking along in the shadow of the hedgerow. I finally reached the corner where we had been challenged. I had no idea of the exploding grenade's effect on the enemy patrol on the other side of the hedge from the earlier encounter. I was really a scared soldier. ^{INDIVIDUAL} ^{WHERE} Anyway I found the the map case and raced back to the other two were waiting. It was then that we separated and went in three separate directions in the hope one of us would find the assembly area then return and bring the others to the gathering place. I was the first to locate the assembled group. I explained to General Taylor I had been with two of his staff officers. He asked if I knew where the others were and having no compass, I was at a loss as to where I had come from. That was the story I related to General SLAM Marshall and my 101st friends at the book signing session in his home. I stated at the time I would write something to correct the account.

So the diary and the story in **The Longest Day** was enough for me to accept my wife's challenge.

I planned to write an account of my experiences as the general's radio operator and actions in all of our campaigns. It was to be geared for the Junior High level reader. (My wife and were both teachers.) I had already forgotten what equipment was dropped with the various colored parachutes and means did we have of locating the parachute bundles in the darkness of night. ^{I WANTED TO IDENTIFY THE MEDIC.} I decided to write to some of the veterans I had corresponded with after the war and asked them what came down in blue, green, yellow and red chutes and how did they find the bundles. They would try to be helpful having made many more night jumps than I had experienced (which was one.) Then, having shaken their memory cells a bit--they would describe some of their own D-Day actions. ^{Talk with Edw. H. Hill} After ^{here} receiving several of these letters during which the writers

relived their own baptism by fire experiences, I had nightmares about combat. I burst out sobbing when I read some of these letters to my wife. I told her my stories were tame compared to what I was getting in response to my queries. I told her I was switching my focus and would write to more of these men and get eye witness accounts. Being a science teacher I decided I'd contact men from every regiment, battalion, company and special units which were part of the D-Day action. I developed a questionnaire which would lead them in ~~developing~~^{writing} a format for their personal accounts. Most of them sent the names of buddies and in some instances provided current addresses for them. I knew there were interesting accounts out there--but how to find the men after 20 some years after the war. I wrote to the Army Records Center in St. Louis in the late 1960's and asked for unit rosters of most companies and batteries in the 101st which were involved in the D-Day actions. (Many of the Army records were destroyed in St. Louis in an early 1970's fire.) After putting the names in alphabetical order, company by company, I sent the list of men from each man's unit, and an introductory letter on what I was attempting to accomplish, along with a a map of the Normandy area where we had participated. I am positive the company roster played a major role in getting these men to respond to my requests for information. Seeing various names on the rosters stirred the memory cells providing recall for long forgotten incidents and buddies. Some who were wounded so badly in Normandy and never returned to their units cried when they noted close buddies listed as KIA in later actions. How to find buddies of these men who knew only that friends came from various states or parts of the country

--I made a list of all the Army serial numbers that I found on the 50-plus rosters (which usually listed 140 men) placing them in numerical order by Army zones. Where I had the wartime address (as well as current) I would run down the list looking for ASN's with ~~numbers~~^{DIRECTS} which were close to

theirs. With these lists I spent days at the Detroit Public Library going through their stacks of telephone books. In the course of two years I located well over a thousand of these men. About 40 percent still lived within the areas of their local phone directories.

For all three accounts I authored, I wrote to approximately 1,300 men. 518 responded to my requests for the Normandy book, 612 for the Hell's Highway book about Holland and 530 for the Bastogne book.

I was fortunate to get help from the chief pathfinder, Capt Frank Lillyman who edited the special chapter on these trail blazers. Col. Mike Murphy ^{Top Glider Pilot} edited the glider chapter. He piloted the pre-dawn glider in which Brig. Gen. Don F. Pratt of the 101st lost his life. Murphy suffered compound fractures to his legs. Stories came from three chaplains, one from each of the parachute regiments. Their stories appear in the chapter titled "Angels of Mercy" and includes accounts of surgeons and enlisted medics. General McAuliffe checked my chapter on "The Scattered Artillerymen". General Gerald Higgins who was our chief of staff in Normandy wrote the forward to the D-Day book.

The second and third (and now fourth) printing of the D-Day book include a chapter ("The French Were Waiting") based on interviews I did on my 1967 research trip into the hedgerow country. I was able to fit their recollections in with what the troopers had related. I was fortunate for the Holland book to have a young history buff translate my Hell's Highway questionnaire into Dutch and then the responses back to English. It (the book) was translated into Dutch for those people who still celebrate their liberation each September. Our members continue to exchange visits with those Dutch people, many of whom adopted the graves of our men and decorate them on their birthdays and Memorial Day. The same is true in Belgium to a lesser degree.

My files which were and still are being developed over a period of 38 years contain some 22,000 names of men who were

with the 101st at some time during World War II. During the past ten years about 250 families have been helped get in touch with men who served with their loved ones. Even at this late date we are still putting old friends together who have been out of touch for 57 years. I continue to write a column, "K's Korner" in the bi-monthly newsmagazine of the 101st *Show Mag* Airborne Division Association. I try to mention at least a hundred men in the four-page column. The men continue to look for familiar names. *The widows, children and grandchildren*