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I was about 21 years old and working in construction at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, when I was inducted into the Army and sent to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. A Southern boy from southern Tennessee, I thought they would send me to Texas or California from there. But when I stepped off the troop train at the end of our journey, I was met by an MP with a heavy overcoat. He said, “Welcome to Plattsburg Barracks, New York. The temperature is 37 below zero, so you’ll be required to wear this heavy coat and full cap all the time when you’re outside.”

It was right before Christmas 1942 when I arrived at that cold New York base just below Montreal, Canada, and I stayed for basic training until the following September. As an inductee of the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion, I learned about construction and how to build bridges and roads.

Next I went for mountain training in a national forest in West Virginia. From there, we went to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for demolition training before moving into Fort Dix, New Jersey, to await an overseas assignment.

On November 5, 1943, our assignment came, and we shipped out from Hampton Roads, Virginia. Our equipment had been shipped to Calcutta, India, and we were advised that we were going to Africa and then India. We landed at Oran in North Africa on December 1, 1943, and I worked for a while as a courier. One day I was going from one Headquarters office to another with messages, traveling down a real smooth, graded road. In the middle of nowhere with no one else around for miles, I couldn’t see very far down the road. Suddenly I heard a commotion ahead. Pretty soon, a whole company of Scottish soldiers stepped out of a low draw in front of me. They were in parade

dress uniform and marching in parade step while looking straight ahead with their bagpipes wide open. It seemed like they were performing a parade just for me. I thought, *Well, I know where I'm going. I wonder if they do?*

Instead of continuing on to India as planned, our battalion, along with four others, was sent to Morocco. There we boarded a fast British troop ship headed for Liverpool, England. We stayed in Liverpool just a short time before leaving for our final training and staging in preparation for the invasion. Of course, we knew something big was coming when we landed in England on January 20, 1944, and saw the country covered with U.S. troops and planes filling the sky every day.

In May, I was assigned to a small group separate from my unit. The surprising thing was that they shaved my head, though I never knew why. As we entered the staging area near Percyville, preparing to cross the English Channel, we saw a big sign on an arch across the road that read, "Good luck soldier. You're not coming back this way."

Large groups of soldiers had pretty well covered England by June 6th. We knew the invasion was coming and were sent to Portsmouth in southern England to await our crossing of the channel into France on June 17, a little bit after D-Day.

For the crossing, I boarded an LST — a ship that sort of ran on top of the water until it hit the sand and stopped on Omaha Beach. The ship carried about 20 trucks but no troops, just two drivers for each truck. I was standing with another soldier on the bow looking at the beach as we came in, and it reminded me of the Fourth of July. Shells and tracer bullets were flying around and going off everywhere. Around midnight, an officer suddenly jumped from a truck and said, "You two take this truck onto the beach and get it off there in a hurry!"

I said, "Now wait just a minute. It's getting cold out here, and I don't have a coat." Somebody threw me an overcoat, and off we went. We were the first ones off the ship. After driving off the ship and out of the water, we went less than half a mile across the beach and had to stop to tear all the insulation and waterproofing materials off the truck before we could go any further. By dawn we had reached a cliff where a National Cemetery is now located. From the meadow in that tree-shaded spot with its trees and little meadow, the beach looked like a regular coastline except for the occasional firing from a German pillbox.

Sometime after daylight, I noticed that the MP's were saluting me as we passed the checkpoints. Since they normally don't salute corporals, I looked down and realized I was wearing a fancy captain's coat. I'm sure he was mad when he couldn't find his coat.

Then we found out that our little truck was loaded with explosives and were told to find an ammunition depot. Traffic really wasn't moving much on the beach at that time because there were too many people and not enough roads. It was a day or more before we found a place to leave the truck. After that, we looked for my unit or at least a mess tent with food. That didn't last long because everything was total confusion. Finally, we dug a foxhole and forgot about it.

We stayed in that vicinity for approximately five weeks, and I just hung in there in that foxhole pretty good. We were pretty stymied. If the Germans had really tried during that time, they could have pushed us in since we were so thin and were only occupying a very small area.

Others still were landing, so that beach became saturated with soldiers. Those who were already there would move up a little bit to make room and dig another foxhole. The Germans were still strafing us every night. I finally found my unit about five weeks later. They had crossed on one of the huge Liberty ships and landed on Utah beach by climbing down the side of the ship into a smaller boat. They made it ashore without losing anyone, but within a few hours five of those men became casualties when their truck was hit by enemy fire.

Mainly, we just sat there. Sometimes we'd go out searching for Germans. Once another soldier and I were sent out to survey the area. When we came to a barn and heard a bunch of rattling noises inside, we thought, "Boy, the Germans are gonna' get us!" We started to run away, and I never ran so fast. But we decided to go back and check it out. In the loft of that barn, we found about six goats.

When we finally left the beach, our trucks moved right along. My unit would be repairing or rebuilding bridges along the way, but we moved fast. Then we ran out of fuel and went too far up and out while driving across Northern France, so that slowed things down. I think it was about October 1944 by the time we really got ahead of everything.

I was awarded a Bronze Star on my Campaign Ribbon for my participation in the Invasion of Normandy.

My unit continued on toward Germany but was scattered out as the war progressed. The 51st built a number of little bridges across streams, and then the Germans came along and blew them all up. We had to go right back and rebuild them, so we started putting up signs saying "51st Again". The bridges stayed that time and were not damaged again.

By November 1944, the 51st had left the battlefield and started operating sawmills. We were sawing lumber to build bridges, dwellings or anything else we might need. Working in the vicinity of Tripont and Malmedy, we were sawing lumber and minding our own business when the Battle of the Bulge began in December. My battalion got caught right in the middle of it.

We were told to hold the line. The battle was so severe that everything that identified us (except our dog tags) was taken away — letters from home, pictures, etc. Before it ended, we were pretty well surrounded. I remember laying on a riverbank with another soldier around midnight on December 17th, soon after the battle had begun. Trying to stay out of sight and not freeze, we heard tanks coming down the other side of a little stream about 40 or 50 feet away. When the other soldier raised up and looked over the ridge, I asked, "Ours or theirs?"

"Theirs!" he said.

That was one of the shortest conversations we ever had. The Germans went on around us, and then surrounded us for a short time. But the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion did hold and was recognized with a Presidential Citation. I don't think we lost more than six men.

We had been surrounded for almost a week and had run out of food when the 82nd Airborne Division finally rescued our battalion. Though our 750 men had been scattered across a seven-mile front, the 82nd brought us in together and made us part of their division. Then we just stayed still because we didn't know what was going on or where to go. The Air Corps was really pounding Germany — especially along the Rhine River. Two or three weeks later, the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion was put into line to head towards the Rhine. We built one of the first pontoon, floating bridges across that river.

Later we found out that General Patton had taken us into the 3rd Army, though we originally were part of the 1st Army troops. For a while, we were wearing a 3rd Army patch on one shoulder and a 1st Army patch on the other. Patton never did turn us loose. As he swept through toward the Germans, he gathered up every American soldier he could find and made him 3rd Army. We were part of that and finished the war as part of the 3rd Army.

Patton was hell bent for leather to go to Berlin, and our battalion was one of the units going with him. He thought he had it made, but I guess the Allied Commanders told him no. Though we never made it to Berlin, we thought we were headed there. One morning I was driving a truck well inside Germany when I came upon the biggest road I'd ever seen — the Autobahn. But then we had to turn south and were no longer permitted to move toward Berlin. We drove all the way to the Austrian border at that point.

When the war ended, I was in a small town on the Austrian border about 15 miles southeast of Munich. In April 1945, Patton had decided to go to Munich, but the bridge over the Danube River at Engelstott had been blown up. So the 51st was brought in to build another bridge. Our unit was fired on as we built that bridge, and, as far as I know, that was one of the last skirmishes of the war. After we finished the bridge, Patton crossed it in a hurry and went down to the Death Camp at Dachau. He also went to the prisoner of war camp at Mooseberg, where a lot of American soldiers, mostly airmen, were held. For us, the war ended right there. We saw nothing else. Finally we moved closer to Austria just to have a place to stay.

At Mooseberg, I remember watching the Russian soldiers and officers walking out and heading home. Somehow they got hold of a pretty good size wagon and piled on every blanket and anything else they could find that the German soldiers had at the prisoner of war camp. They were going home loaded. Behind the big four-wheel wagon, they attached a little bitty wagon and loaded it up, too. I still have a picture of those soldiers and their wagons. Dachau was a death camp used primarily for Jews or really anybody who opposed Hitler, including Gypsies. I'm 82 now, and some of those scenes come back to me and some don't. They have faded.

When the war ended in Germany, I was assigned to the Army of Occupation for three months. Then the war with Japan ended, and they started sending troops home. I was one of the first in line because I had so many points for being in combat. In November 1945, after three years in the service, I finally got to come home.

Since that time, I have returned to Germany twice. I've also attended several 51st Battalion reunions that are held every two years. I probably won't make the one in Cleveland next year, but I made it to Branson, Missouri, in 1995 and San Antonio, Texas, in 1990. Our attendance is down to about one hundred men now, and some of those are sons. So really we're down to about 75 veterans. Of course, we're dying at the rate of 1,000 a day.

I have stayed pretty much in touch with those men. Some of the material for my memoir I'm writing for my grandchildren came from a Major General who stays in touch with us. He sent me some notes that he kindly got together, and they will be beneficial. He wrote, "I think a number of you may be wanting to do something like write your memoirs. So here, I'll start you."

I was a Christian when I went into the service, but I was one of those people who say, "It's not going to happen to me!" I think an awful lot of people feel that way. I recall being at the little mess tent for a meal once when somebody yelled, "Shells!" So I ran real fast and found a hole to fall in. I wondered, *Boy, how did that get there?* It was a German foxhole that was handed to me. As I look back, I know of a number of times when God was looking out for me. Of course, being a Christian, I did not reach the point of saying, "Well, God, if you'll get me outta' here, I'll do so and so." I didn't feel that I had to ask.

Having served three years with the 51st Engineer Combat Battalion engineers, I decided to become one. On January 6, 1946, I started classes in the Engineering School at Vanderbilt University on the GI Bill after returning home at Thanksgiving in 1945. I received a degree in mechanical engineering from Vanderbilt, an expensive place, and it didn't cost me a penny. The GI Bill even paid for my pencils and paper, plus they gave me about \$105 per month for food. Everything was provided. So my years in the Army were a very positive experience. I didn't know what engineers did until I went into the service, and then they paid for my education.

I married just before entering the service, and I'm still married to the same woman 60 years later. I've had a wonderful career that was as well suited to me as a career could be. After college, I went to work for the Gulf Oil Company in New Orleans and later worked in Mississippi, Alabama, Missouri, Illinois, Texas and Oklahoma. I stayed with them until I retired

We had one daughter. By the time she was 18 months old, she had lived in 3 states. I was moving fast then, but things slowed down after that. I came to Tyler in 1968 when I was given the option of going to Little Rock or Tyler. I chose Tyler since I had never been there, and we sure have enjoyed it.

My family started attending Green Acres Baptist Church immediately, and I've been a deacon there for some time. I taught high school seniors in Sunday school for a number of years until I reached a point where they knew so much more than I did. One of the blessings in my life was finding a church like Green Acres.

God has intervened in my life on several occasions. When I was on the beach at Normandy late one evening, a German plane came over and scattered bullets everywhere. I jumped into a large ditch, on top of some boxes — any port in a storm. After the plane flew off, I looked around and saw that I was sitting on boxes filled with German ammunition. God was with me there! If one bullet had hit those boxes, it would have sent me flying.