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When I saw this dateline on the newspaper, memories came back of yet another August 5th, this one being August 5, 1944. Fifty years had gone by. When we were very young, 50 years seemed like an eternity away to us; now we are older and it may seem like yesterday.

Celebrations commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day, the 6th of June had already been held in many places in Europe and there had been numerous television programs about the war in Europe. The magnitude of the D-Day operation was almost beyond anyone's comprehension. So many plans to be made. The vast numbers of men, machines and supplies required. Even with all the preparations, it still was considered a gamble.

In January of 1944 I joined the 80th Infantry Division in Camp Laguna, Arizona and was assigned to Headquarters Company of the 3rd Battalion, 319th Infantry. Because I had telephone field lineman training while in basic training, I was placed in the wire section of the communications platoon.

Camp Laguna was the desert training center for the Army. All troops that were to be sent to fight in Africa were trained there. The 80th was the last unit to be in Camp Laguna, as the African campaign was coming to an end.

The only permanent type buildings in the entire camp were the latrines. Everything else was tents and tents, as far as you could see. Most of the tents were for five men, complete with a small stove and fold-up type canvas cots. In the middle of the tent was a wire from which to hang our blouses, etc. Your rifle had to be stored on the crosspieces under your cot. The tent was without wood flooring. The sand floor was of very soft, fine dry sand. It was impossible to keep your weapon clean.

Almost no one in my company was particularly happy about being in the infantry but we all knew that being in a battalion Headquarters Company was better than being in a line company as they always received the most casualties.

I was 18 years old, would be 19 in March, D-Day was to be the 6th of June and in August the Division was to land in Normandy.

By August 1944 the Normandy beaches were secure, the fighting had moved inland somewhat and troops and materials were pouring on to the beaches as fast as was possible.

Now it was the 80th Division's turn to land in France. After leaving the marshaling area near Salisbury, England we were moved by train to Southampton and there our Battalion boarded a ship for the approximately 80-mile crossing of the English Channel.

While we were waiting on the pier for our turn to board, a group of about 30 English Marines came out of a ship that was tied to the opposite side of our pier. They looked really smart, cream-

of-the-crop type guys, all apparently in excellent physical condition, each one being about the same size as the next, with nice uniforms and black tams. They were armed but without battle gear-packs, grenades, canteens, etc. They lined up rather loosely. Then a young officer came on the pier and stood in front of them. Shortly he gave a command to his men, which was almost inaudible to us, whereupon they snapped to attention and were lined up perfectly. Again, a couple of almost inaudible commands and they faced right and were marching away with that exaggerated arm swing that British troops use when marching. We were all really impressed. Our officers gave commands in a loud, tough sounding voice — supposedly the louder, the better — and this British officer almost whispered his commands. We all looked at each other in amazement, feeling somewhat like a bunch of amateurs compared with these guys. This officer must have given his men a pep talk before they came out. You know, something like: “All right you blokes, there’s a bunch of Yanks on the pier. Now is our chance to show them what real soldiers look like.”

Shortly afterwards, we boarded our pretty-good-sized ship. We weighed anchor and started the trip across the Channel. We were taken to a large compartment that was empty except for hammocks. Some of the men were trying out the hammocks and lots of them were falling onto the deck, amid a lot of laughing.

Everyone was in a kind of festive mood. We were glad to be away from the intense training and full schedule we had endured during the previous 6 weeks in England.

We got our mess kits and were served a meal of what we first thought was greasy beef stew but later decided it was mutton stew, with some insisting that it was goat.

After several hours of smooth sailing we saw the coast of France. Our ship anchored some distance out to allow us to load in smaller landing craft type boats for the trip to the beach.

So there we were, about to become a part of the invasion of Europe. Many of us were not yet 20 years old, our Non-Coms were a few years older, maybe 22-25 or so, the Battalion Commander was 36, the wire section’s two jeep drivers were in their early 40’s and were referred to by all as “Pops”.

Soon, it was our turn to go over the ship’s rail and down a cargo net to a bouncing landing craft. We had practiced going down cargo nets while in the States so it wasn’t too difficult, other than that this time we were stepping into a bouncing boat. They cautioned us to hit the boat, because if we missed it and hit the water, it was, “Goodbye.” Loaded as we were with equipment, there was no way anyone could be rescued if they went in the “drink.”

We huddled in the landing craft as we headed for the beach — like the scenes we had seen in movies. There wasn’t any one shooting at us, but even so, it was exciting. I don’t think anyone was scared — we were so young. The really scary times were to come later.

When the landing craft grounded, the ramp went down and we waded in water above our knees for the short distance to the beach. From the water to a hill on the far side of the beach was not very far. Ahead was a massive wall of heavy, thick barbed wire, which was strung so close together a rabbit couldn’t have found its way through it.

Off to the right was a big concrete gun emplacement, which had been silenced. To the left was a black sign with a white skull with crossed bones and letters painted on it. The letters said: "Achtung, Minen!" A path wide enough for vehicles had been cleared through the barbed wire. We walked in columns of two, up the hill, along this path, and into the war.

After a short distance we were stopped and told that we were to march several miles inland where trucks would pick us up. Before long, we passed a large field hospital. Some of the recuperating wounded came out of their tents and stood by the roadside. Cries of "Get the bastards", "Give 'em hell", etc. were shouted at us.

Sometime after dark we left the road and were told to bed down as the trucks would not pick us up until about 2:00 a.m. It was the first of many, many nights sleeping on the old terra firma in Europe.

I awoke to the sound of lots and lots of motors, as the truck convoy came into our area. It was so dark you literally could not see your hand in front of your face. I was amazed that they found us, as they had to drive without lights.

As I was getting up to gather my gear, a slight cramp gripped my stomach. I knew the symptom of the GIs. I uttered an audible "Oh no, not now!" There was nothing to do but get into a truck. Within minutes the convoy moved out at a very slow pace.

After a short while the cramps became severe. What a terrible place to be at a time like this. Fortunately, the convoy slowed down and then stopped. Some others and I went out the back of the truck. Sounds of the front of the convoy starting to move caused us to some quick action. It was up-with-the-pants and back-on-the-truck. The cramps got worse. Fortunately the convoy stopped again and I got out.

Just then, a Jeep came slowly back from the head of the column. One of the men in it was saying softly: "Snipers ahead! Snipers ahead!" Talk about terror. Here I was sick, with my pants down, the convoy moving out and they tell me, "Snipers Ahead!" No way was I going to be left there alone. I got back in the truck very quickly. Thankfully I did get some relief during another stop. Later I heard that some trucks were not so lucky and had people who couldn't hold it. Those guys were made to sit at the back of the truck on the tailgate. A real mess.

It was still dark when we arrived at the assembly area where we were to get our vehicles, heavy weapons and other equipment. We were put in a large field that was surrounded on all sides by thick hedges and tall trees that were barely discernible in the darkness. This was "Hedgerow Country." There was only one entrance in this big field and that was for the farmer to come in and out of the field to tend to his crops.

Right away, I was put on guard duty. My post was from the gate to the far side of the field. I was to walk to the far side, stop, listen, and then return to the gate, stop, listen, and then do it again. Because I still had stomach cramps, there was sometimes a delay before my return from the far side of the field.

When I was relieved from guard duty I managed to get some sleep before the dawn came rolling in. During the day while we waited for our equipment, I did some exploring, which was kind of dumb, considering the possibility of mines, etc. I went into the hedgerows and saw German foxholes. They were made very precisely, with smooth sides as though made by a sculptor. I found a bloody piece of trouser from an American uniform, letting me know that this wasn't Hollywood. Then I came across a piece of paper with German wording and the swastika on it. I later found out it was a soldier's pass.

After we had our equipment I learned that the 319th was put in Corps reserve. We missed the fighting in the Hedgerows and followed up the advance for days as the breakout from Normandy was made.

Ahead of us was the German Army—the best-equipped and best-trained army in the world, and here we were, young guys who had yet to hear the sound of the cannons.

I sometimes thought that we were like a high school football team that was to be matched against a professional team. We had to learn quickly from our experiences and our mistakes, and we did.

The 80th Division became a very effective fighting unit—always taking their objectives while accepting their casualties. The German Army was still respected, but the American Army was not awed by it.

After several months in the line, the Regiment was put in a rest area near Saarebourg, France, resting and refitting while waiting to attack the Siegfried Line in Germany.

We were there for a week or so when we got the order to move out. I assumed that we were going on a short ride, as we almost always did. Because of that I rolled up my overcoat with my bedroll and put it in our jeep trailer, assuming that I would not need it. The overcoats were cumbersome and it made it more difficult to get in and out of vehicles, which sometimes could mean being in the ranks of the living or the dead. We didn't have enough jeeps in our section to carry all of us, so some of us had to get on the trucks that carried the infantrymen of the line companies. I hopped on a truck with a bunch of riflemen and went on the unexpectedly long, very cold ride to Luxembourg City. I had never before been so cold for so long. We didn't know it, but the Battle of the Bulge had started and we were on our way to help.

Looking out of the back of our truck, we saw vehicles in convoy with their lights on. It seemed there was an endless stream of them. The whole Division was on the move. I stuck my head out and looked to the front of the convoy. It was the same scene — lights as far as you could see. Everyone realized that something “big” had happened or was about to happen, but no one knew what it was.

After driving all night we arrived in Luxembourg City and were billeted in an apartment building. The first thing I remember is being so impressed with the architecture — the magnificent bridges, etc.

When our convoy finally stopped in the City, a young man came out of a house and stood watching. Siegal, one of our radio operators, was sitting next to me and tried to ask him in German if he had a toilet. The man said in perfect English: “What are trying to say?” Siegal said, “Oh, you speak English. Do you have a toilet?” The man said, “Of course we have a toilet, do you want to use it?” Luckily Siegal got back just before the convoy took off again. The next day we were moved forward until we were told to occupy a house on a hillside—what village I don’t know, but it wasn’t very far from Luxembourg City. Steinsel, maybe.

While there a family of refugees came walking by in front of the house. There was a grandfather and a couple with a small child, maybe 2 or 3 years old. The little boy was crying. When I asked what was wrong, the father said that his feet were hurting him. We asked them to come in the house to get warm. My sergeant immediately offered some of our rations and sent someone to get the Medics so that they could look at the boy’s feet. The Medic came and decided that he was hurting because his shoes were too tight and had cut off circulation. I had just received a box of Hershey chocolate bars from a firm I had worked for briefly before going in the Army. I went to our trailer and brought the back a bar and gave it to the boy. His mother took it and gave him a small piece of it and the child stopped crying as the Medic massaged his feet.

We had just been issued a big box 10-in-one rations, which included coffee, cheese, crackers, bacon etc., so we had plenty of food for a meal together.

These people all spoke English, were well dressed, polite and appreciative of everything we tried to do for them. Before they left, the grandfather insisted that each of us have a 100-franc note, which had a picture of their Queen on it. I carried that note throughout the war and kept it until I visited Luxembourg in 1983, when I gave it to Paul Hoffman in Heiderscheid, in appreciation of the hospitality he and his family had shown my wife and I. I have many times wondered about that family—who they were and where they are today.

On the next move forward it was my turn to stay with the rear switchboard. We frequently did that. The advance group would go forward and establish a new wire communication network, while the rear one would remain in place until I was told to close the station and join the advance unit. Sometimes, during a rapid advance the rear unit would leapfrog the advance unit and would become the new advance unit.

While in the rear, I frequently talked to the advance operator. He told me that the Germans were killing our medics, and when I was moved forward we passed two of our medics who were frozen, still bending over the man they were trying to give aid to.

The next time I talked to the forward operator he told me that they were surrounded and that the Germans were running up and down the street. I told him that he must be kidding, whereupon he held his headset out the window so that I could hear the firing. The wire section had set up in the last house of this village. Our section always liked to be as far away from the officers and the rest of the company as possible.

The Germans were unloading from half-tracks right behind the house. Men from the radio section were shooting them from the upstairs windows as they came out of the half-tracks. Two of

my friends from the Ammunition and Pioneering Platoon were in the basement where one was shooting through a vent in the potato cellar at the Germans in the street with a .45 caliber burp gun (machine pistol) while his friend reloaded clips for him. They knew there was a full box of .45 ammo in their truck that was close by. When they ran low on ammunition, the man loading the clips ran out to the truck, climbed in, got the box and dashed back into the house. They were firing at him all the way and it was miraculous that he made it. A Panzer Faust set the one tank on fire, but the tank commander stayed on the tank and continued firing his machine gun. The attack was beaten off.

When I passed through the town the next day the German dead were still lying in a field behind the house. All the German wounded had been evacuated. I believe the name of the town was Mertzig or maybe Mersch. A lot of Mirabel and other types of brandy or Schnapps were “liberated” there.

We moved into Heiderscheid and were there for several days. We received intermittent artillery fire while there and two friends of mine were wounded, one of them was killed in a house the next night because he neglected a warning not to sleep in the upstairs of the house. While there, my brother showed up. He was with the First Army Headquarters and had volunteered for a courier run to Third Army. After he made his delivery he came looking for me. During his visit he had me exchange clothes with him. My clothes were very dirty and he said he could get his laundered, while I could not. Brotherly love and affection.

After that, I was in Tadler briefly. Then a few days in a house in Ringel. This house was on the bend of the road at the very top of the town. The land sloped sharply down to the river below and then climbed steeply up on the far side.

Our next move was to Dahl. When we got there, our communications officer told us to get the switchboard in the safest place we could find because they expected a lot of trouble.

DAHL, LUXEMBOURG

For the men of the 319th Regiment, one of the hardest times of the war was during January 1945, in and around the small village of Dahl, Luxembourg. Heiderscheid, Tadler, Ringel and Dahl had been taken and now the German resistance stiffened to protect supply lines to their forces in the Bastogne area.

At that time I was a switchboard operator/field lineman in the Communications Platoon of Hq. Co. 3rd Battalion. We were responsible for laying telephone lines to Companies I, K, L, M and others as needed and keeping them in working order. Dahl was taken and cleared by the time we entered as darkness fell. It was bitter cold, overcast and deep snow was everywhere.

Our Platoon officer told us to find a good, safe place for the switchboards because they expected a lot of trouble. We set up the boards in a small room that was between a house and a barn. The farmer probably used this room for changing clothes. There were two doors in the room, one at the top of a few stairs leading to a kitchen, and another leading to the barn. There was one small window that faced to the north toward the enemy. The wire crews ran the telephone lines to the Companies as quickly as possible. They passed the lines through the small window and then

they were attached to the back of the switchboard. The Battalion Headquarters and the Company were notified the line was in and now they were only a phone call away from each other. ...

The linemen were especially glad to get back to the switchboard room this night because of all the artillery and mortar fire the Germans were sending our way. Everyone from the Wire Section stayed in the room where the switchboards were so the crews were always together. If an operator turned the generator crank, and it turned very easily, he knew that the line was broken or open. If it turned very hard and jerky he knew it was shorted.

When a line went out—usually from shellfire but occasionally from getting snagged by a vehicle—a crew went to repair it. The crew might consist of two men on foot for a very short line or one where a vehicle would not be practical. Long lines requiring lots of wire were laid using a Jeep with driver and two or more men. The lines were all in and working and for the moment our job was complete. We had some rations and settled in for the night—17 of us in this small room. Operators worked in shifts of 3 hours on and 6 hours off.

This night my shift started at midnight. At 2:55 I woke my relief operator. About 2 minutes later I heard a single round coming in. A ferocious barrage quickly developed as shells too numerous to count began landing all around. They were hitting on the roof and side of the house, which had very thick stone walls that were holding up despite the hits. A tank pulled up and was putting rounds through the barn—in one wall and out the other. Stones couldn't stop their direct fire. Every line on the boards started ringing as every Company and outpost was calling the Command Post. For the first time ever, my hands shook uncontrollably as I tried to answer all the incoming calls. Now every man in the room was awake. I gladly took my headset off and handed it to the relief operator. Then I sat on the floor with the other men, wondering how long we would have to endure this. The noise became overwhelming as shells continued to hit the walls and roof of the house. Pieces of plaster dropped on us, dust and powder fumes filled the room. It was like being in the middle of a violent thunderstorm and having numerous close lightning strikes. But this wasn't thunder and lightning.

There was a momentary pause in the shelling and the sound of heavy breathing filled the room, as each man gasped for air because of the tension, terror and hopelessness we felt as we lay there taking this punishment. The calm was broken by a really close hit. The force of the blast blew the door to the barn off its hinges and it came crashing in on us. A man jumped up and pushed it back up—a gesture that was little more than symbolic for all the protection that thin wooden door could give us.

The house and barn were taking a lot of hits. Another man leaped to his feet, shouting, "I'm getting out of here!" My Sgt. threw him to the floor. Saying, "You're not going anywhere!" I thought this was like a scene right out of "All Quiet on the Western Front," where a man went mad from the shellfire and ran out of the dugout to be killed. It would have been certain suicide for anyone to go outside. When the shelling finally stopped, the German infantry was very close to us. We heard a German burp gun firing. A Tank Destroyer, which was parked close by, answered the shots with bursts from his .50 caliber machine gun. The attack was beaten back and the noise abated. In the morning, I found a dead German with a burp gun in his hands by a little hedge about

100 yards from the house. He looked to be 16-17 years old. The next day we put the switchboards in the potato cellar, which was off to the side of the short stairway to the house. It was so full of potatoes we had to crawl in. With so little space we had to work lying down. It was close quarters but it gave a feeling of security.

There was a fireplace in the basement that had been used by the farmer for heating wash water. Riflemen who had been spending 2 hours in a foxhole and 2 hours off, around the clock, built a roaring fire in it. They kept it going all day and as the day turned to night the fire was getting bigger and hotter. I was in the kitchen when I noticed smoke coming from a crack in the wall and about that time heard someone shouting, "The house is on fire!"

We went in the potato cellar and frantically cut all the wires and took the switchboards outside. Then we went back in to get our bedrolls, etc. Soon the house was really torching up and the whole area was lit up bright as day. Flames were shooting higher and higher. There were some explosions as grenades and ammunition left in the house started going off; sending up sparks each time. I thought for sure the Germans would really shell us now, but not a single round came in. I was watching the flames when our Sgt. told us we were going to set up in the back room of the church.

By the time I had carried a switchboard there, the room was already being cleared. Furniture, robes— everything was being tossed outside in the snow. This bothered me, but only for a minute—we were desperate. We were lucky to find this room as I don't think there was another place that wasn't occupied or damaged. For what seemed like days and days, it was the heavy shelling early in the morning, followed by an infantry and tank attack that each time was beaten off. Then intermittent shell fire the rest of the day. It was never safe to leave to venture outside. Just going to get chow could be a deadly adventure.

The telephone lines went out repeatedly, mostly from shellfire, and each time they did, a crew had to go fix them, sometimes standing in the spot where the shell landed and seeing the smoke rising from the ground, hoping they wouldn't send another round in. As the days went on, an atmosphere of depression developed and it affected everyone. The crews became more and more reluctant to go out to fix a line. Our Sgt. asked to be relieved. He said that he had more to live for than we did, that he had a wife and child. That was a surprise that didn't go over very well. We were just as worried as he was but we were still hanging in there. He was transferred to comparative safety with Regimental Headquarters Co. I saw him one time but I think he was too embarrassed to talk.

Our switchboard was placed in the closet so that the operator faced outward and their body was inside the closet. This gave a nice feeling of security. Our chief operator was always a quiet man. Now he became even more so. He started wearing his helmet really low on his head so that his forehead was not visible. It was hard to even see his eyebrows when he had his helmet on. He smoked constantly. When he was on the board, all you could see was his helmet, two sad eyes below it and a thin curl of rising smoke from his cigarette. He functioned but seldom had anything to say to anyone and rarely went to chow. Someone must have spoken to our Lieutenant because soon he was evacuated. While on the board I frequently listened to calls from the Companies to Headquarters. More than once I heard officers call in and ask to be relieved, saying that they

couldn't take it anymore. If they stuck to their guns and resisted the efforts to talk them out of it, they were told to get their stuff together and come back to Battalion. We never saw them again.

After days of this, I had the feeling that I would give anything to get away from it all even if for just for an hour or two. After being overcast for several days, the weather finally cleared. When we heard the sound of planes we all went outside to see them. Four P-47 Thunderbolt fighter/bombers roared by with a low-level pass in front of us. We all cheered. They then climbed higher and circled us. They were looked magnificent against the blue sky with the sun glistening on them. The planes made another circle and when they were right in front of us the lead plane did a wingover and dove right at us.

There was a half-track parked close by with a .30 caliber machine gun mounted on it. The guy on the half-track put off a very short burst at the plane, changed his mind and leaped off. Seventeen men tried to get through the doorway to the church at the same time. I was the last one in. They were all in a big pile against the thick inside wall. I figured this was it and that it wouldn't do any good to be on top of the pile. I went over in the corner, sat down and waited. The plane's motor roared louder and louder, closer and closer, pulling up with a mighty roar. Then there was a split second of silence before we heard the whistle of the falling bomb. It fell behind the church. The concussion blew out the windows and opened the ceiling trapdoor with a bang. Another bomb had landed in a field off to the right.

Afterwards the planes went to work on the Germans in the next village up—I believe it was Nocher. We watched as eight P-47s lined up in single file, and then the lead plane dove down with guns blazing, disappearing below the horizon, then climbing up above it as tracers from the anti-aircraft guns followed them as they twisted to the right and then to the left. The next plane was already starting his run. As each plane finished his run he turned back to get in line for another run. They continued their runs until there wasn't any more anti-aircraft fire and smoke was rising from the village.

After all this excitement, and being curious as to how big a crater the bombs had made, Murphy and I ran out to see for ourselves. About halfway there, shells started coming in and we thought better of going any further. We started running back to the church, laughing at our stupidity, as the shells were getting closer. Partly from boredom and partly from a feeling of guilt for being able to stay inside while the linemen were repairing lines, I volunteered twice to take the place of a lineman.

One time was to lay a line to Second Battalion. It was a moonlight night. We loaded several spools of wire on the Jeep and took off, pulling the wire from the spool and carrying it a few feet away from the side of the road so that vehicles wouldn't tear it out. When we got to a bend in the road I looked for a place to tie the line so it wouldn't be pulled back on the road. There was nothing but deep, smooth snow. Then I noticed a stake sticking up about an inch above the snow and tied a clove hitch on it. When we got back, our Lt. told us, "Be careful of a minefield on the left side of the road. It is supposed to be one of the most heavily mined fields in Europe. It is marked by stakes." We had just run through it.

The other time I went out with Ted Grom to fix a line but we didn't get far. Without white clothing we stuck out very plainly. A shell dropped 600-700 yards to the right of us. It kicked up a little black frozen dirt and some snow. We didn't pay much attention to it and we continued walking. Another round came in about 200 yards to our right and we suddenly realized that they were registering on us. We started running and now the whole battery took us. Shrapnel sang close and very loud as we dove in a doorway that was to an earth-covered pump house. We didn't know it, but there was a machine gun mounted in the doorway. In our haste to get in, and not knowing the gun was there, we knocked it over. I thought they might give us a bad time about it, but they didn't. Ted and I didn't accomplish much that time but we made the Krauts waste six, or more, artillery shells.

After several more days and several orders to "Move out" being countermanded, we finally did move out and up in preparation for crossing into Germany at Wallendorf. No one was sorry to leave Dahl.