

Part III - Beginning Late March 1944

Contributed by Charles Harper
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Every day that was fit we had a boat drill so everyone would know what to do and where to go in case something happened. About ten days out a German sub was supposed to have been sighted during the night. As we were running a zig zag course it didn't get in a shot. It was reported sunk by the destroyers that were with us. At least we heard the ash cans go off that they dropped on it and the water was slick with oil so they must have hit something.

April 14, we dropped anchor but were still out of sight of land, we moved in later in the day to where land could be seen in the distance. We waited two days for ships ahead of us to unload then we pulled into the dock at Liverpool, England. We were permitted to be on deck Eœtill ready to unload and that was as soon as we had docked. We didn't have to be told twice to get off. We were greeted by a band, but it didn't sound much like the one in the states. After unloading we went right on to the train which was about a half mile from the ship. By the time we carried all our equipment that far we were ready to stop.

From the ship we had to go up a steep incline and as we had our overcoats on and it was a hot day it was almost too much for us. I caught up with Efrin Leon, a Spanish boy from Texas about half way up the incline. He was carrying a large box of company records and was about to give out so I helped him the rest of the way to the train. We were loaded on goods wagons, the English word for coaches, we didn't know how long we would be on the train. The Red Cross girls gave us donuts, coffee and magazines. At last we pulled out and were surprised at the speed and pick up the train had. It seemed to me that the engine was awfully small. We were also surprised at the beauty of the homes and landscape as we rode along.

About ten o'clock it got too dark to see and we pulled the shades and read our magazines. About two o'clock we pulled into a station and stopped. We never did learn the name of the station. Anyway that was the end of our train ride, we were loaded onto trucks or loreys as the English would say and taken to a camp that was under construction. The tents were up also the mess hall but the showers, etc. weren't finished. The cots were already in the tents and on them was a tick filled so full of straw it was tight. One needed a saddle and spurs to stay on top of it. We were to tired to worry about that though so we rolled out our blankets, balanced ourselves on top of the tick and went to sleep.

The next morning we went to chow and then began to draw our motor equipment. As soon as we got that we had to check it all over and change the wiring so no lights but the cat eyes could be turned on. The cat eyes were small lights used in driving blackout. They could only be seen about a hundred yards. The same day we learned our nearest town was Leo Minister four miles away and Ludlow was six miles in the opposite direction.

Our camp was Barrington park and was located on a large estate. We went on hikes every day and as the pavement was hot and hard many of the men had their feet blistered so badly they could hardly get to the mess hall. At that stage Major Franklin, our Medical officer, said no more hikes and we were all glad of it as there was plenty of work to be done otherwise. Soon after we had everything ready to go the orders came for us to move. This time the company was divided and drivers and mechanics went with vehicles and the rest of the company went with another outfit to another camp in southern England.

I went with the vehicles and we ended up at a camp near the coast called Camp Y Gallon. Here we learned we were to be a part of the invasion troops and would land in France on D Day. We didn't see the rest of the company until after we were in France. We were restricted to camp the entire time we were there and the last few days we would neither listen to the radio or write letters. We had plenty to do to keep us busy though. All the vehicles had to be waterproofed for the beach landing and that took a lot of time.

There were also a lot of other things to be done before we hit the water going in. As usual we were rushed for time and then had to wait a couple of days after we were all ready. Then came the loading of the vehicles on to the ships that were to take us across. During our time of waiting we made up our packs and turned in all excess clothing and a great many of the items we had packed from the states. We were issued Sulpha pills, K rations for one day and D rations for one day.

Our extra rations and extra cigarettes that we had acquired we packed in a large can and waterproofed them then put them on the maintenance truck for safe keeping. We were only allowed one blanket in our pack so the extra ones we packed in the truck. The ration cans weren't opened till near Christmas and one we didn't open till the war was over. The contents were as good as when we put them in there. We were able to get some waterproof bags and slipped our pack and extra clothing in them, tied them tight and then waterproofed the top. All were dry when we landed in France.

In a couple of days we went to the port to load. Everyone else was loading at the same place so there was plenty of us there. As we came to the dock we were told which line to get into and at the end where we would be placed in the ship. We were all loaded on a Liberty ship No 226. All of our vehicles ended up on the same ship in spite of the fact that they were all separated as we were going to the ship. My jeep went into the third hold of the ship and I and Sgt. Oglesby, our motor Sgt. Rode it down.

To load them the vehicles were driven onto a large net and then the crane on the ship lifted it onto the ship and lowered it into the hold where it belonged. Mine went into the third hold. That made it three decks below the top of the ship. After all were loaded the ship crew blocked all vehicles and wired them to the ship so they couldn't move around during passage. After all were loaded we all got together and were taken back to the company area by truck where we had to wait another day. Until we were ready to sail then we were again taken by truck to the ship. On the ship there was just one small hold where some could sleep. Those who used it slept in shifts so the bunk was always kept warm.