

# My Private War

## Excerpts

### From Part I:

For the personnel of the 104<sup>th</sup> Ordnance, D Day and H Hour had a special significance, for in that first wave on Omaha Beach was the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry with whom they had been closely associated at Fort Meade. The lot of the 29<sup>th</sup> Division was probably the worst of all in the landings. Preparations had not gone well, and the saturation bombing that was supposed to neutralize the defenses and create shell craters for cover had missed the mark. The air crews, fearful of hitting their own troops, delayed their drop by just enough to miss the beaches. The bombs fell inland. The fortified German coastal guns had withstood the Allied naval bombardment and, though the defenders were close to a state of shock, they could report “all guns ready for action.”

Into this sailed the landing craft of the 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry. They looked over the gunwales of their craft at a beach totally prepared for them—no gaps in the landing obstacles—no shell craters; instead, a beach of obstacles, land mines, barbed wire, machine guns, and cannon. Just the way General Rommel had prepared it for them, and now they would test it out with flesh and blood. “Bloody Omaha” it was called, and as they came in, seeing the carnage around them, the soldiers would steel themselves against the opening of the ramp. “Pick it up and put it on,” they would say, “You expect to live forever? Pick it up and put it on.” Entire boatloads of men were machine gunned when the ramps opened. In other boats, many drowned when they stepped off into deep water, while some never got close to the beach but were blasted with mortar and cannon as they approached shore. Those in the water and those who made it to the beach were almost completely at the mercy of German guns and mines, and the surf ran red with blood. But you probably know the story of how, here and there, little knots of men moved off the beach and took their objectives.

### From Part II:

Members of the Small Arms Section were to go on a field party “right up to the front where the war was at.” There the weapons of several infantry companies were to be checked over... It was my first close-up look at combat infantry; these were the boys from back home, veteran soldiers now, doing the job their country had laid upon them. They fell into two distinct categories to me. Most of them were low key soldiers with a dull, hurt look of resignation in their eyes that said, “If I don't get it today, I'll probably get it tomorrow.” Then there was the John Wayne type of natural hunter—these had a bravado and swagger about them and I pity the enemy that had to face them. One of the latter type came along in line with the rest to my table. I asked, “Want me to check your rifle?” “Naw,” he said, “nothing's wrong with this one,” whereupon he turned aside and emptied a clip into the ground and walked away. The weapon looked as though it could have used some servicing, but I wasn't going to argue with him.

**From Part III:**

“Load 'em up and wheel 'em!” We were heading west into France to an assembly area called Camp Baltimore near the cathedral city of Reims and also close to Paris. The day was June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1945. Going home? Only a few of the lucky high-pointers were going home. The points were called the Adjusted Service Rating (ASR) and were awarded to each man according to the number of his dependents, his time in service, and battle participation. Those of us with lower point ratings would have to sweat it out a little longer. Any hopes we had of going home disappeared as we began to receive cholera shots, while our trucks and equipment were being processed for shipment at Marseilles. There we would later join them for a long voyage to the China-Burma-India theater. But all that was vaguely in the future while the present included passes to Paris...