

Ernest “Andy” Andrews

Mr. Andrews was drafted into the Army in June 1943. He and 250 other new high school graduates were all drafted together. They traveled to Ft. Oglethorpe for induction. Mr. Andrews then traveled to Ft. McClellan, Alabama for basic training, then 13 weeks of machine gun training and finally received 10 days of leave.

After his leave he returned to Ft. McClellan and from there he traveled to New York and boarded an ocean liner, the *Ile de France* for transport to England. Mr. Andrews recalled the ship was the largest of its kind and could carry 10,000 troops at a time. She also made the trip unescorted since it was assumed that her high speed made her invulnerable to attack by u-boats. He landed in Greenock, Scotland and traveled by train to Yeovil, England.

His unit, the 1st Infantry Division, was informed early on of its role in the planned D-Day assault and trained extensively for it. He described bayonet training and attacking mock villages with dummy Germans that would spring out for the soldiers to fire upon. There was lots of training with live ammunition, including firing machine guns over the heads of soldiers as they crawled underneath coils of barbed wire. This did incur 2-3 casualties among the soldiers. There were also many long distance marches. The training in the United Kingdom lasted 6 months.

The local English population was very generous to the US soldiers. Despite not having much in the way of food because of rationing local families would always have groups of soldiers over on Sundays, the soldier's one day off. They would share whatever food they could. US soldiers, who were very well supplied, made it a point to take food from their own mess to these meals to share with the locals.

He then described his experience on D-Day. He recalled that from his vantage point in the invasion fleet you could look east and west and there were ships as far as you could see. His unit was not supposed to go ashore until the 3rd wave but resistance by the Germans caused earlier waves to bunch up on the beach. He was told that his unit would have to wait for casualties among the soldiers on the beach to make room for additional soldiers. Each man in his unit was loaded down with 85 pounds of equipment, this included packs, machine gun ammo, and grenades.

At one point he looked over the side of his transport ship and saw nothing but a wall of gray. He then realized it was the US battleship *Texas*, seeing the ship reassured him about the level of the Allied effort involved in the attack.

He describes his adrenalin and excitement and that he didn't lack fear but rather had mastered his fear. There was little talking, in fact many soldiers read versions of the New Testament issued to them by the Army.

His units landed in wooden Higgins boats, 35 men per boat. They had to be boarded from the transport ships by climbing down rope ladders. The bad weather caused the boats to toss up and

down and some soldiers were lost when they fell between the ship and the Higgins boats into the water.

He was dropped into chest deep water to walk ashore. Some coxswains on the Higgins boats were confused by a sand bar 600 yards offshore and dropped their men off too early. In one case an officer on the boat used his pistol to convince his coxswain to keep going over the sand bar and in closer to the beach.

The Higgins boat next to Mr. Andrews took a direct hit from a German 88 (artillery shell) and sank with all hands. He explains that his unit was fortunate not to have received machine gun fire since earlier waves had wiped out the German positions that overlooked the landing beach.

He saw bodies in the water as he waded ashore, he felt badly for the US dead but was apathetic about seeing the dead Germans.

Before his unit met with the jeeps carrying their machine guns they had had to take rifles from the dead so that they might have weapons. They then joined with tanks to attack concrete bunkers and machine gun nests. By this time the Germans were retreating and his unit began to run into hastily abandoned camps and positions.

Soon they ran into hedgerow country that proved to be very tough to fight through. Hedgerows were high (8-20 foot) and wide (8-10 foot) walls of rocks and hedges that French farmers used to divide their fields. The Germans would tunnel through the base and set up machine gun nests that proved hard to destroy. The US fought a bloody campaign through the hedgerows and finally developed blades to be welded onto a tank that would cut through the hedgerows.

In these battles and later ones, the US was successful because of material superiority and because they followed an aggressive strategy of always attacking, including in deep snow, sleet and thunderstorms. He remembers a German prisoner who commented that for every US tank the Germans destroyed there seemed to be three to replace it.

Mr. Andrews was wounded 6 days after the D-Day landing. A German bullet grazed his cheek but he didn't think it was serious and didn't go to the hospital for a week. There were only emergency facilities in France at the time so when he did go to the hospital he he was flown back to the UK for two weeks of treatment. He returned to France to find that his unit was deep in France with General Patton's 3rd Army. That was his first injury which led to a Purple Heart award.

His second injury occurred in later in 1944 in Germany. His unit attacked and captured a ridge and were then counterattacked by the Germans. Mr. Andrews recalls shooting German soldiers out of trees and as they tried to come over the lip of the ridge. The battle was very bloody with his unit (30 man machine gun platoon) alone losing 8-9 men killed. He fired his machine gun at first then his pistol as the Germans got closer. He was hit by shrapnel from a German grenade thrown by a man he had just shot. After the battle his platoon only had 5 men left in condition to fight and only 2 unwounded.

After the battle Mr. Andrews heard a voice on the other side of the ridge calling for help. It was the German who he had shot and who had thrown the grenade at him. Since Mr. Andrews was also wounded he helped the German to the hospital so that they could both receive treatment. Along the way he had to assure the very scared German soldier that he was not going to shoot him. The incident came back to Mr. Andrews in later years as a great example of a person reaching out for help and getting it.

Mr. Andrews spent 6 weeks in the hospital in Germany and returned to his unit. He said it was hard because he knew what kind of experience was waiting for him but getting back to help his buddies in his unit motivated him to return.

Later, in Sept.-Oct. of 1944, he found himself manning a machine gun in the doorway to an abandoned German pillbox. A German unit attacked that night and badly shot up the wall of the concrete bunker but never hit Mr. Andrews who was firing back the whole time. After the battle he noticed that a German bullet had smashed the ammunition belt of his machine gun. If he had fired any more rounds his gun would have jammed and he would have probably been killed by the Germans.

The 1st Infantry Division was then pulled back for rest and to resupply. However they soon received word of the German attack that became known as the Battle of the Bulge. The 1st Infantry Division attacked the southern flank of the German attack to contain it. It was during this battle that Mr. Andrews got frostbitten feet that led to his third Purple Heart. He was in the hospital for 6 days recovering.

After the Battle of the Bulge, he moved from Aachen (Germany) to Czechoslovakia. Many German units refused to surrender and kept fighting. However, ultimately, all the German units surrendered and soon Mr. Andrew's unit was guarding 100,000 prisoners in one huge field. There no fences just four machine guns set up one on each corner. German officers were also allowed to keep their side arms so they could help maintain discipline among their men.

Mr. Andrew's unit then left Czechoslovakia for Bauberg, Germany where they were told they would be occupation forces for 4-5 months. There was a point system to allow soldiers who had fought for a long time or who had been wounded to go home early. Soldiers earned points for time spent in battle and for wounds received. A soldier who had 75 points could go home, Mr. Andrews had earned 74!

His unit was transferred to Southern France to load on a transport ship to head to the Pacific for the invasion of Japan.

His ship was rerouted on the way to the Pacific upon hearing of the dropping of the atomic bombs and the surrender of Japan.