

Lyons Hamblen

Born November 9, 1922. Now living in Hendersonville, North Carolina

Hamblen was born in a small town in Tennessee and grew up there attending local schools. He was drafted at 20 years of age on November 9, 1942. Hamblen was sworn in at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia and then given a seven day leave to come home. Returning to Oglethorpe he spent another three or four days. He was then sent to San Luis Obispo where he stayed for three or four days. Inducted into the 35th Infantry, Hamblen spent three months in basic training. Since he was in good physical shape the "basic" did not seem too difficult for him. All the troops in basic training lived in four-man Quonset huts.

In April of 1943, Hamblen was sent by train to Camp Rucker at Ozark, Alabama. He remained in training at Rucker, during the extremely hot summer months. In July of 1943, Hamblen was given a fifteen day furlough and came home. He came home by bus and for a good part of the trip, since the buses were overloaded, stood up.

He was then assigned to Company A, 137 Infantry, Division Headquarters. They were then sent on maneuvers in a large area of middle Tennessee. Some 35,000 soldiers were involved in these maneuvers. The maneuvers consisted of simulated problems the men might face in actual battle. They were divided into the Blue Army and the Red Army. Hamblen was in the Blue Army. The special duty that Private Hamblen was given was to guard the Command Post, Headquarters of the Blue Army General. He carried a side arm, a 45 pistol and a 30 caliber rifle. He had qualified with both of these weapons on the firing range.

When two groups of soldiers encountered each other in a combat situation, "kill" were determined by which side had the most fire power. Hamblen tells the story of how the Command Post and the Blue Army General were almost captured. He said that he was on guard when he heard several soldiers approaching through the bush. Drawing his pistol and holding his rifle, Hamblen ordered the approaching soldiers to "halt!" Those "attacking" the Blue Army Headquarters and endeavoring to "capture" the Blue Army General declared themselves winners. Private Hamblen argued with the referee that he had successfully defended the Headquarters since he would have opened up with firepower before they had their weapons into position. After the argument went on for a while the referee declared it a standoff and the Blue Army General was saved from being captured.

On these maneuvers, the soldiers dug and slept in foxholes. It was a very cold winter. Nevertheless, according to Hamblen the men were moving in deep mud most of the time. In February of 1944, Hamblen was sent to Camp Butler, North Carolina with a Captain Goodman as his commanding officer.

Then in May of that year he was sent by train to Camp Killmore, (I couldn't find this post on the official Military Base List for the United States so I am not sure of the location or the spelling) a Point of Embarkation. He sailed, along with around 5,000 men on the U.S. Alexander for overseas duty. They were at sea for fourteen days. On the ship they were served mostly hard boiled eggs and turkey. Hamblen said that the turkey was hastily prepared. It sometimes still had

the pin feathers in it. The Alexander was part of a large convoy headed for Europe. The men wore life preservers at all times. These were equipped with a special light in case they were attacked and went into the water. They were to turn these light on to guide the rescuers to their position.

The Alexander docked at Liverpool, England. Hamblen was sent along with others up to Traverstock, England. This posting was under General Eisenhower and for a while was fairly easy duty. The men could get passes to go into town at night where they might attend a movie.

Eisenhower, with General Patton with him, reviewed the troops there, Hamblen among them. Hamblen was at Traverstock for the months of April, May and June.

Hamblen says that General Eisenhower in moving along the line of troops would stop frequently and chat with the men, asking them where they were from, if they happened to be from Kansas, his home state, he stayed for a few minutes to talk with them. By now he had three brothers in service. They served in the United States Navy.

Thirty days after June 6, D-Day, Hamblen landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy. He crossed over in an LSD boat to relieve the front line soldiers of the 29th Division. The troops from the DDay invasion had pushed thirteen days inland. They were near St. Lo and the fighting was fierce and very difficult since the area was lined with hedgerows, one after another. Hamblen was in the 35th Division. He said they faired pretty well during the daytime when the Allied planes were flying over on their bombing missions but at night the German planes would drop flairs which would explode and light up the whole area and they would drop their bombs on the U.S. troops.

As the troops pushed nearer to the German border, Hamblen said they saw around 3,000 planes fly over in a big push. The Ground Forces set smoke screens to mark troop movements. The only problem was the wind came up and blew the smoke screen over the American Troops. The planes, in "friendly fire" dropped some bombs on the Allied soldiers.

The Battle of the Bulge broke out and the fighting was fierce and hard with the 106 Division in Bastogne surrounded by German forces. As we know from history, Patton's Army came in to relieve Bastogne. Hamblen was still with the 35th Division.

Hamblen spent Christmas 1944, in the University buildings at Metz, Belgium. The day after Christmas his Division moved out. The snow was deep and to keep their guns from being seen by German planes they painted them white. Reaching the Elbe River where they halted, only 40 miles from Berlin. They waited there for a week or ten days while the Soviet Forces moved into Berlin for occupation.

Hamblen remained in Europe in the Army of Occupation for two or three months. There were some 20,000 men there at Cablantz, Germany. They organized a baseball team and played against other Army units.

Hamblen, after aiding in the setting up of deployment facilities in Germany, was sent to La Harve to deport for Norfolk, VA (He thinks this is the right port.) From there he went to Camp Van Dorn, Mississippi and then to Camp Breakenridge, KY where he was released from the Army on October 16, 1945 with the rank of Corporal.

Hamblen enrolled at Carson-Newman College, Tennessee, attending on the GI Bill. There he met his future wife Muriel Bennett who was from Asheville, NC.

Later Hamblen would go into the banking business in Knoxville, Tennessee.