

War Era Story Project 2012

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I recorded some of my father's WW II memories in the last summer of his life. He was a proud member of the 33rd Armored Regiment, 3rd Armored Division, called "Spearhead" because the division led so many of the First Army's drives in France, Belgium and Germany during 1944 and 1945. The WWII experience, in which so-called "average men" accomplished remarkable and world-changing things, meant a great deal to my father. When he was well and with us, my father frequently spoke of his war experiences—both the good and the bad. I believe he would like to share them with you this one last time.

WW II Memories – Harry T. Masram (November 27, 1919 – September 13, 2001)

We left for England September 5, 1943, on the *John Erickson*. It was supposed to hold 2,000 men, we had 8,000. We alternated sleeping on the deck and inside on five-tier high bunk beds. The weather was nice, so outside wasn't bad. We arrived in Liverpool, England on September 15, 1943 without trouble.

We left Portsmouth June 22, 1944, D+16 on a British LCT. We landed at Omaha Beach (Red). We tied a balloon on the front of the tank for beach defense; it kept staffers up high. We dug a hole and pulled the tank over the top of it. We didn't do that often, it wasn't worth the effort. You dig in, then have to move. It was mostly for artillery or night bombs. We had 17 tanks and 150 men in our group, with maintenance workers, cooks and arms distributors. Other attached groups were from different infantry divisions; artillery, or tank or rifle units.

We stayed 1-2 days and had a few fake gas attacks. We wore camouflage and impregnated clothing that stunk like heck. We were assigned to take a little town called Pont Hebert, North of St. Lô, a town we were trying desperately to get. We took it without trouble and then they made us pull back because there was nobody to support us on foot. We went back in shooting the next day and they were set up for us. The assistant driver and I made it out of the tank. Two never made it out and one got out but they shot him. They hit us from the back, as we were coming out of the town. The Sergeant's tank was parked in front of mine. I could see him and he waived at me with yellow gloves. Somebody was shootin' at us with a machine gun. I went "over there." He traversed his gun and shot. We got up, ran a few yards, and jumped into a foxhole. He sat there for 10-15 minutes – nobody shot – a then pulled out. I had two tanks behind me: #4 and #1 tank. They hit #1 through the back end, wounding the gunner; I think he got a broken leg out of it and somebody had shrapnel in his head.

We were in the foxhole 36 hours. It was too brightly lit at night and we couldn't stand up; we just dirtied in our pants. The next day, we heard a half-track radio and managed to stand. They pulled us over the

hedgerow, put us on jeeps, and took us to an aid station. They put "combat fatigue" tickets on us and gave us big blue pills that knocked the hell out of us. That was on July 11th.

They gave me an M2A2 tank, *Laura D*, and I became a tank commander. My assistant driver became a corporal and I got another kid as my assistant driver. I had a gunner who had served with the British in Africa and a kid from Maine, a big, tall, French-speaking 19-year-old, as my loader. I kept that tank all the way across France and into Germany. It got hit in Germany, but I was out of the tank by that time.

The first time we got hit by a 105 artillery shell, it sheared off the machine gun and scarred the brow on the tank gun so badly that when I fired it, a bunch of rivets broke loose. We tied and welded them back up. The assistant driver got a punctured eardrum. The kid from Maine left and somebody said he was an MP. I got my driver back and another gunner. I don't know who was loading for me. The tank got knocked out about two days later in Stolberg, Germany.

We were parked overnight by a house with no American tanks ahead. There was a row of houses, a big garden and a creek down through the row of houses. A big blast came out of there. When you fire up a tank, a big ball of smoke comes out of it. I said, "Fire a round." The gunner fired a high explosive and, I think, hit a beanpole. That attracted their attention to us and they traversed. They were shooting holes in the building next to us; I told the driver to start the tank up and get us to the road. He didn't hear me, came straight back, hit a building, and we stalled. The gunner put two rounds up ahead of us. When he did that, we cut off another tank. Later, somebody got that tank and it burned over there.

I asked to be reassigned and became a driver on a tank recovery vehicle, a T-2, a converted tank used to recover vehicles. I had a lot more company, about seven guys in that thing. I got the vehicle in Cologne, Germany, March, 1945.

We had cut the Germans off and were racing to Germany and went up through Bonne and then to the Siegfried Line. We got to towns like Mannes first. The air corps was just eating them up with the B47s, bombs, flamethrowers, mostly 500 pounders and 20 mm machine guns. There were miles of German dead along the roadside and a lot of dead horses.

We just pulled back into American territory. We were in Russian territory, I think, about 90 miles from Berlin. We were allowed up to the Düsseldorf River. Fighting for us started about mid-April and the war ended May 8th. They pulled us back to a town that had a death camp, Nordhausen. We stayed there a couple of days, all those people lying around like cord wood, emaciated. They did everything they could for them, but most were too far gone. Nordhausen was where they made rockets.

The war ended for us about April 15, when they pulled us back to Rüsselsheim, where we just moved in people's houses. I was transferred to the 703rd tank destroyer company and moved to Belgium. We spent 5 or 6 days eatin', sleepin' and gamblin'. We took a train to Marseilles, then a stripped B-17 bomber to Casa Blanca, then a C-54 to the Azores, Canada, then Gandor, Maine. At Presscot, they put us on a train to Massachusetts, then Indian Town Gap, PA. I got discharged August 1, 1945 and came home on a Greyhound bus.

