

U.S. NAVY MEDICAL DEPARTMENT ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

ORAL HISTORY WITH PHARMACIST'S MATE (ret.)
RICHARD BORDEN, USN

CONDUCTED BY
JAN K. HERMAN, HISTORIAN, BUMED

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TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW

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**Interview with Dr. Richard Borden, 6th Naval Beach Battalion,
hospital corpsman present at Omaha Beach, 6 June 1944.**

You were born and grew up in North Carolina.

Correct.

In the same area you are living now.

Very close, within a hundred miles.

In your book you described your early life . . .

Which was beautiful.

Yes, it sounded like an idyllic . . .

Constructive, very active.

**And the fact that you participated in the rationing and all that
kind of thing in the early part of the war.**

It was very much a part of my high school life between the selling of defense stamps and scrap iron collections and being a scout, teaching first aid. Like I said, my mom and dad were very much involved, she as a "Gray Lady" and he on the oil rationing board, and my Scouting itself. Really, we didn't realize it, but as I mentioned in the booklet, the Lord was preparing me for war.

**Yes. Apparently so. When and why did you decide on the Navy
rather than the Army, the Army Air Force, or the Marines? And why
did you want to be a hospital corpsman?**

Well, I was prejudiced from the beginning probably because my folks had all kinds of people in on weekends. Seymour Johnson Air Force Base was there in Goldboro and we had both officers and enlisted men. Every Sunday we would have company join us at the Sunday table.¹ But the basic thing is my beloved brother. He was 8 years my senior and I hero worshiped him. He had put in 2 years at Annapolis before he went in the Army later and I had the joy of a 12-year-old going to Philadelphia and seeing an Army and Navy game and going back to Annapolis. It was a pretty high thrill for a 12-year-old.

¹Airmen, Marines from Cherry Point and Camp Lejeune, Army from Ft. Bragg. . . Goldsboro was a hub of hospitality Southern style.

That summer I was 17. I was on the camp staff teaching all the nature merit badges-- reptile study, bird study--required for Eagle. But also I was literally camp doctor for about 75 scout campers and taught first aid and public health. Of course I had my swimming merit badge, lifesaving . . . not only the scout lifesaving merit badge but the Red Cross standard first aid and Red Cross standard life saving courses. I was considering medicine, the ministry, Scouting, and a career naturalist.

The war was really going that summer and I knew about Hitler and his atrocities. I was very much aware of them listening to the BBC at midnight. I approached Dad and said, "Dad, if I go to college now, the minute I turn 18, I'm going to be draft eligible and I've talked to somebody and I can enlist directly as a hospital corpsman and I'll have that experience while I am in the Navy. Maybe I'll know what I want." My grades weren't good in high school at all. The only A's I made in high school were in biology. At the end of scout camp in September I headed to Bainbridge [MD].

Where did you actually enlist?

I enlisted right there in Goldsboro. I probably signed some papers and Dad had to sign with me. I was going in in Raleigh with a group of others.

You were how old then?

Seventeen.

That's why you needed your Dad's signature?

Yes. And they really needed folks badly at that stage of the war and there was no problem. I had never heard of anybody going in that way, that is as a corpsman--HA2c instead of seaman. I did not want to be a radioman or a signalman. I loved the water. I really wanted to get the experience of what I might be interested in doing. I just didn't think I had the brains. In fact, right on through med school, I never thought I had the brains to be a doctor.

Fooled yourself, didn't you?

Yes. Well, I really applied myself. I didn't date or anything.

Do you remember when you enlisted?

I think about the 17th of September or so. One thing I remember was . . .

That's '43, right?

'43, correct. I remember standing in a cold line way out on

an asphalt drill field at Bainbridge, MD, at 4 o'clock in the morning. The line was headed to the chow hall and I felt so lonely and miserable and the closest I ever came to being homesick, I think. I looked up and there was a beautiful, shining . . . just look at it tonight and you'll see what I mean--Orion the hunter. I looked up and saw him and just all of a sudden I said, "There's my friend, Orion. I feel better now, I've got a friend."

That's a good story. This was at Bainbridge?

Yes.

What did Bainbridge look like?

I don't remember that much. I want to say it was mostly clapboard. The thing I remember most about boot camp was steel wool. Before captain's inspection on Fridays, I remember scrubbing the scuff marks off each step. Bainbridge had a big, pure asphalt drill field with the chow hall at the end and barracks on each side. At the time I was in Bainbridge boot camp, I didn't even know there was a huge naval hospital next door.

When you came to Bainbridge, were you already a hospital apprentice, second class?

I had a little red cross--no stripes-- just a little red cross on my left shoulder.

But they gave you the rank of HA2?

Instead of seaman, second class, I was an HA2c. I don't think that's done today.

It's unusual that you would have actually come in the Navy at that rank.

When I got my uniform, that's what I sewed on it.

It may have been that they already had plans for you at that point. What was the training like at Bainbridge?

Well, remember I was so tender and frail. I was totally embarrassed by my physical weakness at 118 pounds. Among other things, they had you out and sparring--boxing with each other and playing volleyball on the side and the regular physical fitness things. I'd start sagging at about 15 pushups and I never could pull myself up on a bar. So I mostly was miserable. I wasn't used to showering with 18 other hairy beasts standing around me with me and my little you know what.

It was funny right? With your hairless body?

Yes, almost.

Was there any medical training at that point?

None, none at all in boot camp itself. In boot camp, you did things like learning from the *Blue Jacket Manual*. We had a manual about 2 inches thick, leather covered.

Right, and it had a blue cover on it?

Tying of knots and signal flags. Of course, I was up a little bit because I knew semaphore as a scout.

Then they assigned you to the hospital?

Well, when I came back to Bainbridge . . . well . . .

You had a leave in there?

I had a leave. And that's interesting. That's when I got my Eagle pin pinned on my Navy uniform. That probably wasn't legal either today, but that's what we did in church. Then I went back and reported to hospital corps school. When I got there, they immediately said, "No, we want you to go straight to the surgical ward."

The surgical ward at Bainbridge Hospital?

At Bainbridge Hospital. Bainbridge Hospital was unbelievable. It had a long corridor and then the wards went off in T's on each side, the individual wards. It was at least a block or maybe two blocks of this rolling, wooden corridor with everybody milling back and forth. Then, periodically, somebody would be rolling a chow cart to a ward and it would get away from him. Some of the boys would ride the carts down the slope, lose control. You could see where in the wall board of the hall where a chow cart had gotten away from somebody. But anyhow, as we worked in the ward itself . . .

The surgical ward, you say?

It was the surgical ward. There was a nursing station about halfway down with beds all around it and an offset head.

A head? Excuse me.

Naval head.

Oh, a head?

In the Army, they call it a latrine.

Oh right, a head.

A washroom and two or three toilets and urinals, and that kind

of stuff for patients. But then, short of that, but fairly close to the nursing station, was a conference room and that's where the doctor or the nurse would take us in to talk to us periodically. We literally had on-the-job training. By the time I was told how to give a shot in a classroom, I had been giving them for 2 weeks.

The nurses were the main instructors?

Well, they were not assigned to be, but they were because we were working together and they would teach us what to do--the book work, keeping charts and that kind of stuff. There was also a little office for the lieutenant commander, the head officer for the ward. That was Dr. Caruthers. I'd love to know his whole name and look him up, but I am sure he's dead now. He was so kind to me, Lord. He would interrupt and explain; he would take me to surgery and would explain what he was doing and we would have a session later, maybe on a Saturday morning or a Saturday afternoon.

When did learn that you were being transferred to Camp Bradford?
Just before Christmas.

How did you learn?

They posted it on the bulletin board. I was told to report to MAA, which was the Master at Arms. And you go and are told that you are assigned for transfer and that you would be given a long weekend leave--72-hour leave kind of thing and then come back and report to Norfolk, which was Little Creek. Camp Bradford was officially the name, but it was Little Creek, VA.

What did you find there?

The rest of the order was, Report to Little Creek, VA. There were three of us all in Navy whites, all corpsmen from Bainbridge Hospital. We went by train together with our orders to Bradford. We were to report for the organization of the 10th Beach Battalion. We got in about the 22nd or 23rd of December. It was a very busy, muddy place and it was rainy and misty and cold. They called the three of us in after we had gone out and gotten our gear and

called us back and said, "We've got a problem; we're one corpsman short," (and I always heard that he had committed suicide on leave, but I've never been able to confirm that), "of a unit that is leaving immediately for Europe, the 6th Beach Battalion. In reviewing things, Borden, with your scout background, you will be our choice. You can refuse." Everybody just shuffled their feet at that point. I didn't feel like a hero at all, but I was in it to do it, you know.

So you went over to the 6th at that point?

So at that point, I was assigned and went. I was still in Navy whites with a red cross on my shoulder with my sea bag. I could barely carry it. It was a white duffel bag with a laced hammock around it. Everything you own is in there, on your shoulders.

So, the sea bag was loaded with all your personal gear?

Everything.

And your hammock was stretched over the sea bag?

Your hammock contained the mattress pad and some folded sheets and stuff, so it could be rolled around the white duffel bag, which, of course, was a heavy canvas, at least a number 8 or 10 duck with a drawstring. And your name was stenciled on the canvas. The thing made a hammock that could be slung with a mattress pad in it covered with a mattress sheet that went over the pad like a fitted sheet. It wasn't fitted but like a long pillowcase. Your sheets were all in that and that folded around the completely stuffed duffel bag. You were taught in boot camp to roll your skivvies, your skivvy shorts and a white skivvy shirt. And then it's rolled real tightly in a circle. You even had little pieces of rope--cotton rope-- that you tied the ends of it like a big firecracker and you did the same thing with your dress blues. You were taught how to fold it and roll it and that's as close as it came to an iron until you got on some base somewhere where there would usually be an iron up in the utility room. Everything was relatively pressed when you unrolled it.

Yes, because it wasn't creased?

Just minimum wrinkles.

Yes, You hadn't folded it, so there were no creases along .

. . .
Exactly, I hadn't thought about those little rope tassels in 55 years, but you had a whole hand full of them that you whipped the ends to keep them from unraveling. And all of this was on your shoulders. But my point is, as I went, I went into a filthy, dirty double row of squad tents--eight- man squad tents--with a little heater stove in the middle with a pipe through the top. And it was raining and there was so much mud, that when you walked on the slabs, you know like a pier . . .

Duckboards?

Yes. The mud would splash up on the cuffs of your white pants. Being a corpsman, I went from the sterility of the hospital into this mud and I opened the tent flap, there wasn't a soul there in that

tent. They were all on a weekend leave, so it must have been a Friday afternoon that I got in. I threw this tent back. My memory is that they were double decker bunks painted olive drab. I seem to remember not just rifles and carbines but even tommy guns hanging on them. Everything was filthy with nobody's bunk made up. There was nobody there. It smelled of nothing but human sweat and smoke. I'm a nonsmoker and always have been. So I thought to myself, "Dear Lord, what am I into here?" Everything was khaki, you know. That was my introduction to the amphibious forces.

What happened after you got settled in there?

I don't know whether I ought to tell you this or not. But stop me if you want me to. I had been called over as soon as I got organized. I then probably went to chow, but at some point I was called over and given a whole series of shots for typhus, cholera, tetanus booster--in other words--booster shots, because I was behind. You know I was, bingo, I'm headed overseas. So I had a combination of three or four shots and wasn't feeling the very best when I went to bed that night and probably febrile. . . feverish. See, that's the doctor coming out of me.

Sure, I'm familiar with that word.

I'm trying to relive as I am now the youth I was then. I was asleep probably by 11:00, maybe closer to 12:00. Anyhow, I heard all this rumpus and everything and these guys . . . Remember, I had never met them; I had never seen one of them. They all came in drunk as coots. I swear, they even had a woman with them. And they had a bottle of whiskey and I had never had a drink in my life. In that sort of moment of truth for a youth, I desperately wanted to be a part of the group I was going to go to war with, but maintain my own stability. It made me feel pretty small, but anyhow, I bucked with it and said, "No, thank you." They even wanted to share the woman with me.

That was neighborly.

They were happy drunks.

What was the training like at the Amphibious Base?

I didn't train at all.

No training?

The other people had had about 3 to 5 months training. They practiced both land and assault landings at Solomon's Island in Maryland. But they had already done that. And they had gone down for 2 months to Fort Pierce, FL. I'd learned that I was initially

attached to A Company and within 2 days we mustered and were on the train to Lido Beach, Long Island. We got in about 3:00 in the morning, a mile walk with gear, cold and no heat in the barracks. We weren't going to be there very long, so most of us slept on the springs. They were double decker bunks. About a day or 2 later we went aboard the *Mauritania*, the British liner converted to troopship . . . gray.

You had to go from Lido to New York City to get to the ship on the west side. The piers there are on the Hudson River.

Yes, somewhere around Pier 92. I don't know that it was Pier 92, but that sort of rings a bell with me. We came in on another pier. But we were aboard the British liner with about 5,000 others. This would have been about January the 3rd, or something very close to that.

Early January?

Yes. We were the only Navy we saw. Everybody else aboard was Army. We didn't see any other Navy. Leaving, we had a life boat drill, and we were all standing in our British cork life jacket. You've seen them in pictures I am sure.

My dad had them on his boat.

Squares of course . . .

Yes, they are square and were made of orange canvas with cork inside.

Well, these weren't even orange. These were just gray, white that had turned gray canvas. They hung over you and you tied them.

Right, I remember those.

We were standing on the decks as we were leaving the harbor of New York, and we looked and here was this tanker coming. Well, I didn't even have sense enough at that point of the game to know it was a tanker, but, it was a tanker. And it hit us. It hit the *Mauritania*!

I've skipped a little bit . . . Once we went aboard the *Mauritania*, we had a couple of nights that we were allowed to go on liberty and the uncle that I am named after lived at 52 West 12th Street, which is right at the edge of Greenwich Village. I'd had my mother and dad, through a coded signal, know that I hoped that they would visit Uncle Dick. You know that in wartime you couldn't say what outfit you were in or where you were. So, I had sent them a telegram from Little Creek just before we left for Lido Beach. "Hope you can visit Uncle Dick," and I must have slid in a date there somewhere. And they had come up and were at Uncle Dick's apartment.

So I had three nice liberties and actually one of the pictures in the book was me right after boot camp. Uncle Dick took me down to some photographic studio and had that picture made before I went overseas. Anyhow, I spent two nights with Mom and Dad.

Now back to our departure. We thought we were gone after the collision. We went back in to weld a new plate in the bow of the *Mauritania*. That gave us one more night's liberty. So I went and had another visit with my beloved uncle.

And then you left again?

And then we left again. I wondered why at the time, but I didn't worry that much one way or another. I was so down on the totem pole and everything. I wasn't a seaman. We were not in convoy. I remember a PBY escorting us or flying over us two or three times as we moved on out into the Atlantic, but we were not in convoy. Now I know we weren't in convoy because the larger ships that could run 20 knots just struck off straight for England on their own, whereas the slower convoys . . .

The LST's and such?

They would only make about 10 knots.

That ship could probably do about 25 or 30 knots. It was pretty fast. What was it like going over?

Very interesting. Very, very packed. There may have been more than 5,000 on there. I don't know how many folks there were. This was a British ship. I was on outboard, D Deck, which was about the waterline or just below the waterline. There were no portholes. Now this was winter and we were down, because very musty air was pumped in and there were so many of us in these quarters.

By the way, this was the only time in the Navy that I used my hammock. The only time. Hammocks were strung just as close as they could be, maybe 3 or so feet apart. Below the hammocks were these welded mess tables--metal tables. They were long enough to take two sleeping on top of them and then everybody else was sleeping on the deck, the metal deck. So there were three tiers of us in those living quarters for whatever it was, 5 days or so it took for the trip. And it was in January and we were in heavy weather, big 10- to 20-foot swells, never a pure storm. Periodically, they would allow us, if it wasn't too rough, to come up in shifts topside just to get some fresh air. The meals were . . . that's when I was introduced to Lend Lease foods. The meals were primarily a very sloppy, lots of fat pork chop and boiled potatoes. I don't really remember any vegetable. But it was probably a bean or string beans or something like that and a bread of some sort, maybe rolls.

The British are not noted for their good cuisine.

Well, I made comments, "Well, we sent them this Lend Lease. Now they are giving it back to us, but it's probably Australian pork or mutton." There was also a lot of smoke and a lot of human sweat. But they would let us wander around pretty freely. I would go up the stairwell to the deck and even in rough seas stand there with the bolted door open in the hatchway.

One of my memories is seeing the heavy seas, and I'm a sailor; I've loved heavy seas all my life. And the fulmars, which is a seabird like a small albatross. He skims along and sails along in between the waves and goes . . .

What's the name? What's the name of the bird?

F-U-L-M-A-R. Fulmar. That and the storm petrels, little sooty petrels. I would stand in the hatchway, even in heavy seas, getting fresh air and the ship rolling and the fulmars and the petrels are soaring and periodically dipping to skim food stuff that was either from the ship or plankton.

We had a lot of black troops with us too that I think were primarily barrage balloon battalion and stevedores. We had a barrage balloon battalion on Omaha. It was the 320th, I found out just a couple of weeks ago. But anyhow, there were a lot of seasick folks. And they were all coming up, not just blacks, but blacks and whites, moaning and wanting to get out on deck to spew so bad. But they couldn't go so they would have to go back down to the head. And of course everybody was trying to grab a "smoke" in the doorway, the hatchway.

But they are my memories of crossing. It seems to me there was a report of a submarine somewhere along, but nobody ever confirmed anything. The PBY's left us. As we got closer to the British Isles, we would occasionally pick up a corvette as an escort. I didn't know at the time, but it was smaller than a destroyer. That's the way the North Atlantic was.

And you pulled into a port and . . .

We came into Liverpool. And the thing I remember was seeing for the first time barrage balloons and the albatrosses on top of what I think to this day is the customs building there at Liverpool. There was some salvage work going on over to the side, maybe a quarter of a mile from where we anchored or where we tied up. Somebody said they were trying to salvage a sunken ship. From where we were aboard the ship, we didn't see that much damage to the city from bombing.

I think we came in about 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning, but it must have been late afternoon as we came off the ship. I remember

seeing my first view of a cadre of British WRENS. I don't know what it stands for. They were like our WAAC's. Of course everybody was whistling and clapping at them as we filed off the ship.

I not only had my Navy seabag on my shoulders, but in the other hand, an Army duffel bag full of Army clothes--khaki stuff. And that's the way we came off the ship.

By this time it was night. You know, the old thing, hurry up and wait, hurry up and wait. I think we stayed in formation there on the dock for an hour or two.

We had a short stop by a Red Cross or whatever the British call the USO for doughnuts and coffee. ("tea and crumpets") My memory is probably wrong. It probably wasn't doughnuts in Britain. Anyhow, it was a snack and coffee. Then we filed aboard the English trains. The British cars open from the side. They were not cabins, but you know what I mean.

Compartments.

Compartments, thank you. I'm a old man; I can't grab these things like I used to. We were in the compartments and the minute they got settled and the train got going, everybody was sacked out asleep. You know, sitting with their bags under their feet and some of it probably in their lap. Pretty cramped. And we went all night that clickety clack, clickety clack of the British rail. It makes a different noise or did to me. It will sing you to sleep real quick.

We were aboard the train all night and got in early the next morning. It turned out to be in Salcombe, England. It's a beautiful, beautiful place. I've returned three times now. Today there's a marker, a brass plate, down on the waterfront in memory of the 6th Beach that quartered there before the invasion.

In memory of your outfit?

Yes.

What do you remember about Salcombe? Was it a big camp?

No. The camp was up at the top of a hill over Salcombe and when we first got there it was nothing but mud. I think there was one Quonset hut that was the mess hall. Everything else was eight-man tents again and lots of mud. But, it was under construction as a camp as we moved into it. We went from Salcombe up to South Wales for about 2 months and then back to Salcombe and then back to Dartmouth, the area from which we would cross for D-Day.

We would file down into Salcombe at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning with our mess kits rattling. It was about a 2-mile walk. And down

in the basement part of the "Cliff House"² is where we would be fed two meals a day and then we would go back up to the camp.

What was a typical day like in that camp?

Well, two or three things. One, I was moved from A Company to B1 and then to B5 platoon. During that period I met an officer by the name of Virgil Weathers, who was a full lieutenant. He was from Shelby, NC, and it turned out that our mothers knew each other via Senator Clyde Huey. So there was an attachment there and I was in his platoon for a little while and then transferred over to B5 either at Salcombe or right after we got to South Wales.

We didn't do a whole lot of anything at Salcombe. They were still building the camp. We're talking January, February at this point. They were still building the camp and we probably helped with some of the construction chores. Also we would go down into Salcombe. Have you ever been to Morehead at all?

Morehead?

Or Atlantic Beach, NC?

No.

Anyhow, you've seen these . . . probably you have the same things up there . . . these restaurants and things out over the water.

A boardwalk type of thing?

Yes. There was a place that probably had been a dance hall and restaurant in peacetime that we would go down and basically it was our classroom. Now this is on our first run down there and in there we would have studies of reading maps, of gas warfare, learning some of the odors of the various gases. I remember one of them. I don't remember which gas it was, but one of them smelled like onion. I don't think that would be mustard; mustard probably smelled like mustard gas.

They apparently had a little shed very close to that classroom and when it came to the gas, they would fill it full of tear gas and let us put on our gas masks and go in and just take the mask off for about 30 seconds or so. And then we put it back on just to expose us and try to impress on us the importance of what we were doing. They really expected us to run into gas on D-Day. We did not, thank God.

We had lectures on gas and what to do and so forth and then we

²A landmark of Salcombe, Devon.

had lectures very frequently using slides of aircraft, both British, American, and German silhouettes to recognize the Junkers 88, the Stuka, the Spitfire, and the American planes-- Mustangs and Thunderbolts. In other words, they would flash things up and everybody would jot down what he thought it was. It would be just a moment. It was like teaching bird study--what to notice about the plane, the tail, the shape of the wing and whether it was forward or back of . . . whatever.

And then after that we had repetitive visits down there for other classes. We would go in for 30 minutes or so of just real quick flashes of just less than a second almost, because you don't have that much time when a plane's zipping over you to identify it. It worked the same way with ship identification.

The classes were down in town. While the camp was being built, they were very leisurely with us about time off at night. We could go down to town to a pub, cinema, or whatever. It was a beautiful, beautiful town. Groups of us would walk out at sunset and it was just an absolutely beautiful walk, you know, thatched roof houses along the way. This is where Tennyson wrote "Crossing the Bar" at "Bolt's Head" about a mile walk out of town. . . beautiful sunsets, the sea crashing along the rustic cliffs.

Was there any medical training for you corpsmen?

Yes. At this point I had Dr. Eugene Guyton, who was from Marion, SC, and it turned out that his mother and my mother had been classmates in high school in South Carolina. Everything was censored, but our two mothers would put things together when they got a letter from us and pretty well know what we were doing. Anyhow, there was Dr. Guyton and eight corpsmen.

I was an HA deuce (HA2). There were about three HA first class, two or three pharmacist's mates 3rd classes, one pharmacist mate 2nd class, and one pharmacist mate 1st class. The second class and first class had been in on the African invasion. The first class was killed on D-Day. A LT Hagerty was our company commander and then, I forget the guy's name, Allison maybe, was his assistant--the platoon commander. What was your question?

The medical training that you were getting.

Yes, we studied the Hospital Corps book, which was a big thing about equal to a good size Webster's dictionary. I'm not sure that we made any maneuvers.³ We planned our aid station and that kind of

³Perhaps we made the Torquay exercise at this time. It was my introduction to landing via DUKWs. It was a just go ashore and dig in sort of exercise.

stuff and I'm sure I had practiced first aid using splints, but I'm not sure we did that much maneuvers there. South Wales is where we maneuvered on the beaches up there and we had two or three practice landings with the 5th Brigade Combat Engineers. We would work mixed. We would go offshore and land usually in DUKWs [amphibious trucks], sometimes LCVs [landing craft vehicle and personnel], but usually in DUKWs for the maneuvers. I'm getting ahead of my story a little bit.

What kind of equipment was in your medical kit?

I'm not sure at what point I was issued my medical bag. Theoretically, looking back, I would think it would have been at Little Creek. But I don't think I was there long enough to have one issued. So it must have been at Salcombe that we were issued our bags, which was a totally different unit of straps and belt that went over everything else. You had the big pocket pouches on each hip. I remember stuff that was in the bag . . .

You had morphine syrettes and that type of thing?

Yes, and I'm not sure at what point they were issued. Again, this will get me ahead of the story. At the very last minute at the embarkation concentration area above Weymouth, we were issued the little 50cc glass vials of human serum albumin. We didn't have anything glass in our pouches up to that time. There was a surgical kit of two or three hemostats, at least one mosquito and one or two Kelleys. The kit also contained a scalpel, bandage scissors, and a curved scissors. Suture material was heavy cotton; I want to say mostly black. I don't really remember personally carrying any cat gut in the glass vials kind of thing with a needle on it, and probably I wouldn't have because that would have been in the doctor's chest.

Did you get any weapons training at this point or was that not even a consideration?

We were under the Geneva Convention.

What was the policy on carrying weapons?

Now in the Pacific, that was a different story. I had a Colt .45 in the Pacific.

But certainly not in this operation?

No, I did some target practice with the boys, but we realized... No one had shot anything since we had been in England. So, needless to say, beach battalion style, we went out and it was totally illegal I am sure. But we scrounged some stuff out of the field invasion material and went out and shot at sea gulls for target practice. We

did it on our own. We would probably have been put in the brig had anybody caught us.

(End of first interview)

You were telling me about life and getting ready for the invasion.

I'm in Salcombe, right?

Yes. How long were you there?

It will take a second, but I've got the little book right here if you are willing to wait.

Sure.

I'm going to start back a little bit and do a little bit of repeating. Just to say that we had docked at Liverpool, England at 0700, January 17th. [reading from notebook] It was an uneventful trip except for the ramming. We arrived in Salcombe at 1400 on January 19th in a drizzling rain. My thing mentions "Muddy at New Hut Camp, meals at Cliff House down in the town, which is quite quaint."

Anyhow, at Salcombe, we trained both, as I mentioned in the tape earlier, down at this house over the water, down in the village. We would march down there to cadence even, but we were very rough. We were a scraggly bunch all the way along. I think we prided ourselves in being an "amphibious farce." This is what the nickname of the amphibious force was to us; but if anybody said it to us and wasn't one of us, they got into a fight!

We had the slide flashes of both ours and the British and the German planes.

We had first aid instruction. We had instruction in the various types of gas and their odors and actually went into a gas-filled chamber to try the gas mask and take it off for a few seconds just to be impressed that you needed to act fast. Out in the field, we practiced working everything from defusing mines to setting charges of demolition.. This was totally new to me. Of the various and sundry land mines, the "Bouncing Betsy" personnel mines, the Claymore, which was a larger mine, and then the Teller mine. We called them a "pancake mine" because they looked like a big cow turd and these are the ones that would blow a hole in a tank or blow the tracks off of a bulldozer. And these are the ones that were on all the posts and the "Element C's" when we went ashore.

The Element . . .

"Element C." It goes by a number of names. I think it's officially referred to as a "Belgian Gate" by the Army combat

engineers. These were about 10 to 12 feet across--steel gates. They were sort of the first defense underwater protecting the beach and then in from those were irregularly placed, like a telephone pole pilings. Some pointed seaward with a teller mine laced on top of it, obviously waterproofed. Others were "ramps" facing inland in pairs so that a landing craft would literally ride up on it and couldn't go on further to the beach while it was still in maybe 3 to 6 feet of water.

There were also those tetrahedrals.

We called the tetrahedrals "jack rocks" because that's what they looked like. They also were referred to as "hedgehogs." They were made out of things like construction steel and railroad track. But they were really more like construction steel with a sort of "T" at each end. These were a minimum of three pieces laid across each other at an angle.

We had C4, I think was one of them or C6, the composition explosives that you molded and stuck a fuse into. You had to take it ashore and needed an electric current to blow it.

Even as a corpsman, all of us were trained to some degree in doing the other man's job, which was quite appropriate, because we were all pretty much expendable as we hit the beach. And then, even though I was a corpsman, there were periods of being taught semaphore, which was easy because of Scouting days, and Morse Code or "blinker." I never mastered that very well, but I could get by with it.

And then the other things of learning about war and slit trenches, the dimensions they should be and all those things. So, it was fairly rigorous training. While we were still at Salcombe we had a practice landing there. I had remembered the word, Torquay, which at one point, when I was writing I called it t-o-r-q-u-a-y, you know like a key. In going through either the Web or Britannica or something, the closest we could come was Torbay. So in my book, I've used the word Torbay. But it was very close to, I think, Peighten, was the name of it. Peighton was the first maneuver that I actually went on with a group. We landed in DUKWs. That was the first experience being a boat or being on the water and just rolling right up onto the beach, over wire netting and on down the highway. We had troops come in with us--Army troops. I think that was the only maneuver that we did in southern England until later.

On February 19th, we were given a weekend to go to Plymouth. That was the only weekend I had away from camp. I went with Frank Snyder (HALc), my friend from Florida. We went to Plymouth. The thing that I remember most about stepping off the bus into Plymouth was just absolute, total rubble. I was very impressed with the remnants of the various churches with their "cross-topped" steeples

ragged but still standing as though it was sort of a message of hope. But it was a real shocker to see what the British had put up with. You know, you can hear it over the radio and everything else, but it's totally different when you see it . . . whole blocks destroyed . . . rubble.

About the 20th of February we got gear ready for a 3-day maneuver at Peighton . . . near Torquay. I was now in Platoon B5, so I'd been officially assigned with the company commander, E.V. Hall, Jack Hagerty, who was our platoon commander, and Boatswain First Class Abbott and PhMlc John O'Donnell. And all of my first class group: Hagerty, Habbard, O'Donnell were all on the LCI-85 and were killed going into the beach.

[Reading from his book] "We then moved up to South Wales. March 29th had another group of tetanus and typhoid boosters. When we were in South Wales we used a beach near Pembrice Castle Beach. Landing at 0715 after 0400 reveille." So, this is the period that we were in South Wales. April 5th is when we stole the rations.

Yes, that's the fruit cocktail caper.

Yes. On that maneuver, they gave us a surprise tear gas attack and some of the fellows got caught without their masks. [Reading from his book] "I went to church in the PX--combination PX and movie hut up there. That was a tent camp for the Easter services on April 9th. On April 13 we packed bags and lashed hammocks to move. We sent our personal bag and hammock and kept the A bag with all the GI gear and minimum personal gear." So that's when we were through with South Wales. We were moved by a slow convoy that was very, very interesting. We shoved off from South Wales at 1500 on April the 23rd.

What kind of craft were you in?

No. These were jeeps and weapons carriers--troop carrier trucks with slit lamps, a long "convoy" sneaking south. [Reading from his book] "We were supposed to leave at 1500 hours. But we stood by until 0200. We left Scurlage Castle at 0300 in convoy to Swansea Station. Everything was supposedly in secret and even up that far away, there were literally, not hundreds but thousands of camouflaged everything--army trucks, jeeps, tanks, etc. But mostly there were trucks up in that area pulled off on the side of the road covered with camouflage netting, MP's all along, guided us along to the railroad station with the slit lamps--minimum, minimum light in the convoy just enough to see the truck ahead of you."

"We arrived in Dorchester, England at the camouflaged camp D11 at 1430 hours at April 24. D11 was camouflaged with chicken wire and some other mossy material."

The next camp we went even closer to Weymouth than Dorchester. They had saved and sprayed on with glue or something, chicken feathers, and then sprayed camouflage over the chicken feathers on a chicken wire. But this one had some kind of mossy material. I don't know what it was. [Reading from his book] "Tent flaps always half closed. No washing to hang on the outside. Totally restricted. There was no heat in the tents and we were issued three extra blankets. Slit trenches were all over the place in case of air raid. There was an air raid alert at 0100. This was the 26th. The next day we watched lots of planes headed for France. On April 29th, the platoon was issued 100 rounds of ammo per person preparing for maneuver at Slapton Sands".

"We saw the map and plans setup for the beach--Fox Green for B5. We prepared gear for maneuvers with the First Division. Told our teams (i.e. "paired" as corpsmen) and drew K and D rations for 2 days. On May 1st we arrived in Weymouth and boarded USS *Henrico* in Portland Harbor. We then went below for real Navy chow! It was good to be aboard an American ship. This maneuver is 'Dress Rehearsal.' There were movies aboard ship. I saw "Abbott and Costello Out West."

"On May 3rd the shore was `shelled and so forth. Although the landing itself was dry, we were soaked. Soaked to the skin all the way in on the 8-mile ride in LCVP's. And, of course, all of this tied in very well to the real thing where we slopped around." I'm reading from my notebook here: "8-mile ride from the PA into the beach and the PA's were even a little bit further out, 10 miles or more."

That was a troop transport?

Yes, the same ship assigned for D-Day, *Henrico*.⁴

An AP?

Yes. And then we went back to the camp for a while and then I've got a note here. "Moved in early AM to D8 by convoy. This is the marshaling area and the last step. Everything in secrecy now, even better camouflage in here. May 20th: Captain's inspection of whole battalion in battle dress. Pictures taken. Carusi, our commander, talked to us about the coming events and wished us luck." And at that point, he probably left us to go aboard his LCI down in Portland Hard, which was the name of where the LCI's went out."

⁴The *Henrico* was kamakazied off Okinawa on 1 April 1945 but not sunk. The total bridge was wiped out including the division general.

That's h-a-r-d? Right?

Yes. Portland Hard, h-a-r-d. Yes. Because it was made of concrete piers and ramps.

"May 21st: Waterproofing all vehicles and gear." You know the vehicles had the exhaust pipes that . . .

Mounted up high, right?

Right. "May 22nd: First mail call in a helluva long time. Everybody very happy." And that's where I learned that my brother had gotten married back in Fort Benning. "May 23rd: and talked . . ." and see, I didn't know who it was but we got a talk from a one-star general.⁵ "Don't be ashamed of being afraid, but go ahead and do your job even though you are afraid. It won't be long now." It's pretty important that much of whatever he said to us sunk in and was very real for me. And looking back, I took in what he said. "Just don't worry, just . . . that you are afraid . . . just go on and do your job."

"May 24th: Briefed with maps, photos and scale model. Have planned spot for evacuation station; and then issued albumin, something new, which is in smaller packages, than plasma."

⁵This was GEN Hope (Engineers) of the 5th Brigade Combat Engineers to which we were attached under COL W.D. Bridges, who received the citation.

What was the serum albumin contained in?

It was in a 50cc glass ampule.

And they were in tins, also. Weren't they protected in tins?

Yes, it was in a tin, a very small tin.

I've seen pictures of them with the tubing and the whole thing.

The tin would be about the size of a spotting telescope. I'm looking at a spotting scope on a table on my porch and it's about 3 centimeters. Not as big as a tennis ball can. Now the tennis ball can of course was painted khaki and contained the plasma. There were actually two things, the plasma powder (vacuum), water, a double needle for "restoring" the plasma, and the tubing. This was in the days before plastic so all tubing for blood and IV transfusions was rubber. It was that sort of yellowish, orange rubber with a needle already fixed in the end of it covered with something.

[Reading from his notes] "June 2nd, after lugging gear from convoy to LPR's, we boarded *Henrico* again in Portland Harbor. The harbor was chock full of LST's, LCI's, APA's, LCD's, DE's, DD's and a couple of cruisers. Lots of barrage balloons covering all. One was the beautiful ship *Montcalm*, a French cruiser. It was about all the French had left. But they were participating."

I'll continue reading from my notes. "June 4th: Thought this would be D-Day. Is there a slip up? June 5th: Weighed anchor about 1730. Gear check. First Division assault troops loaded. Flame throwers, TNT packs, etc., in small boats. Went to sleep reading *Science Year Book of 1943*. And then I've got an inserted note dated 6/6, because it was the night of June 5th to me, but it really was the 6th. "Stood watch 0300 to 0700 hours and watched bombardment of the coast. We were waked up first and since we were a second or third wave" I remember my station was on the gangway going out onto the deck of the *Henrico* to help the First Division boys, who were the first wave, get up the steps, or rather the ladders, with their heavy gear. The bulky things they had stashed in the landing craft the afternoon before.

And this was an LCI you were on?

No, no, no.

An AP?

I was on an APA, a troop transport, the *Henrico*.

To go across the channel?

Yes, right. And now we were anchored 12 miles or so off the beach. And my point is, I called it guard duty, but it wasn't really guard

duty, it was to help them (First Division) maneuver with their heavy packs and rifles and everything up the partially darkened passageways (there were red lights) and up to the deck, to their landing stations to the cargo nets hanging off the side of the ship. We were there just to help them get started over the net and for me, to help them get out onto the deck. They were so loaded down with packs, rifles, bazookas, bangalores, ammo, etc. We would rotate around, three or four of us, helping them get from the hatchway across the deck to the cargo net with all their gear. Then they turned around and began climbing down the net. There were 3- to 5-foot seas swashing back and forth across the sides of the ship . . . pretty "raw."

When the bad weather on the 5th caused Eisenhower to call it off and bring all the small boats back, you were big enough to stay out.

Actually, we--the *Henrico*-- were still inside the breakwater of the harbor.

I guess there was a policy about keeping diaries.

Yes, I will come back to this. Most of this I copied from somebody else out in Oceanside {CA} and filled in myself by memory. But it was a recent memory. And then I had written that composition that was a springboard for my book *We Few*--the composition book. Aboard the *Monticello*, on the way home in July, I ran across a guy named Shoch who was one of our oldest men. He was 42, I believe, a carpenter's mate. He had illegally kept a diary. We sat in the Quonset hut at Oceanside (CA) and I copied things that he had written, especially dates and times. There were two or three of us sitting around the table with nothing to do one night, or maybe one weekend, one Sunday afternoon, maybe. And we put this thing together. It was still pretty recent, within a few months.

Anyway, back to my story. Rick and I had spent the night before undoing our stretcher and repacking it a final time.

This was a single stretcher?

A single, typical, khaki, canvas stretcher. It had aluminum or some kind of metal legs to it--4-inch legs. It was already packed but we opened it and repacked it, probably adding a couple of things. We had three Army blankets rolled real tight. No matter how tight you rolled it, it was never quite tight or as small as you really wanted to roll it. If you've ever rolled a down sleeping bag, you can do it over and over and get it smaller and smaller. As I remember, there were three Army blankets. There were also two tins of plasma--like a tennis ball tin, exactly the same size. That may have been what they used. Each can had the plasma powder and the restoring

distilled water, I reckon. And there were battle dressings and that's about it. The serum albumin was in my side pouch--my personal pouch. You rolled it real tight and as you rolled it, you rolled the heavy canvas of the stretcher one full roll up to bringing up the arm pieces to the center. There was the canvas strap that tied them together so they could be put up against the bulkhead aboard ship or in an Army ambulance. We had taken advantage of that space by putting blankets and battle dressings in it. Then, once that was rolled as tight as it could be to keep it waterproof, then we took two of the CO2 life belts that we had scrounged and laced it, not inflated, just flat along the length.

The CO2 life belt had two rubber hoses that had screws in them that you could open and blow up by mouth, but it had two CO2 cartridges in the head of it that a quick squeeze, hopefully, would immediately blow the thing up under your armpits and save you if you went overboard. Hopefully!!! On the stretcher it (1) could save the stretcher and medical gear, and (2) become a sort of life buoy for us.

If you were wearing it properly. And that was a problem with some of them. Some men were wearing it down too low and were being pitched forward into . . .

Yes, right. Right. Exactly, exactly. But see, I was so skinny, I pretty well knew where to wear it. We used two of those, and I don't think they were issued us. I think we stole them somewhere along.

Were you wearing those gas impregnated outfits?

Oh, yes. Yes. And everything was khaki, of course. We had khaki skivvy shorts and shirts, khaki handkerchiefs, and not our usual Navy denim shirt, but our Army shirt and trousers. Over our skivvies, we had long underwear--long johns--that were impregnated. It was gooey, it was sticky and everybody dreaded it. Needless to say, it made us very hot. We had the impregnated underwear and then our clothing--our basic clothing. And then on the top of the basic clothing, our field jacket. A lot of the boys had dark blue or almost black, Navy woven wool jerseys. [A.J.] Liebling mentions that all the amphibious forces on his LCI-88 had these things. I did not have one for some reason or other.

Gas impregnated socks went into our paratrooper boots. All of us had paratrooper boots. Then the baggy, gas impregnated, very smelly snap coveralls that tapered and had snaps at the ankles and at the wrist. Like the paratroopers, we tucked the pant legs into our boots. And then, the couple of days we were aboard ship everybody was sitting out and putting more of the gas impregnating gunk and rubbing it into their boots.

Once we did all that, we were dressed and ready to put on our equipment. Do you want me to go through that one?

Yes.

OK. Since I was a noncombatant, I didn't have a whole lot of ammunition to worry about. But, over the coverall was what they call the pistol belt with all the little holes in it that fits things. And on that a little more posterior than the right hip was hanging my canteen and its cover. That would actually be the canteen sitting in its mess cup with knife, forks, and spoon. Around on the left side from the belt snap was my canvas first aid pouch that had a syrette of morphine in it and sulfa powder and a medium battle dressing. And, I think that's about it. The syrette was like a small tube of toothpaste, aluminum tapered down and had a covered needle made into the end of it. And you could do that in the dark. You just fingered for that thing and jammed it into your thigh if it were you and squeezed the toothpaste out, and that was your dose of morphine.

Other people had long trench knives, but I had a smaller or shorter trench knife but I did not choose to wear it because I had so much on my hips. Instead I chose to work it in the side of my backpack because I had this cross strapped like a vest kind of thing with another belt that had about 15 pounds (others estimate 25) of medical pouch on each side hanging down on each hip that was tied to a belt but also tied across our shoulders because it was heavy.

And then we had the backpack itself that everybody in the Army had. It contained a blanket, change of clothes, anywhere from three to six K rations. Then all of that was covered with my poncho to try to make it waterproof and tucked in all around the top. The flap came over. In the top of the flap are the little hooks from which the khaki-painted trench shovel hangs.

On one side between the front and back of the backpack, I had laced in my trench knife. Just before I put my helmet on with my assault gas mask, which was sort of a deep black navy blue. It was a smaller gas mask than the regular Army gas mask. We were issued that at the last camp that we were at before leaving. We exchanged it for a better gas mask at the last minute. And then our helmets . . . I'm going to have to stand by the white arc . . .

On the helmet?

On the helmet with a red cross and then I thoroughly agree that down below was a bluish battleship gray inch and a half band around the base of the helmet. Obviously, the Navy gray or battleship gray band identified us as Navy. That was our only identification as being part of the Navy amphibious force, i.e. "Beach Party."

**You didn't hear of any other Navy issue uniforms or anything?
It was all Army?**

That's right. All of us didn't have the red cross in front of the helmet. I could be wrong, but I don't think so. I know also what I wore and didn't wear in the Pacific. That was a little different. In the Pacific the color code was yellow for us. In the invasion of Okinawa, we had a yellow circle painted on our khaki shirts on our left shoulder and on our field jackets and on the helmet. But I'm as satisfied as I can be. I don't want to get into a fight with Ken Davey because he is so focused on that helmet of his dad's that he has. I've talked to a couple of other folks and I even talked to this guy that was a member of the underwater demolition team and he confirmed it to me. He said, "Oh yes, it was a white, but by the time we had used the helmet a little bit, it was sort of a gray color." But the Navy did have that definite blue gray band at the base of the helmet. And of course, the helmet liner was under the steel helmet.

And what was that made out of?

Fiber compound, like masonite. And the helmet had a strap. We learned early on that we undid that strap as we went off the cargo net.

The strap had a little hook on it?

Yes. Under the chin. It looked like the part of an arrow kind of thing that's fitted between the others. But it's hard to describe.

But you took that off?

Well, you unstrapped it to go over the cargo net because all of us had heard the story of a number of people, usually Army, that fell going down the cargo net. And you are three or four stories up on a transport off the water. As they hit the water with the strap tied, it just hung them. It just snapped your neck. You didn't drown. You were dead hitting the water.

It would snag on the netting?

No. As you went down feet first into the water . . .

Oh, the water would cup underneath?

Exactly. And there were a number of those stories that were passed around. So those that were knowledgeable undid the straps and they were told to. Once they got down in the boat they immediately resnapped it. You've got two possibilities of death there. You've got one falling off the cargo net with a strapped helmet under your chin. And the other, of course, is the LCVP banging against the ship with you between it and just squashing you. Lots went that way too.

That's what we wore. I have no idea what the weight would be,

but it was a lot. Then we would pass the stretcher down to the small boat we were getting on. Most of the LCVP's in the first wave didn't come back to the ships; they were hit.

Anyhow, an LCT came alongside and that's when about 150 of us went overboard in the cargo nets and down to the LCT-600. The sea was quite choppy, not a storm, but it sure was choppy--3- to 5-foot swells. I've always felt that the LCT may have been assigned us, but it probably was one that took its waterproofed tank into and back off the beach, then came back to the ship for the next wave. I've just assumed that. Also, I had seen the first bombardment from the deck of the ship at 6:00 or so.

Did you see aircraft going over too?

I heard them. It was dark. I say it was dark, it was pretty dark where I was anyhow. And then we in the LCT got in closer to the shore. We would go from the ship into a line of departure and I would guess that line of departure probably was 3 to 5 miles offshore. The control boats were there. One would be a larger "rendezvous" control boat, and the other would be the smaller control boats, Higgins-like launches with cabins, that would lead the particular group into the beach. And we were put on "hold" because our beach (Fox Green) was not open at all. We didn't know that. We just knew that we were put on "hold." We all just simply got bored. There was just hundreds of craft just milling around this area probably a couple of square miles. And they too were on "hold." All this time the battleship *Texas* (BB-35) and the cruiser *Augusta* (CA-31) were just slamming the shoreline trying to get those reinforced concrete bunkers out of action. And, as you know, they never did.

We just put our packs down, got everything off our shoulders, and started joking. I don't know whether anybody actually played any cards, but, in typical beach battalion style, we found these cases of rations strapped to the engine house of the LCT and got into cases of biscuits. There were these cans that had a fuse in the top and a cylinder down inside of the can. And you pulled the fuse, like pulling a "party-cracker" and whatever the chemical was in the central column of the can, heated the soup. And I remember specifically green pea soup. There were two or three varieties. But we sat around eating soup and eating crackers for a number of hours.

I remember going back to the stern of the LCT. I remember that we went through what seemed like a wad of lavender jellyfish, big ones. I don't think they were Portugese men of war, but they were lavender. And just watching the beauty of them being churned up in the wake of the landing craft.

Then, all of a sudden, one of the control boats, which was a light gray came up and someone screamed out, "What unit?" And all

in unison we said, "6th Beach." We were assigned to Fox Green. And they replied, "Easy Red, follow me."

At that point, things became very, very real again and everybody was scrambling around getting their packs back on, reaching for our stretcher. My stretcher mate, Rickenbacker, and I got together. We were doing the final 2- or 3-mile run to the beach at that point. We had been able to see smoke and occasional explosions on the beach. There was one particular destroyer, and this is pretty well documented, that literally went in and dragged bottom to fire on the reinforced concrete bunker with an '88 that nobody had been able to knock out. That '88 was just tearing the beach up. It got one of them and then the crew, one of who was one of our boys, a seaman, got the other with a hand grenade.

But anyhow, we were close enough to see the destroyer go in and see what it was trying to hit. And then as we went in I became more and more aware of the odor of cordite and the haze of the beach as we approached it. We had studied maps and silhouettes and everything and we didn't see anything we were looking for as we went in because it was all smoke and haze and the closer we got more and more confusion.

As we got still closer we heard the rumble of the stern anchor dropping off the stern of the LCT. They have a stern anchor that drops first and then goes on in until they hit the shore and when they hit the shore it hopefully comes to an abrupt halt on the sand. And the ramp drops with another loud rumble of chains running through the chocks. These are sounds that are still very vivid to me today. At that point, I could even sense that my nostrils were dilating and part of it was the adrenalin, the apprehension of knowing that we were really there. All this that we prepared for for the past months. All of us talk about it and nobody knows exactly how to describe it, but the odor was a mixture of burning marsh, burning bodies, active cordite, the heaviest stuff that was still laying across the beach from the 15-inch guns of the battleships. The big boys had marched their stuff on inland, but you could still smell the thing and the haze all over the beach and then the individual puffs of mortars and '88's hitting the beach. Smaller lines of splashes of machine gun and rifle fire hit the water about us.

Everybody was completely quiet at that point. Nobody wanted to look over and crouch down. Nobody wanted to look over the gunwale at all. Of course the two coxswains up at the forward ramp there on station had to look out. And everybody was just very quiet. I didn't sense my heart racing or anything, but I was very much aware of my nostrils dilating at the odor and probably apprehension too. (It wasn't a panic attack.)

And then the ramp dropped, and there was an unbelievable sight, this pall of haze. Instead of being right up on the beach, we were

several hundred yards out and as the boys went out in front of me, they dropped to about their waist. But at least they touched ground.

Let me back up a little bit. There was an LCT that went in to our left, on our port side. It carried a khaki-colored Army spotting plane, a type of Piper Cub with a folded wing. (Dr. Lee Parker mentioned seeing this plane "just sitting there in the waves.") The Germans must have seen it too because they just poured everything on that Cub not getting to the beach. And that's probably what allowed the hundred or so of us to get in. As the ramp dropped and we started going off, all of a sudden we had the Germans' attention and the machine gun fire began hitting the metal plates of the landing craft. Initially, I wasn't that aware of the noise of that as I was just seeing the splashes in the water and sort of wondering. I was so innocent. I began wondering and reflecting a little bit. "Hey, that looks just like throwing pebbles at the scout camp." You know, walking along the dam, just throwing gravel out into the water. Of course I realized they were not pebbles; that was machine gun fire.

How deep was the water where you stepped off?

At the point we stepped off, we were somewhere between belt and armpit level, but we did touch the ground. I had shuffled my life belt around, but I don't think I ever inflated my life belt. Some inflated theirs before they went in. Most of the Army and our combatant boys had their Garands wrapped in a plastic wrap like a sheet, a stiff plastic sheet that they stripped off, or most of them did, as they left the landing craft.

Most of our boys had carbines and tommy guns [Thompson submachine guns] and they had condoms tied over the end of the barrels. Interestingly, I have never seen a picture in a history book of a condom on a rifle, but they sure were there.

The horrible thing was that as we stepped off and started moving toward the shore, we were under fire. Then we saw all the jack rocks. I don't remember seeing any of the Element C's exposed as I went in. I think they were probably still under water. But there were posts with Teller mines pointing to seaward and bodies. There were some bodies and some people trying to hide behind the posts and the jack rocks trying to get ashore. There were a number of bodies, and even two or three that were actually on stretchers. Once we got through most of the posts, it was just hard packed wet sand.

The tide had just turned and was beginning to come back in at the point that I landed, which was very close to 4:00 in the afternoon. I did not go in at H hour. I was supposed to be in at H hour plus 120 minutes, I believe. [Joe] Vaghi and his group went in at 7:35. I don't know the exact time that we hit, but it was definitely in the afternoon. And then beyond mid afternoon.

My first attention, and my friend Rick's, was these stretchers with wounded that had been left there on the hard packed sand. They had been dropped as someone who was carrying them either was killed or ran back to shore. Immediately, we went to pick those up and put them on the LCT that we were leaving on other craft. There were so many of these things!

The other thing that I definitely remember is the coagulum of slimy blood in the water that the screws churned up. The screws initially keep pushing forward as the ramp's down so the boat doesn't swing. This makes a reverse circle of water. As I went off the ramp, one of the first things I did was to look down where I was putting my feet. And there was a mixture of sea water and froth from the churning, and these globs of coagulum. This, needless to say, was the blood of the first wave. Mr. Weathers swears that when he went ashore, he literally could have walked ashore on the backs of bodies. I never saw the bodies that concentrated. The tide had changed by then and was coming back in. But there were certainly lots of bodies. The main thing was people hovering behind a post, and I did the same thing, hiding behind a post, which wasn't as big as my body. There was all this incoming stuff--mortars, the crack of the German '88's, but, of course, I at first didn't know one thing from another. I learned. I wasn't an Army man. I would not argue if somebody told me that it took me 30 minutes to go from the ramp to the stone shale of the beach dune in front of the particular section of the beach that I was going ashore on. (Moving these stretchers to boats or ashore.)

They call it the shingle or something?

Yes. They call it shingle, shale, but it was rocks. It was rubble. They had imported rocks whole. A whole dune line and when I say dune line, I mean a pile of rocks probably 3 or 4 feet high 2 to 5 inches in circumference. And the point of this was as a defense so that the tracks of the tanks, the DUKWs, the gas trucks, the jeeps had no traction. The rocks would roll over; they would slide. And that's why you see the pictures of Easy Red Beach with just solid, dead vehicles that were there trying to get over that very low wall. But they had no traction.

Even those that had tracks had very little traction. Once a bulldozer got in, his first job was to hook onto some of these things and pull them over that low dune that went up to the road that paralleled just above the high water line.⁶

⁶The rocks not only kept vehicles from getting ashore and troops from digging in, but became multiple deadly projectiles in addition to shrapnel at the point of mortar, '88, and 75mm shell-bursts. (Truly Rommel's genius)

It was all that unbelievable equipment--litter. I remember on maneuvers seeing even some of our boys with skillets tucked in their backpacks--cast iron skillets for frying bacon and eggs.

For protection?

No. They just didn't think it was going to be as bad as it was.

Oh, they thought they would bring their kitchenware with them?

For camping out.

Oh, I see.

And just cartons and cartons of cigarettes. . . this was after you had on your backpack on and everything. Everybody . . . I was a non-smoker but almost everybody, certainly thousands of people, had a carton of cigarettes just stuck in at the last minute down the back of their necks--between their neck and the backpack. And the radios, the walkie talkies.

The first thing that went when you got up to the shale was the life belt. Once you were ashore, at least you got rid of that one. But the shore was just covered by that rocky dune. I don't mean littered. I mean covered with walkie talkie radios, radio packs, rifles, whole backpacks with the blankets and everything in them, ammunition boxes and belts, gas masks, duffels, bodies.

There in those first hours, everybody just desperately needed to have his hands on his own ammunition and his own rifle and trying to save his life to get off that damn beach. They dropped all kinds of stuff there. A lot was dropped going in because they were hit. And eventually some of that found its way up on the dune . . . I keep talking about dune . . . but you have to realize that when I'm saying dune, I'm talking about a low rise of nothing but small rock. I don't mean pebbles. You maybe can hold one or two in one hand.

There was an LCT very close to where I went in that had a half track in it. I think it had a cannon mounted on it that was ablaze. It burned all night. And then there was an LCI further down the beach on each side of me.

Anyhow, we would zig back and forth and squat behind either a dead tank or a dead truck or a dead vehicle of some sort for protection as we heard a shell coming in. The bottom line was I saw my job as evacuating the wounded. Before I ever got to the beach, I probably made three or four return trips to landing craft that were offloading troops for me to help a wounded man that I patched . . . if he could walk . . . to crawl on the ramp, as the boys came off to go back to the ships to get some decent medical care. We did the same thing with the stretchers.

Usually we would put one in and there would be a stretcher in

the landing craft over in the bulkhead stuck over by the life preserver. We would sort of trade stretchers, one with a patient for an empty stretcher. We ended up just begging, begging, begging for them to . . . "Wait, wait, look, he's just right there. Let's just . . ." I was an 18-year-old and everything was, "Wait for my patient!" He [the coxswain] was there under fire with his other two men saying, "I need to get the hell off this beach!"

And we never cursed each other or anything like that. I have nothing but admiration for those coxswains to this day. They were standing up. They were exposed, and here I was begging them to wait for one more casualty.

It probably was at least 30 minutes before we got up to the shale line and at that point, I was truly introduced to it. You would hear a shell coming, usually a mortar round at this point. And you'd drop and try to dig and you couldn't dig. I don't even remember undoing my trench shovel. I would scoop out with both hands just a little bit of this stuff and stick my face in it. Of course, I had a helmet on. And all of us, I am sure, looked funny with our butts up in the air. Once we heard the shell explode, then we got up and then about that time somebody was calling "Corpsman," and I skipped over to him and did what had to be done there.

I remember so little of individual cases. Now, Frank Snyder, I am sure told you . . . I think it was Frank, either Frank or Joe Brennan, that one of his first attentions was the guy with his arm blown off. Wasn't that Frank?

Yes it was.

I think it was Frank. I didn't see that. I went off one side of the ramp and he was on the other side of the craft. But, I don't remember a whole lot of very specific things except just getting them together and getting them to an off loading landing craft.

Where were you on the beach at this point?

At the rock shale.

And you are taking care of patients.

And my friend Rick was with me at this point. One had one end of the stretcher and one the other. So, we were off the wet hard pack. We had cleared that area of those in distress that were under both incoming fire and the rising tide. They were all panicked that they were going to drown laying there in the wet sand.

And then as we got up, I remember specifically Eddie Johnson,

who was from Lake Toxaway, NC. We had become buddies. He yelled at me, saying, "Junior, Junior, look they got a pattern to it. Move over there!" He had spotted a pattern of the '88's along the beach (being a mountain man) and he would move into an area after that pattern had passed because it was going to step either forward or back so many yards next round.

Rick and I were doing that. There was a burned out tank we were getting ready to get behind or had just left. It was very definitely in my field of view. We heard something coming in and just both took a dive from the stretcher, I to the right and Rick to the left. It was just unbelievable, absolutely the loudest noise I've ever heard in my life. It was a high pitched crack, which means that it probably was an '88. I remember raising my head and finding my whole head and face were numb, especially on the right side. I remember reaching up across my forehead with my right hand and bringing it down across my right ear and looking at my hand for blood. And there wasn't any. And it was completely numb. The right side of my face was numb and tingling, a burning kind of thing. I looked and the stretcher was between us and then maybe 10 feet to my left was Rick who had taken the dive spontaneously.

I screamed, "Rick, Rick, let's move it!" And he didn't move and I called again, "Rick, Rick, come on, let's move over there by that tank." And he didn't move and then I picked up one of the rocks and threw it and hit him between the shoulders and he didn't move. So, at that point, you know, I . . . and only at that point . . . that I thought, "Something is wrong here." So I scrambled over to him. I don't remember really looking him in the face, but as I turned him, his helmet went to the side and was full of maybe two handfuls of gray matter of brain. I just looked at it in horror and one of my impressions at that point was how clean it was. It was almost bloodless.

See, I've hunted, I've cooked pork brains . . . stuff like that . . . so I knew what brains looked like. But I was absolutely horrified. Again, this just wasn't reasonable thinking at all, but again, I said, "Oh my God, my friend." I started scrambling in my side pouch for that thing of serum albumin we had been told was a new life-saving tool that we had for an immediate super life-saving, super shock condition. I hooked it up and put the tourniquet on and was getting ready to stick the needle in his veins, although it probably didn't come up to me very much. It was distended. (This is a doctor looking back on it now.)

At that point, with gray matter just laying there in his helmet,

I slowly--I say slowly--wrapped the thing back up and put it in my pouch. I was still in a obvious state of shock and I literally looked up. Right now sitting here on my porch . . . I can look up and I can see the haze and the chaos, the dark green of the foliage on the hillside that the German trenches and gun emplacements and everything were in. I literally stood up trembling, which absolutely makes no sense. And it took me a long time to get this out of my conscience. I literally stood up and screamed at the hillside, "Goddamn you every one." At that point, I am looking now and you can argue and say, well, it was . . . what today the druggies would call a rush of the adrenalin in your system. But I don't accept it quite like that.

And then an absolute warmth and peacefulness came over me and I just stood there saying, "God, please let it be me. Let me trade places with him. Please, God. Oh, please." And there just were tears streaming down my face. I've described it a couple of times as, it was as though something holy had just descended around me and I was at peace. I was protected. Probably it was some of my Presbyterianism or something, I don't know... I started reasoning a little. If Rick's there and I'm here, maybe God has His purpose.

About that time, somebody called "Corpsman!" Being so many Army around there, it was probably "Medic." But my memory still says that it was corpsman they called. At that time, I sort of snapped to. I was there for a purpose. I did not do anything heroic, no heroic actions of any kind, but I really went to work in a controlled frenzy, like my 13-year-old does when he's getting ready to go duck hunting. I was all over the field, running from one to another getting them out to these unloading craft primarily. [End of session]

Well, I'll tell you where we left off. You were on the beach

. . .

I had gotten through what happened to Rick.

Right. You had just lost your friend. As I recall, you were talking about shaking your fist and damning the Germans and then you said you felt this rush come over you and you said, "There's a reason, there's a reason for this. The good Lord has a reason for this." And that's about where we left it right there.

It should go a little bit faster because that was the trauma--the landing itself. Well, let me just start with the call of "Corpsman!" There's no doubt I just absolutely got a message and felt very, very comfortable and started moving from one problem to another.

It had probably taken us to 6:00 in the afternoon just to get

to the dune. At this time, we were completely under fire, machine guns, sniper, mortar. Mortars I learned later were not as close as I thought they were. They were up over the hill lobbing in. But there were howitzers and the '88's, machine gun fire, and snipers. There were individual Germans still up in the hill in the sort of camouflage of the brush on the hillside in trenches firing at us. At this point, some of the First Division that had landed at H-hour, 6:30 in the morning, was still pinned down. You literally would maybe stop two or three times as a round came in, hunched low running on that slippery rock. I think I had mentioned that Rommel had brought in truckloads and truckloads and made a defensive dune in that whole strip of beach with these 4- to 5-inch rocks. And you couldn't walk on them, you couldn't dig in them. I think I've already mentioned that when an incoming shell was coming, you dropped down, you scooped out a little bit for your face. Your helmet covered the back of your head and your butt was in the air. And that's the total protection that we had all of D-Day because we weren't going up the hill; we were just working right there on the beach above the high tide mark. That was our job.

In retrospect and also now being a physician, one of the most remarkable things to me was how when someone was hit, they called out. But once you got to them, they quieted . . . or the ones that I remember became quiet and very stoic. Because we were on the beach, totally exposed, and under fire, I had to do my medication and stuff as fast as I could and get them the hell off the beach. And the only way to get them off the beach was into the incoming landing craft. The easy ones were the LCM's and LCVP's, and occasionally an LCT.

So, it was a matter of exposing the wound and that's when I remember using my knife much more than I used a bandage scissor to expose clothing or a thigh or whatever, and then assess it and sprinkle it with sulfa powder and get a tight dressing on. If he could walk at all, I would sort of help him and would see a landing craft coming and all this under the pure chaos of incoming troops and being under fire. As the troops stepped off a landing craft, I was over at the edge helping him get up onto it. Usually there was a coxswain there. You know I'm not sure of this, but I think probably there was a coxswain and three seaman or a coxswain 2nd class and a coxswain 3rd class and two seaman in each of the landing craft. Under good landing conditions at least one seaman and probably two would run out with a line just like they did with an LCI to try to guide the troops. But you know when you are under fire, some coxswains don't go with it or they get killed taking it out. But generally, there was somebody

at the ramp to help me as the troops were pouring off to get the casualties aboard.

That was a major thing to do. I was very impressed later as I thought over things. I don't think I ever marked the forehead as we learned in training. But I certainly marked morphine (MS) and the time and tagged

MF or MS?

Morphine sulfate 1045, 1630, that kind of thing. We tagged them so somebody could see immediately when they got to the hospital ship that they had had morphine at that time and not overdose them. What I'm getting at is, I don't ever remember using a tourniquet and marking with an indelible pen or a wax pencil a "T", which meant tourniquet somewhere. Look for it and loosen it every once in a while. I don't ever remember putting a "T" on anybody. What I did do, was use the tourniquet momentarily while I dressed a wound and if it was an extremity--a leg, a thigh, or even an amputation--I was absolutely pleasantly amazed that one or two big battle dressings really tightly applied--not to totally cut off the circulation--but really firmly applied--would hold as a first aid treatment.

Without use of a tourniquet?

Yes. That was a real surprise to me and still is to this day. But the whole beach area--the shale area--where the rocks were before you got to the little road that paralleled at the top of that little 3-foot dune line was just absolutely . . . You couldn't go 40 feet without there being a burned out something--a tank, a gasoline truck, a jeep, an LCVP, or an LCI, or an LCT. The beach was truly cluttered because anything that got to the beach couldn't get over those rocks. There was no traction for their treads or the tires to catch into. And most of them that got over, had to get over by waiting under fire for a bulldozer or one already over the shale to throw a cable to them and help tow them. Instead of quicksand, it was just these rocks that rolled as you tried to gun the engine.

So everything was very chaotic. But almost everybody that dropped, dropped fairly close and you would drag them over to where they could have just a little bit of protection, usually the leeward corner of a burned out or a dead jeep. And you would dress them there. Then at the point of dressing them, you would grab anybody that was coming by--once Rick was gone--to get the other end of the stretcher and help you get them to a landing craft.

Was it easy to find people to do that?

It was an unwritten law that if a corpsman asked you to do something, as you were going by, you stopped and helped him get that guy. At least that's the experience I had. I don't ever remember feeling futile that I couldn't have help if I really needed it to get somebody that had fallen to a vehicle or moved up the beach. But remember, there were seamen and carpenter's mates and ship fitters and motor mechanics from my own outfit that didn't have anything to work on at that point. I had done maneuvers with them in Wales and England. So, when I asked them for something, when Junior asked you to do something, you just did it.

Did you have a choice as to whether you would drag them up the beach to hide somewhere or under a . . .

There was no choice. It was so obvious in the first few hours I was on the beach that the only choice was to get them the hell off the beach. And even when I was working with them on the beach under fire, I kept a weather eye as to whether an LCVP or LCM was coming in. And, of course, at that time the tide was also coming in. I mentioned that my first job was getting those off the wet sand as the tide came around the stretchers or around their bodies to keep them from drowning. But the main thing was to take them to a vehicle--a boat, not up onto the beach because the beach was still so red hot. The beach was just deadly, deadly, deadly, that's all there is to it.

Was there a point where it became the treatment of choice to take them up rather than down when things quieted down?

Yes, yes, but not that afternoon. There's another feature that I'm afraid I'm going to miss, so I will throw it in here. I think when you talk to any of us, we're really confused on a time factor. It was as though D-Day, the night of D-Day, and D plus 1 and that night really were all fused into one day. It was nonstop. And I really should have put a thing in the little book. I cannot be held accountable for the time that I have related for the time that something happened. Rick was with me and I didn't land before about 4:00. It was somewhere close to 5:00 that Rick was killed--5:30 maybe. But there's another survivor and a very responsible one. He is certain that he saw Rick dead at 3:00 in the afternoon when I wasn't even ashore and I don't think Rick was either. But this is forgivable. It was that chaotic is what I'm saying. Nobody looked at his clock.

But anyhow, it was total chaos. It was during this time . . .

Again, I'm not sure whether it was D-Day or D plus one . . . It was probably D-Day. There was a nearby drowning of colored troops. I'm pretty sure it was the 320th barrage balloon battalion. They had 13 men who came off in the deep water and just drowned. They had been under fire and stepped totally over their heads. The ramp of the incoming vessel was on a ridge when they thought it was the beach. And people were yelling, "Go, go, go." I reckon it was like they did me. They went in and disappeared and the next one went and disappeared. It was a tragedy. But a lot of us, including some of theirs, were right there on top of them. If we hadn't been busy, had looked up, and were just surveying the beach casually, we would have seen it happen; it was so close. It happened maybe 200 yards or even 100 yards away. But they were pulled out immediately and we used old fashioned artificial respiration, the prone pressure of the American Red Cross. And the thing that I remember about that very vividly was that we got them all back, except one--the last one. I may have prone-pressured three before that final one. And I got him breathing and then somebody came up and I said, "Here, look after him" and I skipped over to the next guy. I remember him in my mind's eye. He was a little on the chubby side, his face was cold and beginning to be puffy. I started from the beginning. I rolled him over and took a big pin out of my medical pack. This is the only time I've ever done that in my life. And I pinned his tongue, pulled his tongue out right in my hand, my fingers back into his throat to try to get any obstruction out. I pinned his tongue forward to his chin which was pretty grotesque. And then I rolled him over, pulling him up by his belt and then gave artificial respiration prone pressure. And in a panic, I was getting nowhere. And then finally, I rolled him back over and completely spontaneously I gave him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. I had never been trained to do this and never even heard of it. I can both taste and feel the coldness of those blue-gray lips as I tried mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. And you know, this is doubly unique being a little southern boy. But it didn't phase me. You do what you do without any thought. But I did not get him back.

Well anyhow, we were very very busy. Then gradually as pure dark came, I got together with Joe Brennan and three or four corpsmen and we began accumulating patients. At the top of the shale rocks and parallel to them was a one-lane bulldozed strip that was beginning to be opened and de-mined. It was for traffic and was being opened to get things to each of the exits from the beach. The field on the other side was a mine field and marsh and there were bodies burning in there. That's what contributed to the odor that we lived with

initially, an odor of burning bodies, burning marshes, cordite, and being shot at. There were also puffs of bigger artillery and mortar rounds popping up all over the beach all around you.

We had gotten the sappers to de-mine a very small area probably no more than 30 by 40 feet to put our patients into. So we were beginning to form what in a day or two would become the aid station. Then, as pure dark came, two or three things happened. The landing craft quit coming in because they couldn't see where they were going plus being under fire. So things were pretty much at a standstill. But we were still finding casualties and accumulating them. By midnight or so we had 40 to 45. Everybody seems to be fairly consistent with that. We just lay them on the ground around us, some of them in stretchers, some of them just laying on the ground. None of us had a slit trench or fox hole dug. None of us. We were still working.

At some point, probably after midnight, Dr. Guyton called us all together and this is when he said, "Look, you boys. Just stop a minute. Get out your canteen cups." He mixed some lemon powder--powdered lemonade--from a bunch of K-rations, mixed it with water and medical alcohol. He then said, "You all take a few sips of this." I don't know whether each of us had our cup or whether they passed it around. But that was significant to me. That was my very first drink.

Ever, in your life?

Ever, yes. And then I was very concerned. The patients were all shaking like leaves. Nothing of our medical equipment had come in, absolutely nothing. And most of us had even lost the separate waterproof medical bag that was in one hand and the stretcher in the other as we came off the ramp. I don't know what happened to that bag. I reckoned I got it ashore, but I really don't know. We basically had nothing to work with except what was in our pouches and in our individual first aid kit pouch hooked to our pistol belts.

We were scrounging, trying to find syrettes of morphine, even getting them off the dead. We also needed blankets. I remember going out in the pure dark. There were things that periodically lit up the beach. But trying to find personal packs lying around and digging a blanket out of it was hard. I ended up literally crying tears begging for blankets from infantry, probably mostly the 2nd because they were beginning to file along a foot path that had been cleared right by where all our patients were laying. This foot path went up and joined the path up the hill that went on over.

While they were filing in, we were under air raid alert. This

went on almost every night that we were there for 3 weeks. I doubt there were more than four or five German bombers over the thing. Especially that first night and the second night, there were always rumors of parachutes. You'd see some search lights go on, but mostly from the fleet. And then all of a sudden all hell broke loose offshore. I don't know whether it was an Army film that showed tracers arching up into the sky from the fleet. When a plane came, everybody was gun happy, and I'm sure every boat, every VP, every LCI, every LCT, every battleship, everything sitting out there offshore was firing and sometimes they had a plane in their spotlight and sometimes they didn't. I don't know that radar was that good in those days. But literally thousands of 20mm shells were being fired and expended mainly over the beach and raining down on us. This became quite a problem. We weren't that aware of it the first two nights, and then we became very aware.

This was just spent shells coming from friendly fire?

Yes. Finally, about the 4th day, they passed the word from the beach for the ships not to fire toward the beach. If they could fire away or parallel, that was fine, but not over the beach. I'm getting ahead of my story.

I was out scrounging for blankets and I got a few. I wouldn't be surprised if I didn't beg about a dozen blankets. Looking back, the infantry didn't want to give up their blankets because they needed them to go to Paris and Berlin. But, I reckon I looked like a little teenager with tears, like a spoiled brat, just begging for blankets.

It was a very busy night right on through. It was totally sleepless. By morning, we had 45 or so wounded.

I made a note that we lost two of our patients overnight; they actually died before morning, and that's pretty good out of 40. You know with shock and everything going on.

This was one of the reasons they were shaking or they were in shock?

Oh yes, in shock. Not afraid. They were in shock.

Was it cold?

Once the sun went down, it was cloudy, it was stormy. It was cold. Of course, they had lost blood.

So, it was a combination of shock and temperature?

And fear. All of it. One of the things I mentioned somewhere

along, I don't know why, but it's stuck in my mind the whole time . I treated a guy who had a bad wound on his inner thigh, nothing major, but it was bleeding enough to put three or four large battle dressings on firmly. The whole time I was filling out his tag, he was almost sobbing, telling me over and over and over to put his home telephone number down so that his wife could be called. Of course, there wasn't a place on the medical tag for wife's phone number.

There wasn't a phone handy?

But we were very busy. Later, 20 years later, I mentioned that I would call Dr. Guyton down in Florence [SC] to wish him a happy D-Day. And in one of my calls, I said, "Dr. Guyton,"one of the things that I am confused about . . . I don't ever remember you giving me an order on the beach." And he laughed at the other end . . . this is 20 years later . . . "Dick, you don't understand. We had our training. We were all busy. Everybody was doing what they could." I didn't have to order anybody."

He, Dr. Collier, and Dr. Hall were buddies working there in that area. We had the personal friendship of our family knowing one another that I was pretty loose and easy with him and admired him a great deal. Whether he did any surgery on the beach, I can't tell you because I was busy away from where he was. I think Joe Brennan worked fairly closely with him, but I am not sure. Like I said, everybody had his job to do.

I was saying that the 29th or 2nd was coming by, and when the bombers came over, some spotlights came on. I vaguely remember seeing a bomber, probably a JU-88 in one of the spotlights. I think it was the night of D-Day, but it could have been the next night because they were there every night for a while.

But the 29th or 2nd came by and they had them stop. They passed the word; everything was in a whisper. It was: "Hey, halt, pass the word up, halt, halt," They were working their way up the hillside. Then we heard, "Paratroopers, paratroopers, lock and load, lock and load." I can hear those breeches going into lock and load by a string of soldiers less than 4 feet from me in the dark. And it made you feel very, very small when you were there with nothing but your fillet knife for protection. I don't know what I would have done had a paratrooper landed on my toes.

This is a fear of German paratroopers coming down?

Yes, yes.

As a counter attack against you guys?

Yes, right.

You had your Rappala fillet knife.

Yes, in my boot, and that was it. My little fist wouldn't have done nothing, wouldn't even gotten through his chest covering. But anyhow, it was a raunchy night and we were very busy.

This the second night or the first?

No. I am still into the first. Then, as daybreak came, I was still wandering out trying to find some blankets and stuff. As daybreak came, we were also watching the small boats beginning to come in again with more troops and this was a time for all of us to get together and hustle and get ready to run stretchers out to the incoming crowd. You know, the casualties. We knew there were hospital LST's and a hospital ship and the *Dorothea Dix* all sitting off shore. We couldn't see them, but they were sitting offshore there somewhere and that's what we were trying to do. Going back to a ship would be better for these people than leaving them there because we didn't have a field hospital at that point.

The only thing you had done was administer first aid to these folks.

Exactly.

That's it.

But that's what our job was. I look back as more of an adult person now. That was my job, then.

You couldn't do any more than that.

I had to get them the hell off the beach. Get them to aid. Get them to a doctor. To a surgery, really.

The physicians that went ashore with you couldn't really do much more than you could do.

Very little. They did some things. Dr. [Russell] Davey obviously did a major bit of suture work on John Gallagher who had a hunk of shrapnel go through his sinus and clipped his optic nerve and so forth. I don't remember ever using a hemostat to stop bleeding. But Dr. Davey would have. He would not only have had the kit, he would have had a surgeon's chest. But it may just have been in his packet.

This gets us into the morning of D plus one, the first morning after D-Day. I was kneeling and working on one guy right at the edge of our beach going into Mr. Weather's side of the beach. I don't remember who it was or whether it was one of our's, or a trooper coming in. But, less than 15 feet away was the blinker light and the guy with a semaphore flag and Allison, who was the assistant beachmaster.

He was beachmaster of that particular sector and we were immediately next to him and there was an imaginary line. Of course, we were all working back and forth and we weren't paying any attention to anybody's lines. But I was kneeling with one and ducked as I heard something coming in and this is when the signalman with him had a severe shoulder injury and Allison literally had his brow clipped off. So that dropped us another beachmaster.

Now we had lost Hagerty and Allison--all the higher echelon. Hagerty was the Company B commander. Allison was the beachmaster of the platoon sector of B. Joe Vaghi was C Company. So here we lost Hagerty, and the next day we lost Allison. Either that day or the next we lost, Dr. Hall and Mr. Weathers, both of whom had arm injuries and were shipped off the beach. Then our 1st class boatswain's mate Abbott, and our first class pharmacist's mate O'Donnell on LCI-85. And then there were three or four that were killed on the LCI coming in the morning of D-Day. So we didn't have any higher echelon at all, except the guy who was busy. (Vaghi)

Allison was killed the morning of the second day. At this point, troops were coming in and were moving on up the hill. You could see a lot of movement on the beach, but still, bulldozers were working opening the road and the boys sweeping for land mines. I'm talking about teller mines. They came back and opened a little more area for us by digging up some land mines around that wall to make a more permanent, temporary aid station there around the ruins. They also ran the miles and miles of white cloth tape to show where it was relatively safe to walk and where you did not dare walk. You didn't step over that tape.

You could see a little bit more of what was going on than I registered on D-Day. It was . the chaos . . . It was just absolutely . . . indescribable. The beach was a total clutter of just hundreds of pieces of mobile equipment, everything from bulldozers to gasoline trucks to jeeps to weapons carriers to six-wheel trucks--personnel carriers, LCVP's, three LCI's, all in our general area within sight. The LCT with a tank on it burned all night right under our armpits while we were working, with tracers and munitions going off all night on the night of D-Day right where we were working.

At low tide you could see all the posts and teller mines sitting on them that had not been detonated. And there were still numbers of craft trying to come in and still under fire but not as much fire as D-Day. The '88s were pretty well out of action by noon of D plus one. But we still had mortars going and some howitzers were around up on the hill somewhere. And then always the snipers. Just ping, you know.

Then on the beach itself, in the midst of all this, the dead were beginning to be covered up or wrapped in a shroud or poncho or sometimes somebody would just put a box over the face of some of them. This all was happening up on the rock shale; they weren't floating in the water anymore, or very few of them, at this point.

All the packs that were dropped, either in the sand coming in or up on the shale of the beach-- back packs. When I say 50 walkie talkies, that would not be an exaggeration for a mile of beach probably. I saw maybe a hundred totally soaked radio packs that had washed in--just all the debris of war. But on top of that, the individual personnel items from backpacks. Of course, the life belts were dropped once they got ashore. There were just hundreds of still puffed up life belts and most of them squeezed. I don't remember squeezing mine, but I had it tucked up under my armpits up high so all I had to do is reach for it. Most of the Army boys had inflated their life belts before stepping off the ramp when they saw what was going on . . . before stepping off the ramp. Immediately when they got ashore, they got rid of that weight anyhow. And there were cartons of cigarettes and gas masks.

You say gas masks and . . .

Yes.

This was all debris on the beach. Gas masks and . . .

Yes, that had been dropped to lighten the load. Being under fire, they wanted to get as light as they could to just take their ammunition and rifles and make a run for it toward the hill.

When did things start winding down over there on the beach?

Probably, between D plus three and D plus four.

And you were there the whole time?

Oh yes, I didn't move.

I guess sleeping wasn't real easy.

I think we dug our trench against the wall either the night of the second or third day. Everybody did things differently, but I'm talking about my own personal experience here. Things slowed down enough and along this half wall of rubble we had Drs. Guyton and Collier. The road, just 6 or 8 feet from the top of the rock shale rubble, was now pretty well open, but still had its white tapes running along the side of it. Everything was running back and forth on this road like it was Broadway because it paralleled the beach between the two exits. It was a busy street with all this Army stuff back and forth. Four or 5 feet on the landward side of the shale was where we had our patients.

Down that wall, which was perpendicular to the road, was Drs. Collier, Guyton, and then Rempher and myself. Rempher had become my stretcher mate . . . my buddy for the rest of the war, really, even in the Pacific. Then Cook and Green--all corpsmen. About 4 days later the two of them woke up in the morning, having used two sand bags as pillows, there was a 20mm shell sticking in the sand bag pillow between the two heads! I think Frank Snyder was on the other side of the wall with some Engineers medics.

I think it was the second or third day we got a weapons carrier to use as an ambulance. Ours had not come in.

What did you all do about food?

We had our K-rations. And then after about the third day, more rations came in with some C rations and 10 in 1's, or something like that. I don't think anybody thought about eating the first 24-hours. I know I didn't.

By this time, the patients you had the first night, you had been able to evacuate on the boats going out?

Yes. We had them all off by mid morning of D plus one. I am very proud of that.

So you were there about 17 days altogether?

Until the 28th. We were there about 3 weeks. So that would have been the 26th or 28th, somewhere in there.

When I spoke to Mr. Snyder, he mentioned that he was able to wander around and they went into some of those fortifications that was used by the Germans.

I never did that. Actually, I don't know what I did. He did go with us up to Bayeux, but this was the week before we left.

I think it was the third or fourth day that the B5 platoon was moved on down to Fox Green, which was the beach we were supposed to land on. It worked out that they were behind that '88 emplacement that later became the monument for the Croix de Guerre. We were already operating well. We were getting some medical supplies, some plasma and that kind of stuff. We had a tent up and a flag up. We probably got that flag up, maybe the night of the second day.

What did the flag look like?

Just a Red Cross flag. There was still enough going on, but things were getting organized. I don't know whether they were Seabees, or part of the engineer brigade but they started sorting through all this junk on the beach and seeing what was salvageable. They began stacking boxes of munitions in one pile and life belts in another pile and radios to be checked out in another pile--getting some semblance of order on the beach. This would have probably been day 3.

Once we got a weapons carrier, probably on day 3, we started taking some of the dead up to the cemetery with Sepulveda, who was the motor machinist. And then at some point, I think we actually got an ambulance. An ambulance, weapons carrier, or jeep had all been waterproofed and loaded aboard a larger craft including a DUKW with all the medical supplies but none made it in on D-Day.

I meant to tell you, we had assumed that Barnes, another hospital apprentice 1st class, had a jeep loaded with medical supplies. The end of the second day, Dr. Guyton looked up and saw him bedraggled and dragging his medical pouches along coming up the beach, still under a little bit of fire, but not much. Everybody was pretty well beginning to relax a little bit.

He called out and that's when I looked up and saw him. "Here comes Horse Barnes." That was his nickname. He had been in North Africa, so he was one of our veterans and he comes dragging his medical pouches and shuffling up the beach and he was as glad to see us as we were him. We thought he was dead.

"Horse, what happened?" He says, "Well, they brought me ashore, I was on the LCM and they lowered the ramp and said, "Go," and I gunned her and I ain't seen it since." The jeep just dropped out from under him. He swam ashore, had no idea where he was, didn't see anybody he knew, and he was definitely down the beach (westward). He wasn't at Utah, but he was at the other end, at the opposite end of Omaha Beach. And, under fire, he started working his way up through the units. He landed D-Day, but he found us on the afternoon of the second

day.

The tragedy was that the leading pharmacist's mate, once O'Donnell was killed, was a pharmacist's mate 2nd class. A combination of his own personal trauma plus the personal trauma of finding that both Mr. Hagerty and his two best liberty friends, had been killed. He was in . . . In those days we called it "shell shock." He was in total shock. We all tried to comfort him, but he was basically in the fetal position shaking for over 2 days. When things calmed down, we evacuated him. The next thing I knew, I asked where he was and they said that Dr. Guyton moved him off the beach out to the hospital ship.

What do you remember about leaving Normandy?

I'll try to move on to the things I haven't touched on. When the field hospital opened about third and fourth day, by this time we had a three-hole latrine. Therefore, we were very proud of our aid station. We had some ripped open sand bags around it for "screening." When the Army nurses came ashore they were delighted to find a latrine with a little privacy on the beach, so we were very popular that day as they came ashore.

It was during the early morning hours of the next day that our CDR Carusi was hit by a 20mm shell--ours! He had a sucking wound of the left upper chest. Dr. Guyton worked on the wound. I did his tags and gave a little morphine and then we got him right up to the field hospital and the airfield right at the top of the hill. So Carusi was one of the first ones back to England for emergency surgery and then on to Bethesda.

Those were the C-47's they landed on top there?

Yes. And then the other event as far as I was concerned occurred about the fourth or fifth day. They opened a field kitchen up on the hill. I've noticed since that several correspondents apparently visited it. It just gave you an eagle's eye view of the beach with the stuff coming in.

Certainly after day 5 things really simmered down. Once an airfield got going, there were fewer and fewer evacuations from the beach proper and more and more from the air strip.

We and the 5th Brigade medics combined were credited with evacuating 600 casualties the first 2 days by water. I've got a list from the historical division of how things went, both the sea evacuation and the air evacuation. The numbers are very interesting and all of a sudden, our's had gotten down to almost none with

everything going by air.

Long about the 15th or 17th or so of June, the hurricane or storm came in. It was hurricane winds that played hell and just nothing but cold and wet and nasty. The Germans could have had us if they had known about it because nothing was coming in--no supplies, no troops. Everything was at a total standstill and at that point our sea evacuations increased again because the planes couldn't come in for about 4 days.

So you were there for that?

Oh yes. On Sunday the 25th they had a religious service. We moved the aid station up to where the rest of the boys were up around that '88 bunker that's pretty famous; you see a lot of pictures of it. It was in back of that they had a religious service. The chaplain even sent some folks to pull us out of our foxhole because he needed some more people to sing, he said. But they had a nice little Sunday morning religious service. So things were really simmering down and we heard a rumor that we might be leaving the beach to go back to England.

Of course, everybody also had heard rumors of another invasion down in southern France. So we were very excited about news of going home. But it turned out right. They left a communications group and beachmaster there. The corpsmen were doing nothing at that point. That's when a group of four or five of us bummed a ride on an empty six-wheeler off the beach inland for "sight-seeing." All of a sudden we found out the hard way that it was an empty burial detail truck. It stopped two or three times to pick up green, bloated, blowfly-covered German corpses in the gutters and the fields. We jumped off that and hooked a secondary ride on an Army DUKW and just jumped off at the first little village we got to, Veaxcelle. I didn't know until 10 years later that I was that close to Bayeux.

And that's when I had my first drink of cognac, probably the famous Calvados! I was the only one that had any knowledge at all of French, and mine was southern high school French, period. We went into this pub and introduced ourselves. Some of us still had our Red Cross arm bands on. We explained that we were not Army, but Navy corpsmen and had been on the beach the whole time. I also pointed out to them that I was of Norman stock and we had just come in because we thought we were going to be leaving the beach pretty soon and just wanted to see what France and Normandy were like. For about an hour and a half they just flooded us with kindness. They called in all the family. The daddy had gone down to the cellar and gotten a bottle

of brandy. I didn't drink; I didn't know what was special or not. But, I chugged it down and spued it all over and made an ass of myself. But everybody was happy and laughing and laughing at "Junior." I was the butt of the joke!

Finally I said, "We would love to have some . . ." and nobody understood what I was saying. I said, "Souvenir, souvenir." I was asking about a souvenir and I was trying to say, "Le souvenir des allemandes" which is what I remembered from French was how you said German.

And finally the daddy reared back and said, "Oh, le Bosche, le Bosche." He just spit it out. They'd hated the Germans ever since World War I. He called to his grandson and whispered to him and he went out the back of the little cafe and came back with a German canteen, a 9mm Mauser, and a triple black leather cartridge clip-full! Obviously, there was a dead German back of the barn. Then he presented them to me!

About that time we were getting ready to go and Mama whispered something to Daddy and then disappeared upstairs. When she came back she took something from a brown paper bag. Then she unfolded an absolutely sterile, beautiful, simple French flag about 8" x 12" that they had kept all during the war years. They could have been gunned down had they been caught with it in their home. The family agreed among themselves to present it to me. And then there were a lot of hugs and kisses as we bowed and went back to the beach. The next day we heard that we were going to be leaving on the 27th or 28th.

Do you still have the flag?

I did until my stepfather and my mother cleared out the trunk room. (He was 84 at the time.) My scout uniforms, merit badge sash, Navy uniforms, that flag, and things were just . . . I don't know what happened to them; I never saw them again. And I had had all the surviving corpsmen sign the bottom of the flag. It was a nice souvenir for 20 years or so.

How did you get back to England?

Oh, we went back on an LST. Most of the boys weren't about to go into the hold of an empty LST to go back to England, having survived all the mines and everything on shore. And so they slept topside. Rempher and I pulled out a stretcher from the bulkhead of the LST, spread it out, and had a very peaceful night's sleep in the bowels wallowing across the Channel.. We woke up the next morning in Weymouth Harbor. We had a hot meal at the naval station there and then went

on back up to Salcombe.

By that time, the area that had been so muddy and full of tents when we had been there in January was now very nicely Quonset-hutted with concrete walkways and stuff. It was very nice. We stayed there and then went by train to Liverpool. Apparently Southampton was so busy for the invasion, I reckon that was the reason they took us back to Liverpool. We went aboard the *Monticello* (an Italian liner/troopship) and back to New York.

I had two interesting experiences on the *Monticello*, which was an ocean liner. Joe Brennan apparently slept in the pool which was empty. But what was so great was the unbelievable fare we had to eat--grapefruit, strawberries, and ice cream, just wonderful food.

I had an area against the bridge up on deck to chip paint down to the base metal. And that was my thing, just putt, putt, putt. You go down a row and come up. If you do it just right each time you hit, just a little fleck comes off, but it makes your "square." The other thing was, that I had a detail of holystoning. I had the experience of all my 118 lbs. with this big grainy yellow brick with a hole in it . . .

With a broom handle.

With a broom handle and then going back and forth on the teak deck of the ocean liner scrubbing the deck with seawater. But I was out in the sun and the waves and fresh air instead of down in the hold as I had been going the other way in January. It was beautiful!

We landed at Pier 54 or 52 and were moved up to the 93, 92 area to get our passage. We took all our equipment, our Army gear and helmets as well as our Navy gear, home on leave. We were then to report in 20 plus 5 days travel to Oceanside, CA, right there across the highway from the Camp Pendleton Marine Base.

I would like to back up and put the same note that I put at the end of my book, if you don't mind.

Go ahead.

I'd found out in calling home from my uncle's there in the edge of Greenwich Village, 52 West 12th, that my mom and dad were up at Petersburg, VA, and had rented a couple of rooms in a boarding house visiting my brother and his new wife. He was on the way overseas as a 1st lieutenant in the infantry "Lightning Division." I had a 1-night visit with Uncle Dick and Frances and then got on the train. I got off in Petersburg with Mom and Dad and my brother meeting me at the train station. My brother, who was 8 years my senior, and I sat up

all night talking and I pulled out my bags to show him my 9mm rifle.

You had brought the Mauser home with you?

Yes. I brought it home along with the canteen, the whole works. I still have the Mauser; I fire it every January 1st and 4th of July. I fire it out into the canal here at South River. I haven't used up the shells yet.

Yes. We had a very nice visit. Little did I know that that would be our last visit. Paul was killed by a sniper in 14 inches of snow in the Battle of the Bulge. I was in the Pacific preparing for the invasion of Okinawa.